

What I Learned At Palm

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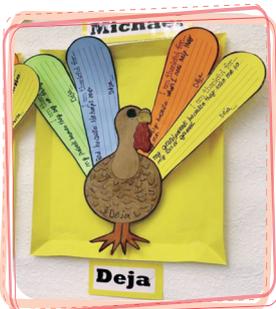
I was extremely grateful to have the opportunity to join the 2-week English teacher training program in Hacienda La Puente United School District. We arrived there at October 30th and just bumped into the important U.S. holiday-Halloween. In addition, Veteran's Day and Thanksgiving Day are also coming. It was so exciting to have a Halloween party at Rosie's home to join trick-or-treat, see Halloween decorations and feel the atmosphere. Thanks to these fun festivals experiences, I applied them to my teaching in Taiwan to broaden my students' perspective of the world.



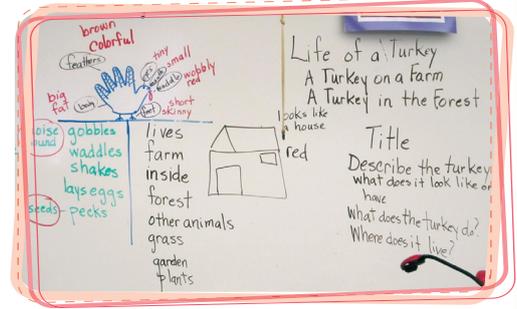
Halloween party at Rosie's home



Student's work: pumpkins

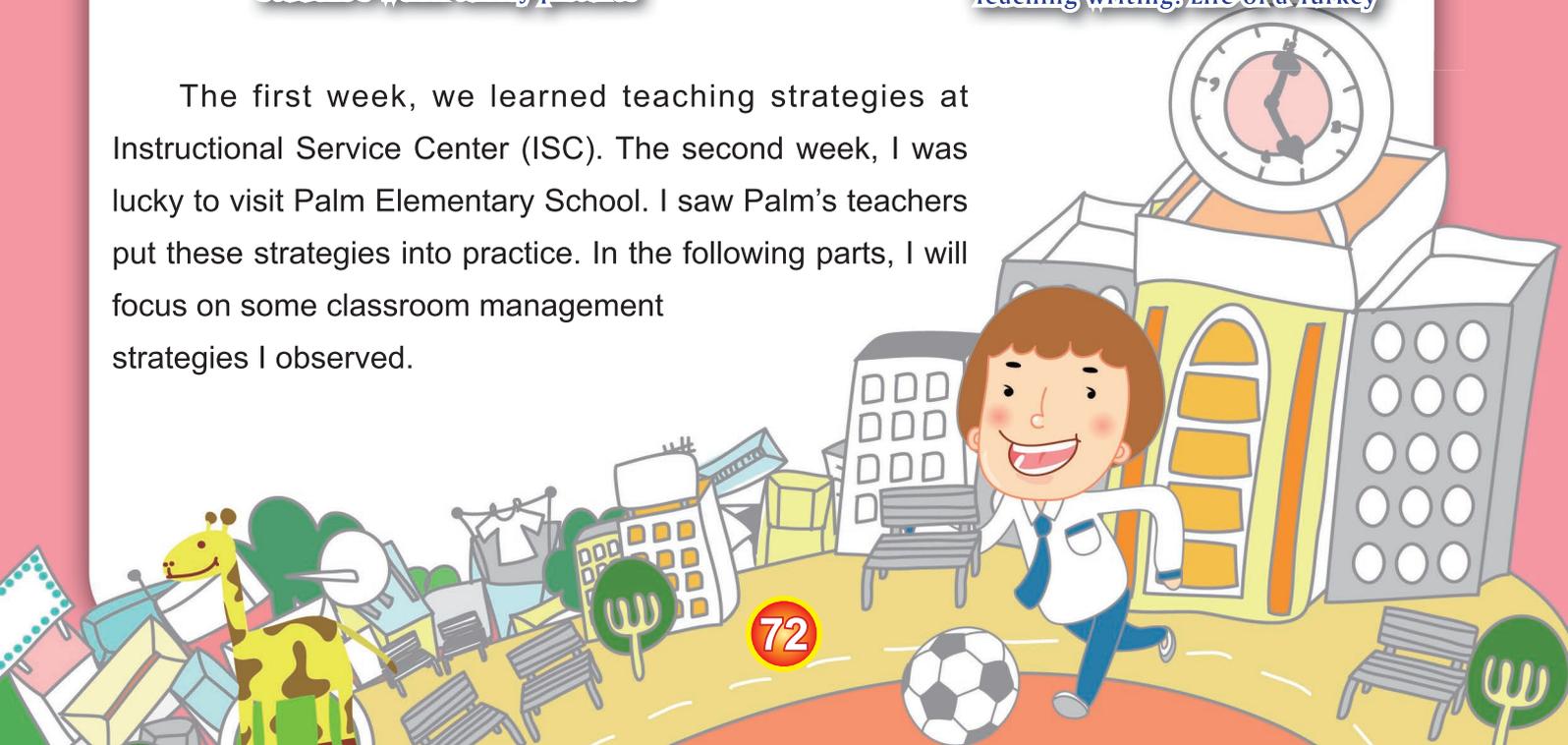


Student's work: turkey pictures



Teaching writing: Life of a Turkey

