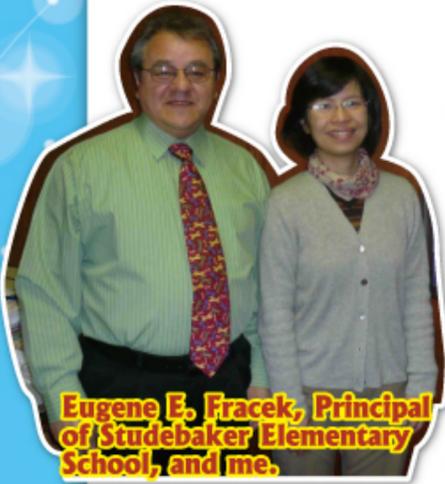


# A WEEK IN STUDEBAKER

## MIN HUA, WU, YONGJI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Eugene E. Fracek, Principal of Studebaker Elementary School, and me.

I was so lucky to have the chance to join the training trip to Iowa. This was my first time to visit the United States. The school we visited is Studebaker Elementary School in Des Moines, Iowa.

Anita, my partner, and I stayed with our host family for a week. Our hostess, Mary, is an experienced kindergarten teacher in Studebaker. It was a considerate arrangement to live with Mary and her family. During the school days, we could have intimate classroom observations. After school, we could share what we had seen with Mary.

Every morning, Mary drove us to school along with her lovely twin grandchildren. I was impressed with their school lives and family lives. Actually, I was astonished.

### ASTONISHING THINGS

#### ● Well-behaved Students

When the students answered questions, asked questions, or wanted to say something, they just raised their hands quietly and waited for the teacher to call their name. They wouldn't yell: Me! Me!

When the teacher was talking to the guest, and the student wanted to talk to the teacher, they waited. If the teacher decided to talk to the guest first, she would tell the student to come back later. The student went back to the seat quietly and came back later.



The students listened to the teacher carefully. She didn't have to repeat the same thing again and again. In Taiwan, it is totally different. For instance, when I say, "Open your book and turn to page ten," in my class, only two thirds of the students open their books to the right page. Then I have to repeat the sentence at least twice. But there would still be two or more students who would be lost. In the class I observed, the teacher spoke this kind of sentence only once, or maybe twice.



### ● **Respect Others' Space:**

When the students got into line or gathered together and listened to the teacher telling a story, they kept a proper distance from each other. I didn't see students push or poke each other.



### ● **How the Teachers Spoke**

The teachers spoke in a low voice. They didn't have to use microphones, and the students listened carefully. The teachers always used positive words and phrases to encourage their students, like: Good job, Good question, Wonderful, You made a good choice, Marvelous, etc. I especially like this one—You made a good choice. When a student did something wrong, instead of yelling at the kid, Mrs. E.J., a teacher in Studebaker said, "You made a bad choice." That's cool.

### ● **No Child Left Behind**

There are special teachers in the school helping students who are struggling with literacy and math. Every day, the teacher goes

to different classes and stays in each class for twenty minutes. During

that time, the students that need extra help form a group with the special teacher to learn basic literacy or math skills. The other students in the same

class form different groups working with their teacher or doing other activities on their own, like pair reading, working on worksheets that the teacher assigned, or listening to a CD.



### ● **Background Music**

There was a teacher putting music on very, very low volume while teaching. When the teacher was teaching, the music became background music and the students didn't seem to be disturbed. The atmosphere in the class was nice.

## ● Workstation

The students didn't always do the same thing together in class. In Literacy class, they were grouped and then joined different literacy activities, like reading letters, counting numbers, reading a big book, doing pair reading, writing, working on a worksheet, listening to a CD for fluency, or reading books in the reading corner, etc.



There was a workstation rotation chart on the wall. According to the chart, the students knew which group they belonged to and which workstation they should work at. At the same time, the teacher had guided reading with a certain group. The teacher could help the lower level group while the other higher level groups were working on different workstations.



## I WONDER WHY?

These are the things that astonished me. There must be reasons. Here are a few of my observations.

### ● Buildings Make the Difference

When I showed pictures of the Studebaker school building to my students, all of them said that it didn't look like a school. The school is a single-story building. Once students enter the school, they are inside the building. They do almost everything inside the buildings, even the gym is in the building. They can only go out of the building to the playground during recess. The classrooms are bigger than the classrooms in Taiwan. There is only one or maybe two windows in each classroom, and they are always closed.

Students don't have a chance to look out of the windows, which helps them stay concentrated. There is more space on the walls to put up posters, and the teachers don't have to use microphones because their voice can be heard easily when speaking.



