

MY FIVE DAYS AT HUBBELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

CHANG SHU-TING, ANKENG ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

This was my first time to visit the city of Des Moines, Iowa, and along with three other colleagues, Hubbell Elementary School.



Hubbell Elementary School is officially authorized as an IB World School. The International Baccalaureate® (IB) is a non-profit educational foundation, motivated by its mission, focused on the student. The IB is composed of three programs for students aged three to nineteen to help develop the intellectual, personal, emotional and social skills to live, learn and work in a rapidly globalizing world.

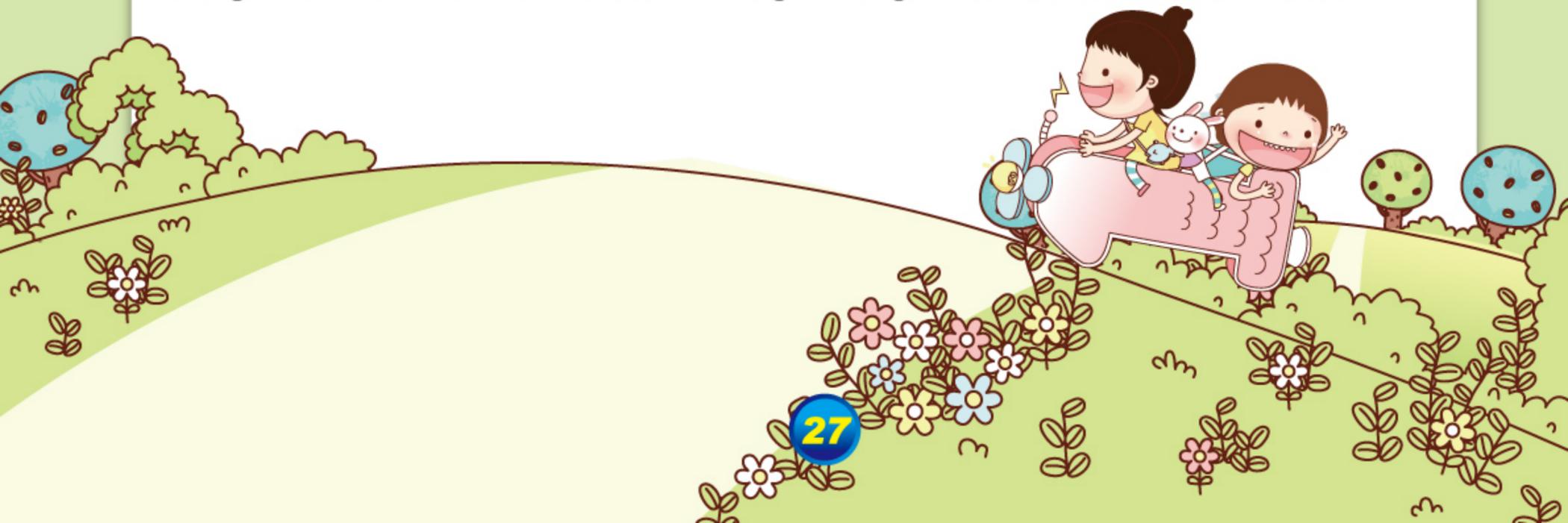
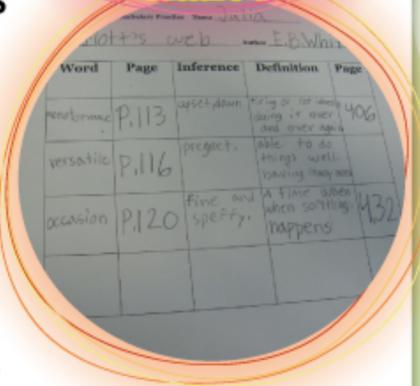
THE FIRST DAY

ADVANCED LEVEL CHILDREN

My host family pays special attention to children's education. They have a boy in the second grade that is in Mrs. Carlson's class, which is also the class I visited during the first and second days of my visit. Every child in Hubble is well-taken care of. Students are few in number, with even assistant teachers present in some of the classes. My host mom is a lovely mother (she has a master's degree), often taking care of students who are slower in reading or writing, sometimes also giving help to those who are advanced. On the first day, advanced level children studied Charlotte's Web (see picture 1). First, the teacher distributed worksheets, and students were required to jot down new words as they read. Initially, the teacher asked one of the students to read a paragraph, and then asked others to share and guess the meanings of the new words they had recorded earlier. Then, the children looked up meanings of the new words in the dictionary, and wrote their definitions down. It was such an amazing reading time. Charlotte's Web is a classic piece of literature, and children discover the beauty and intricacies of words through reading aloud. Flipping through dictionaries can be something students dislike doing, but it has been made interesting through these kinds of discussions.