The first week, we learned teaching strategies at Instructional Service Center (ISC). The second week, I was lucky to visit Palm Elementary School. I saw Palm's teachers put these strategies into practice. In the following parts, I will focus on some classroom management strategies I observed.



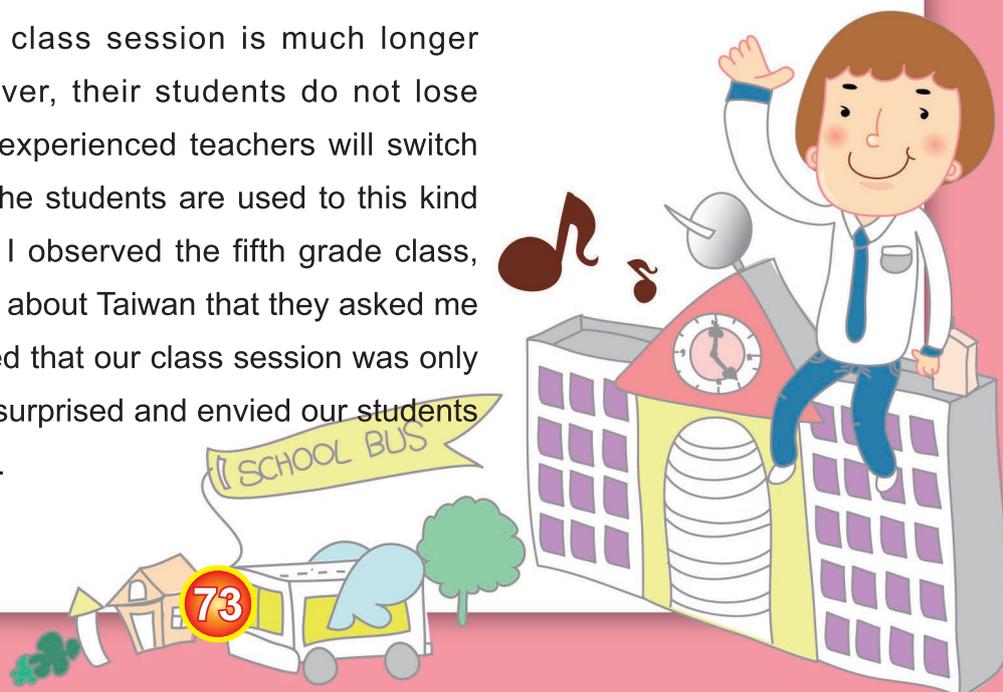
Introduction of Palm

There are about 400 students from kindergarten to grade fifth at Palm Elementary School. The majority of students are Hispanic or Latino. Therefore, English is not their mother tongue just like it is not ours in Taiwan. Some of their teachers can speak Spanish, too. I saw a teacher speak a few Spanish during teaching to let students understand the meaning of English contents. Because of the living environment, Palm's students are bilingual: they speak Spanish at home and automatically switch into English while at school. There are also some Asians, including Taiwanese. When I observed a kindergarten class, there was a cute little Taiwanese girl, whose mother was a volunteer as a teacher's assistant.