### ● Schedules Make the Difference

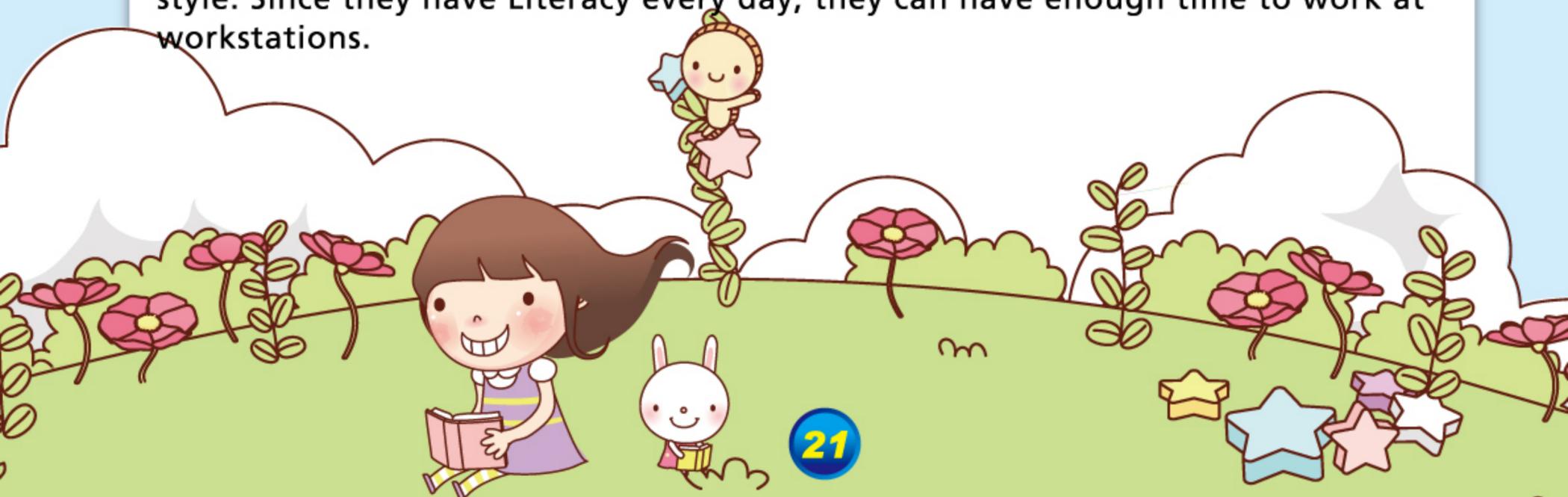
The schedule is also very different from the schedule in Taiwan.

The class starts at 8:35. The students don't have to clean their classrooms and school. The main subjects are Literacy, Math, Science, Social Studies, Health, P.E., Art, Music and Counseling. They have Literacy, Math, Science/Health and Social Studies every day. Literacy is the most important. They divide Literacy into different categories: word knowledge, small group, comprehension, writing, library, and literature. There are three Fluency blocks in one day: fifty minutes in the morning, one hour in the afternoon, and another fifteen minutes before the students go home.

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
8:35-9:00	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
9:00-9:25	Art	P.E.	Music	P.E.	Music
9:25-9:55	9:25-10:00 Library	9:25-10:00 Comprehension (Large Group)	9:25-10:00 Word Knowledge	9:25-10:00 Art	9:25-10:00 Word Knowledge
9:55-11:10	Math	Math	Math	10:05-11:00 Math	Math
11:10-12:00	Literacy Block Comprehension Word Knowledge Fluency				
12:00-12:45	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess	Lunch/Recess
12:45-1:00	Word Knowledge				
1:00-2:00	Literacy Block Small Group Comprehension Fluency Writing				
2:00-3:00	Health Science Social Studies				
3:00-3:15	Literacy/Fluency	Literacy/Fluency	Literacy/Fluency	Literacy/Fluency	Literacy/Fluency
3:15	Dismiss	Dismiss	Dismiss	Dismiss	Dismiss

**Third Grade School Schedule**

The teacher told us that she spent one month training her students to work at workstations. It took time to help the students get used to the learning style. Since they have Literacy every day, they can have enough time to work at workstations.



## ● Short Lunchtime and Recess

The students don't eat lunch in the classrooms. They have their lunch in the cafeteria. The cafeteria is not big enough for all the students, so they rotate. For example, Mrs. Winget's class has to head for the cafeteria at 12:05, choose their lunch and then finish their lunch in twenty minutes. Then they have another twenty minutes for recess, which is the only recess during the school day. They can play on the playground during the recess. While they are on the playground, there will be teachers watching them.