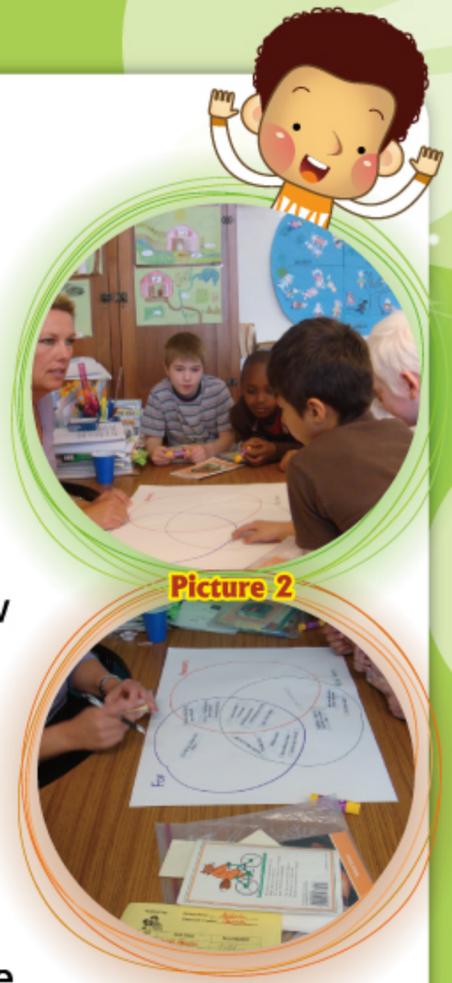
Picture 1



THE SECOND DAY

CHILDREN WITH LOWER ABILITY

On day two, I saw Mrs. Carlson lead those children with lower ability to read (see picture 2), based on the book "Is That a Fact?" The book was a story about a fox, and the teacher drew three big circles on a piece of white paper, and labeled them 'Fox', 'Humans' and 'Real Foxes'. Many strips of paper with sentences on them were prepared, some taken from the storybook, and the children would take turns to draw a sentence strip. They must then read aloud the sentence descriptions. Some of the sentences included basic abilities such as riding a bicycle, buying things, talking to Mother, eating breakfast, etc. The children must then discern whether these abilities refer to Fox, humans or real foxes. When some of the sentences describe abilities that refer to two or more of the characters, the children must put the slip of paper in the overlapping area (either two or three circles). What a brilliant idea! Not only do the children learn to read sentences, reflect upon the contents of the story, but they are also inspired to think about the background and motive of the author. No wonder my mind kept thinking during the class!



PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Next, I went to observe a physical education (PE) class. At Hubbell, the PE classes are held within a large indoor gym (see picture 3). First, the children circled around the teacher, listening to the explanation of the games' rules. Then, five to six children were selected to be "it", and put on blue vests. The gym has blue lines on its floor, and in the first round, the children must jump like frogs along the "lines". The other children crawled on the floor and mustn't be touched by the students with blue vests, otherwise they would have to retreat to the sidelines and be "out" of the game. Based on my understanding of children, they love to crawl on the floor, prostrated, either moving forward, backward or jumping from one side to another. As the game progressed, more and more children moved to the sidelines, until one last child remained. Then the whole class cheered for him/her. Of course, the second phase of the game could include brisk walking, with the same rule of sticking to the blue lines to catch people. This simple game achieved a dual purpose of exercising and allowing all students to have fun.