The instructional schedule for every grade is from 8:00 to 14:00, but there is a little difference from each grade. Here is their instructional schedule:

Kindergarten	Grade 1	Grade 2
08:00-10:15 Class	08:00-10:00 Class	08:00-10:00 Class
10:15-10:30 Recess	10:00-10:15 Recess	10:00-10:15 Recess
10:30-12:15 Class	10:15-11:10 Class	10:15-11:30 Class
12:15-13:00 Lunch	11:10-11:55 Lunch	11:30-12:15 Lunch
13:00-14:00 Class/Dismissal	11:55-14:00 Class/Dismissal	12:15-14:00 Class/Dismissal
Grade 3	Grade 4&5	Thursday-Early dismissal
08:00-10:00 Class	08:00-09:45 Class	13:00 PM K-G3
10:00-10:15 Recess	09:45-10:00 Recess	13:15 PM G4 & G5
10:15-11:40 Class	10:00-11:50 Class	
11:40-12:25 Lunch	11:50-12:28 Lunch	
12:25-14:00 Class/Dismissal	12:28-14:15 Class/Dismissal	

To my surprise, their class session is much longer than that in Taiwan. However, their students do not lose their attention because the experienced teachers will switch activities in class. Besides, the students are used to this kind of learning schedule. When I observed the fifth grade class, the students were so curious about Taiwan that they asked me a lot of questions. I mentioned that our class session was only forty minutes. They were so surprised and envied our students for having so many recesses.

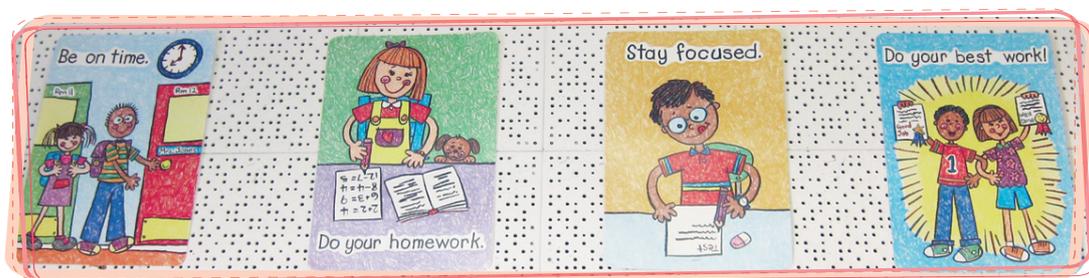


They study language art and mathematics in the morning, and in the afternoon they may have science, social studies, music or PE class. Like Taiwanese teachers, the homeroom teachers have to teach language art, mathematics, social studies, and science. But they usually teach the same grade every year. I think this practice is good because the teacher can focus in the grade s/he teaches. Take myself for example, I am in a small school and I have to teach all different graders. It is really a heavy burden for me to prepare the teaching materials.