In Taiwan, our students eat lunch in their classrooms and they have forty minutes to finish lunch. After lunch, they have another thirty minutes for a nap. During the school day, there is a ten-minute break between every forty-minute class. This explains why the students in Taiwan go to school earlier and go home later than the students in America.

## ● Choice of Lunch

The students' lunch menu is decided in advance for them in Taiwan. However, in America, it is more complicated. Students can decide their own lunch based on five components. The components that make up the lunch are: Milk (1%, skim or fat free chocolate) 1 serving, Meat or Meat Alternate (Hamburger Patty, Yogurt or Cheese on Pizza) 1 serving, 2 servings of a Different Fruit or Vegetable.

Students need to choose 3 out of the 5 components listed above for a lunch to be completed. They can choose to take all 5 components without an extra charge.

In the morning, when the students go into the classroom, they have to choose the Meat or Meat Alternate they want and tell their teacher. The teacher has to list the students' choice and report it to the office. They do it every day. We thought it was time consuming, but the American teacher answered, "That's OK."

Thus, as soon as the students enter the classroom in the morning, they have already made their first choice about their lunch. At lunchtime, they get the tray to pick up their lunch. First, they have to choose the kind of milk they want. Remember? There are three different kinds of milk. Then they choose the grain they want from three different kinds of grains. And finally, they choose 2 servings of different fruit or vegetables from three.



If there are dips, they have to choose the dip they want. They have to make at least 4 choices to get their lunch.

Maybe it is a part of education. It is important to make good choices. The students get used to making choices from choosing their lunch. When the students can make good choices, it is more possible for them to become independent learners.

The teachers like to use the word "choice". When a student did something good, the teacher said, "You made a good choice." When the student did something bad, the teacher said, "You made a bad choice." Teachers have to lead students to make good choices, not just make choices for them. Students have to know that they have the free will to make choices, and they have to be responsible for the choices they make at the same time.

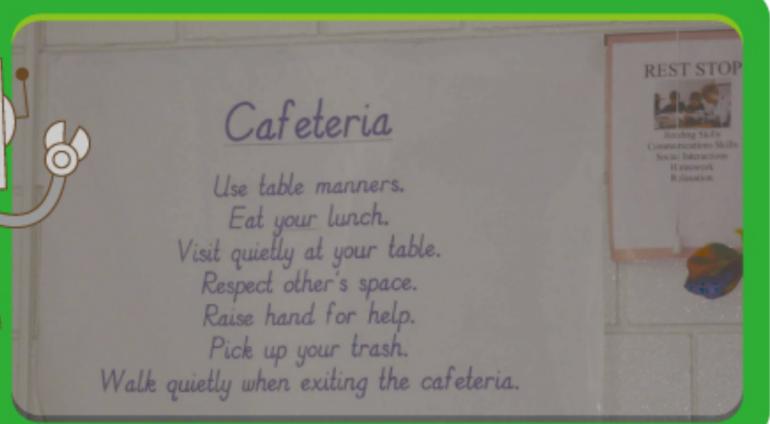
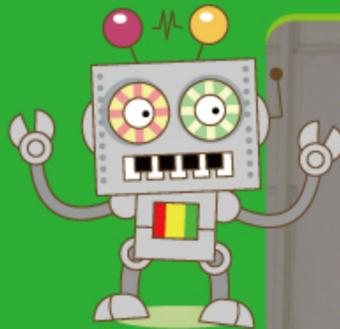
### ● Posters on the Wall

There are a lot of posters on the walls. They are used to remind the students of the rules they have to follow or the knowledge they have to be familiar with. These posters are very practical. Here are two kinds of posters I am especially interested in: posters about behaviors, and posters about reading.

## I. Behavior

### ✓ Proper Behaviors in the Cafeteria

Use table manners  
Eat your lunch  
Visit quietly at your table  
Respect other's space  
Raise hand for help  
Pick up your trash  
Walk quietly when exiting the cafeteria



### ✓ How to Get Along with Classmates



Be able to control your anger



Be able to make a plan together



Be able to walk away and choose something new

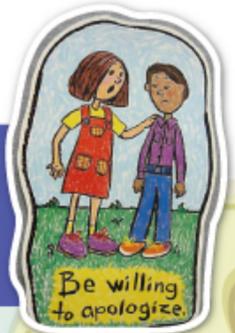
Be willing to discuss the problem



Be able to ignore unkind words



Be willing to apologize



✓ **Proper Behaviors in Different Places**



**Entering The Building**  
 Stay in order when exiting the bus.  
 WALK to the building.  
 Stay on the sidewalk.  
 Go in front door.  
 Go directly to assigned place.