MUSIC CLASS

Even though I am tone deaf, I love to sing hymns and listen to beautiful music. I discovered that at Hubbell, the music teacher is very elegant, and she has taught for over thirty years. She has a very soft voice, and she knows how to sing and lead games. Initially, she would greet the students with singing, and when she sang one question, she would throw a soft, round, bouncy ball to one of the students. The one who caught it must reply by singing back. The children were very excited when the ball was being tossed around. They would try to catch the ball, but most importantly, they listened attentively to the teacher's question, similar to Zoltan Kodaly's pedagogy of singing what you want to express. Towards the end of the lesson, the teacher also used a similar technique to ask a simple question, this time pointing to specific characteristics of a certain student, for instance, a student who was wearing a red T-shirt, blue shorts and green sneakers, and also wearing a smile. The students answered the teacher by also singing, naming the student. If the right student was not named, the teacher would say that it was not him/her, and repeat the singing to describe his/her features in more detail. At this point, the children would pay special attention, and perhaps even feel a little shy, as they all thought the teacher might be referring to him/her. The key to the class is the game, and through songs taught such as "I Am the Fattest Turkey in the Barnyard, You Can't Catch Me on Thanksgiving", the students formed a circle, and one of them became a turkey, another the hunter. The hunter must try to catch the turkey, but the rule is they cannot run and can only walk quickly. They have to circle around the other students, and they must sing "turkey". Only when the turkey returned to his/her original position would he/she be safe. Here children's favorite game, tag, has been fully utilized. Higher grade students would be taught how to count beats and rhythms, like 1234, 5678. Similar to playing "London Bridge is Falling Down", the children lined up in two lines, with eight on each side. The first two students raised their hands to form a tower, and counted two eighth-beats to move forward and backward. Upon getting to the last pair of students, they again form a tower, and the rest of the students have to cross their tower in order to progress, and so on. Initially, they used counts to practice the right steps, and only after they became familiar did they start playing my favorite Scottish music. This reminded me of the dancing lessons I had in Scotland years ago. I didn't know that a music lesson could be so fun!



THE THIRD DAY

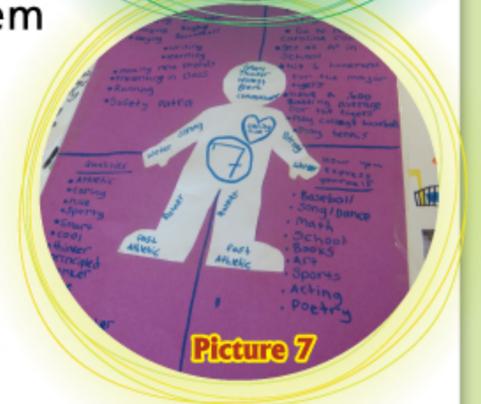
REMEDIAL CLASS

On the third day, I visited their remedial classes (see picture 5). In Iowa, the children are lucky due to the “No Child Left Behind” program. Children with poor reading or mathematics skills have pull-out group lessons. They have their own classrooms to learn basic things, such as basic Phonics, instructed by specialized teachers. Books could be borrowed and taken home. Teachers would read the story first and ask the children to repeat. It is during this time that certain difficulties need to be addressed. Next, they would each do a worksheet (see picture 5), which is part of the spelling work they need to learn every week. The Regular List contained words within the story, and another list, the Challenge List, contained more difficult and longer words. Students needed to find these words in the book and practice spelling them. Teachers of the remedial classes were very hard-working, for instance, one of the stories was about stones, and the teacher actually went out and collected several stones for students to observe and touch. In mathematics, students get to count with real money! In Hubbell, there is also a specialized library for remedial teaching, and books could be checked out and taken home. Of course, there are different levels for different students, providing students and teachers with a wide range of teaching materials.



FIFTH GRADE SOCIAL STUDIES

Day three afternoon lesson—Understand Diversity: know oneself, protect oneself and respect others. Fifth grade social studies class gave me a valuable lesson. First, the teacher talked about a picture book, which was about a Mexican family moving to the United States (see picture 6). Then, they watched a short movie describing the real-life situations and communication difficulties of the immigrants. Next, all of them took out a practice book that taught them how to think if they were in a similar situation, or when they met disrespectful or abusive people, either in words or action. Students would be required to take a standing response. The practice book also included several clarifying questions, and students were asked to think over certain questions, and record their responses on a beautiful poster (see picture 7).



RECIPE FOR “You”: 1. Draw a picture of yourself. 2. What are some things about your looks that you like? 3. What are some things about your looks that you do not like? 4. Write some of your inner traits? Example might be “I’m honest.” or “I’m good at math.” 5. Write some of your not-so-good inner traits? Example might be “Sometimes, I’m lazy.” or “I have a bad temper.” 6. Which is easier to change? The way we look on the outside or the kind of person we are on the inside, why? Students must learn their own qualities and write down “How do you express yourself?”, “The Risks in your life” and “The Goals in your life” in their own words. This exercise can help their writing and communication skills.