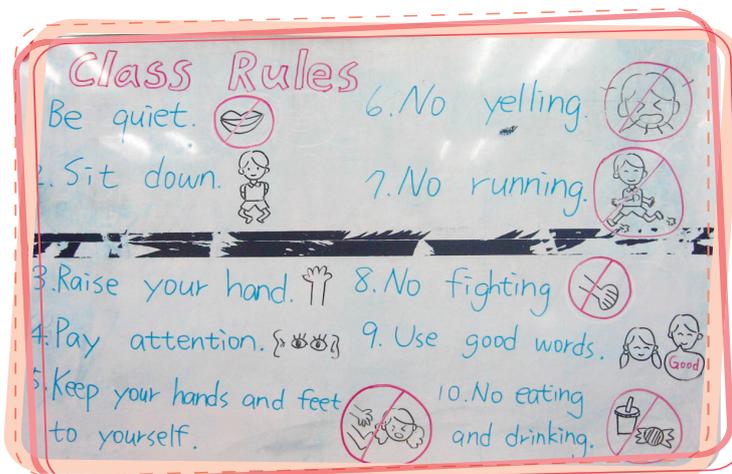
There is one teacher in every class, except that special education class has one support teacher. It is special that they mix different grade students in the same class. I know that there is one elementary school in Yilan, Taiwan, uses the same teaching system. Students learn knowledge according to their aptitudes, interests and abilities. The class number for each grade this year is in the following table. In the lower grade, like the first grade, there are about twenty students per class; in the higher grade, like the fifth grade, there are about thirty students for each. There are totally nineteen classes at Palm Elementary School.

Class Numbers:

grade	K	1	1&2	2	2&3	3	3&4	4	5	K-2 SDC	3-5 SDC
number	3	3	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	1



At Palm Elementary School, L.A.



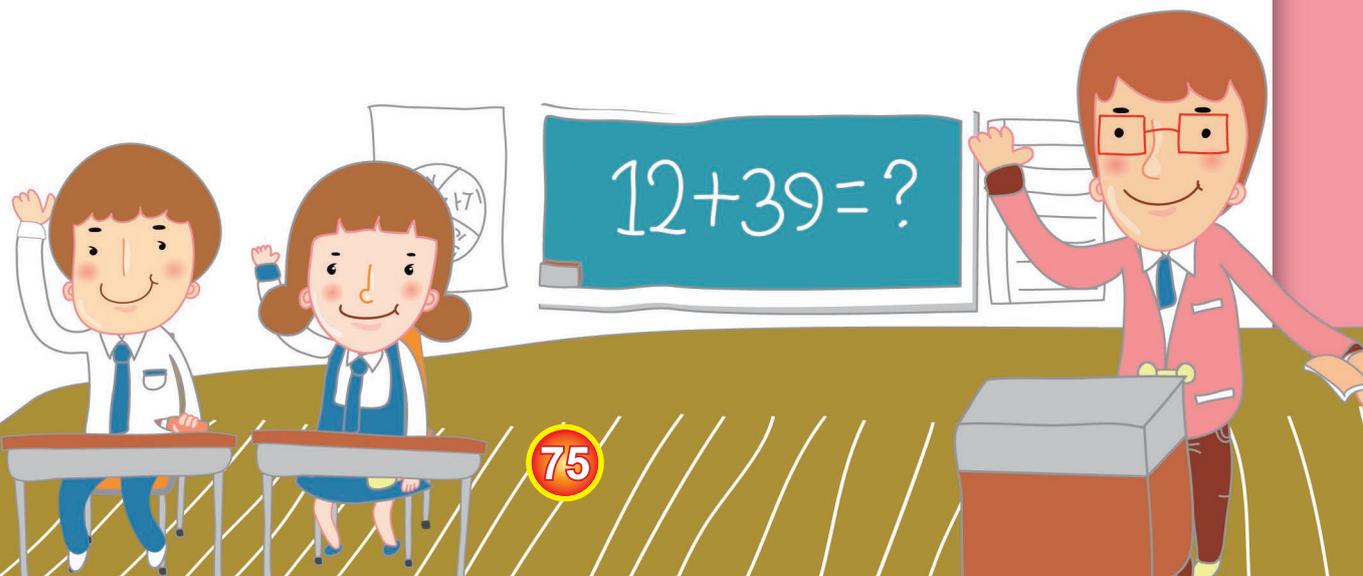
In my classroom, I make my own classroom rules and draw them on the whiteboard.

Classroom Management

“Successful teaching comes from good classroom management.” When I was at Palm Elementary School, I saw many useful classroom management strategies. After I came back to Taiwan, I can not wait to use some of them. Here are the strategies.