**Hallways**  
 Walking – no talking.  
 Face forward.  
 One straight line.  
 Keep hands and feet to self.  
 Stay to the right.

**On The Bus**  
 Stay seated at all times.  
 Keep hands and feet to self.  
 Follow directions of the driver.  
 Use quiet voices.

**Restrooms**  
 Use it.  
 Flush it.  
 Wash hands -  
 Press foot pedal gently  
 One squirt of soap  
 Press dryer button gently  
 Return to classroom.

## 2. Reading

✓ **Levels of Books**



**Easy Books**  
 When you read an easy book, you have lots of prior knowledge, experiences, and schema to bring to the text. You can read all the words fluently and with expression. You understand everything in the text.

**Just Right Books**  
 When you read a just right book, you have quite a bit of prior knowledge, experiences and schema, to bring to the text. You can read most of the words and understand most of the text.

**Challenging Books**  
 When you read a challenging book, you don't have much prior knowledge, experiences or schema to bring to the text. You can barely read any of the words or struggle to understand the text. You can use some of the text features to make meaning.

✓ **Categories of Books**

✓ **Things Good Readers Do**



**Fiction—** Realistic Fiction, Historical Fiction, Traditional Literature, Science Fiction, Fantasy, Mystery

**Non Fiction—** Information, Biography, Autobiography

For more information:  
<http://blog.xuite.net/etlucy/blog/34120869>

**Things Good Readers Do**

<b>Preview</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Look at the cover and title.</li> <li>Look at some of the pictures and read some of the text.</li> </ul>
<b>Question</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask who, what, when, where, why, and how.</li> <li>Decide if what you're reading makes sense.</li> </ul>
<b>Predict</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wonder about what will happen next.</li> <li>Make guesses and read ahead to see if your predictions are correct.</li> </ul>
<b>Infer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Imagine the details.</li> <li>Use what you've read to understand what the author means.</li> </ul>
<b>Connect</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recall what you've read to what you know, like to your thoughts and feelings.</li> <li>Compare what you've read to other texts and to the world around you.</li> </ul>
<b>Summarize</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize and connect the details.</li> <li>Show your own conclusions.</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Think about what you've read.</li> <li>What did you think?</li> <li>What's important to read? Why or why not?</li> <li>Did you like it? Why or why not?</li> </ul>

## ● An Episode in My Host Family

The children had to obey the same rules at home and at school.

One day Mary, my hostess, was talking to my partner in the kitchen. Her grandson came over and called, "Grandma, Grandma!" Mary and my partner kept talking. Then her grandson called, "Grandma, Grandma!" again. When her grandson called Mary for the third time, Mary turned to him and seriously said, "I'm talking to Anita and you are bothering us." Her grandson burst out crying. I was in the kitchen then. "What will she do?" I wondered. Then Mary continued, "You are not supposed to stay here. Go to another room." I guessed he would keep crying or even screaming. To my surprise, he hesitated for a few seconds and went to another room as his grandma told him. He was still crying then. Five minutes later, her grandson came back with a smile on his face. His grandma gave him a hug. No yelling. No screaming. How amazing.



## MY APPLICATIONS

### ● The Way I Talk to My Students

I seldom yelled at students. Thanks to the teachers at Studebaker, now I know the students will listen to me carefully when I speak to them gently and firmly. It's been one month since I changed the way I spoke in class. It worked. I used to use my microphone in every class. Now I don't use my microphone that often.

### ● The Power of Music

I played Yo Yo Ma's cello music when my students worked on writing. I put the music on very low volume and told them, "If you can't hear the music, it means that you are too noisy." Instead of saying be quiet, now I ask, "Can you hear the music? If you don't, you know what to do." They did a good job.



### ● Workstations and Reading Recovery

English Teachers in Taiwan have the same problem—We have an M-shaped English class. We need time to help lower level students. However, we don't have the recovery system like I observed in America. I will group my students and train the higher level students doing independent reading or other activities. Then I may have fifteen minutes twice a week to help slower students.

## ● Posters

I will put up posters showing my expectations of my students in my classroom next semester.

- ✓ **Read loudly**  
**Read slowly**  
**Read daily**
- ✓ **Be respectful of others**  
**Be honest with yourself**  
**Walk in/out of the classroom gracefully**
- ✓ **Posters about how to read**

Finally, I would like to give thousands of thanks to my host family, the principal, the teachers, the staff at Studebaker, and my partner. I saw a lot, learned a lot, and I'm still digesting what I've learned.

I will make good use of what I have learned to benefit my students. It is the best way to say thank you.

You make me want to be a better teacher. And I will be a better teacher.