THE FOURTH DAY

HAPPY EARTH DAY

The fourth and fifth days were unforgettable. On the fourth day, I visited Mrs. Bouslog’s third grade class, together with Alice. The class began at eight a.m. Every morning, one of the whiteboards has a list of sentences or dialogues that didn’t have any punctuation marks. The source was taken from the book “Daily Oral Language,” and the students were required to copy down and write the correct punctuation marks. Five to ten minutes prior to the end of class, one of the students wrote in the correct punctuation marks, and the whole class discussed it. April 22nd was Earth Day, so one of the words students had to find out the meaning of was “biodegradable”. Students used “A Student’s Dictionary” to find out the word’s meaning and write down the page number. So many activities! Early in the morning, the principal randomly selected one to two students from the third grade to broadcast knowledge about Earth Day. Their voices were simply beautiful! Mrs. Bouslog invited the children to bring their cereal boxes to be recycled (see picture 8). Sun-blocking hats can be made out of cardboard and yarn. Every child brought his/her hat and sat around the teacher, listening to another epic fantasy tale. Then, as they listened to the soothing classical music, they wrote down what they had just heard. It was like writing a



Picture 8



Picture 9

100–150 word essay. On one of the boards was the number 140. What is its purpose? This is to train the student’s mathematic thinking and analytical skills. One could use any number to add, subtract, minus or divide, in order to get 140. The teacher would then invite one or two students to share their answers and have group discussion. Do you know how to teach fractions? Mrs. Bouslog used rectangles to demonstrate the concept (see picture 9). After their math games, Mrs. Pugh, the teacher next door, led

her third graders quietly into the classroom (see picture 10) and sat on both sides of the wall. The projector displayed "Save the Earth," and they sang it in a duet to the tune of *Are You Sleeping Brother John?* The voices of these little ladies and gentlemen were amazing! Mrs. Bouslog's class sat quietly and listened attentively to their singing. What a touching day, to share your singing with another class.



Picture 10

THE FIFTH DAY

PAJAMA DAY

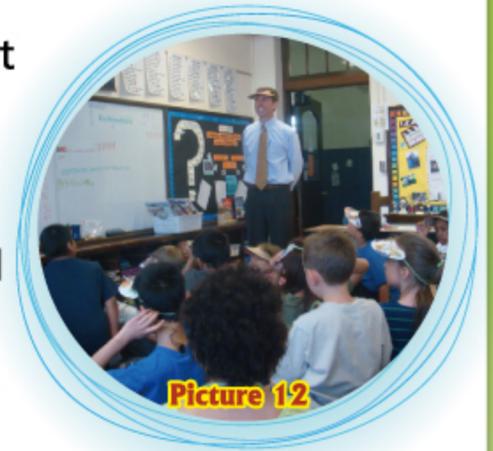
Friday was the happiest day for my host family's child. Because of the students' good performance last week, they were allowed to wear pajamas and comfortable slippers to school. They could even bring one of their favorite toys! Charlie from my host family happily wore his pajamas and brought his best friend, the big crocodile, to school.



Picture 11

LEADERSHIP IS VITAL: STRONG ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT TO ENSURE COMMITMENT AND RESOURCES

As we prepared to leave on Friday afternoon, we went to say farewell to the principal, Mr. Schott, and discovered that many young guests were sitting in his office. Weren't they the kids who were taking remedial lessons? They were all sitting on the floor and reading quietly. Mr. Schott could call out the name of every student. Sometimes, he would appear during class time and call out one of the students to have a nice chat with him. During recess, he would play and talk with students, too. What a great leader, so personal and touching.



Picture 12

APPRECIATION

This one-week observational teaching tour gave me great insights and valuable lessons. First, I would like to extend my appreciation to Steve and Sandy, and their lovely son, Charlie, for their hospitality. I am also thankful to Professor Steve for sharing with me his teaching experiences, and giving me encouragement to give more care to my students. Sandy is an author with an amazingly kind heart, and as a mother, she would read stories to her child every night. She's also a great cook, and an avid volunteer who actively participates in international volunteer events, welcoming volunteers from around the world. She also shows care and concern for lonely students and provides them with food and shelter. As for Charlie, I'm thankful for his time playing with me, and his introduction to his two fish friends. We went to the zoo on Sunday, and he passionately introduced many animals to me. Together we pulled out weeds, and went to the library. These have become my valuable memories, and I thank God for this wonderful family and their blessings.



Picture 13