1. Classroom Rules

After observing almost every classroom, I found the teachers not only hung students' works, graphic organizers and some teaching materials around the classroom, but also the Classroom Rules posters. In these posters, there are pictures besides each rule, which made it easier for students to understand and obey. In addition, there were many posters with positive words to let students understand what good behaviors and teachers' expectations were. Before I went to California, although I had told my students what my classroom rules were at the beginning of the semester, I had to yell at students' misbehavior in class all the time. Maybe it was because I did not visualize these rules and students soon forgot what I expected them to behave. After the trip to L.A., I drew some basic rules on the whiteboard. When students violated them in different situations, I can quickly let my students know what I want them to do.





2. Behavior Traffic Light

In every classroom, I can see the behavior traffic light chart attached to the wall with every kid's name on it. Generally, there are five colors: green, yellow, blue, orange, and red. Depending on the teacher, every color has a different meaning. Green stands for "I am doing great! I am having a great day." Yellow means "One warning! Okay day." Blue is for "Two warnings. Loss of recess." Students can not get out to play during their recesses. Orange means "Three Warnings. Call home" The teacher will call student's home and talk to their parents about their kid's behavior. Red is the most serious and stands for "Four warnings. Principal or note home." In Hacienda La Puente United School District, it is very serious when parents have to meet the principal. The principal said that this kind of kids will be required to sit on a bench, do nothing but self-examination. Furthermore, students will be forbidden to go to school if they behave badly, and their parents are forced to stay at home by the law to take care of their children as a result and can not earn their livings. Therefore, their parents think highly of their children's behavior. In my opinion, it is impossible to request parents not to make a profit but look after their child at home in Taiwan. But it can be a good way to think about why they can do this and we can not.



All the students start with green cards, no matter how they behaved the day before. For kids, it is difficult for them to avoid making mistakes. It is significant that every student has a brand-new start at the beginning of each day. I think this idea is great because it also means “I can do better than yesterday.” If students misbehaved, they had to move their cards by themselves on the moment. It can be a reminder for them to behave well. At the end of each day, the teacher will ask the students to record the colors they get on a “Weekly Behavior” sheet and “Behavior Calendar” book. On every Friday, the kids have to take them home and show to their parents. Thus, parents can easily know how their children perform at school. I think it is an important and useful parent-teacher interaction way.



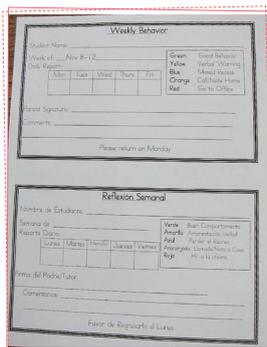
Grade Kindergarten



Behavior, Traffic Light-variation
Grade 1



Grade K-2



Weekly Behavior sheet

English and Spanish version: Parents can know their children's behavior weekly and write comments



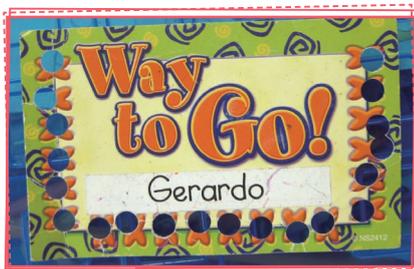
Behavior Calendar book

parents can know their children's performance monthly



3. Punch Card

When I observed teacher McMillan Louise's teaching, who taught the first grade, I found her classroom organized, neat, and cozy. She made a special honor system that she gave every student a punch card. Students wrote down their names on the card and put it in the pencil box or on the table in front of them. When students performed well or made a good speech, they could get one punch on the card. If the student got twenty punches on the "Way To Go" punch card, s/he could earn a trip to the treasure box and picked up one treasure. In the treasure box, there were many little toys, pencils, crayons, stickers and so on. Students loved the treasure box because they not only can get gifts but also can show everyone that they are honor students.



Punch card



Treasure Box



4. Grouping

When doing teaching activities, teachers like to divide students into different groups. The advantages of group competition are that students can cooperate with each other and the learning process becomes more interesting. Usually, teachers group students by numbers. But at Palm Elementary School, some teachers are so creative that they group the kids with the states of America or the continents of the world. I think it is not only a good way to group but also a meaningful way to review students' learning experience. After coming back to Taiwan, because my students are few in a class, I usually divide my kids into two groups and let them name the team for vocabulary which they are learning right now. I find out that students can easily remember these words.



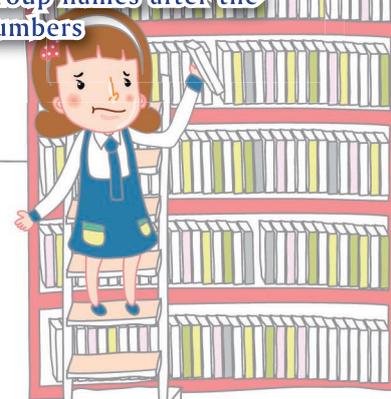
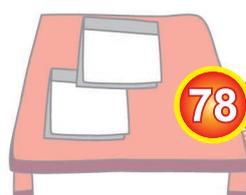
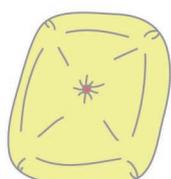
Group names after the states of America



Group names after the continents



Group names after the numbers



5. Fun Friday

Another honor system of teacher McMillan Louise is that if the whole class do something good or behave well, the teacher will put a ball into a jar called "Have a Ball." When the jar is filled up with little balls, students can have a "Fun Friday". Teacher Louise put a lot of educational toys like Bingo and puzzles in her closet. On the "Fun Friday", students don't have to study but play with these toys. Kids love "Fun Friday". Therefore, it is an encouraging and useful way to motivate children to perform. I consider that students not just play but they still learn from the process of playing. These toys are teaching materials which connect to their prior learning.



"Have a Ball" Jar



After filling up the jar, children can play these toys on the "Fun Friday"

6. Bell

Once in a while the teacher will switch or end up an activity in class. Instead of announcing it with an increasing voice, it is better to ring a bell. As soon as the students hear the ring, they have to look at their teacher, stop what they are doing and put their hands over their heads. I think it is interesting and efficient to control the students in class.



7. Secret Student

When the students walk in line, attend flag ceremony, listen to the teacher, read in class, or do other activities, they are easily to chat with others and make noises. They lose their attention and got out of control. In this case, "Secret Student" is a good way to improve this situation. The teacher put the noisy student's name into the "Secret Student" bag. Students do not know who the secret student is. The teacher will keep an eye on that secret student. If the secret student behaves well, s/he can get a special gift; on the contrast, if the secret student performs badly, s/he will be punished. Because children do not know who the secret student is, everyone has to behave well. It really works.



There are four secret student bags: secret reader, listener, worker, and walker. Under the bag there are different pencil board passes: girls, boys, nurse, library, hall and office pass.



8. Choice Box

When students misbehaved, the teacher will write down their names on a little blackboard called “Choice Box.” For students, they have choices to perform well or their names remain on the “Choice Box.” I think it is a positive way to let students reflect and they have the opportunity to make good decisions. Their teacher also teaches them what is good choice and what behavior is acceptable.



9. Interactive Watchword

When the teachers need children’s attention, they will say some watchwords. Here are some examples.

- (1) Learning position: “Sit up tall”, “Feet flat/crossed”, “Hands together” or “Eyes on teacher.” When the teacher says the beginning words, the students have to say the underline words. Writing position is another kind of variation.



- (2) When teachers say, “One, two, three, eyes on me”, and the students reply, “One, two, three, eyes on you.”
- (3) When teachers clap their hands for three times, the kids will clap their hands twice.
- (4) Silent Cheering: When the student has done something well, the teacher will give him or her silent cheering: Other students wave their hands on the air silently. It is excellent that the class will not make noises but everyone is still cheerful.

Finally, I have to say that I really appreciate Education Bureau of Taipei County, the principal and teachers at Palm School, the Education Board members of Hacienda La Puente United School District and all the people who make this trip possible. I benefit a lot from the visit and will do my best in my teaching in the future.

