

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

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The trip has made me think a lot about the importance of partnership among the government, the community, the parents, the school and the children. Only through cooperation of all can we achieve the goal of building a whole person with healthy character, who will ultimately do well for the whole society. I think I will continue to do my best on helping students not only developing on academic performances, but also on mental maturity and responsibility as a global citizen. After all, what the society needs are not brilliant villains, but honest, virtuous and decent people to make this world a better place.

## A. From Decorations to Classroom Management

I'm very surprised that all the decorations in the U.S. teachers' classrooms were 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 currently focus on. Through observing the decorations, I discovered many fantastic classroom management techniques which are really worth discussing and sharing.

### 1. Behavior Chart

Behavior chart is the most popular way for U.S. teachers to manage their own classrooms. Students start from the beginning level every day. If an improper behavior takes place, the student's name will be moved down to the following levels. There are 4 levels which are warning, citation, call home, and office referrals.



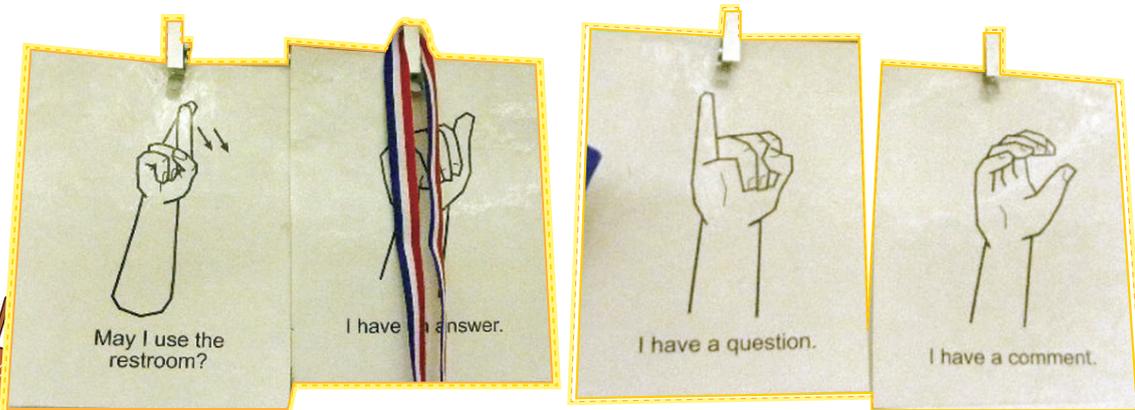
## 2. Classroom Helpers

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



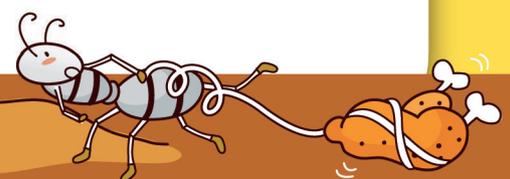
## 3. Directions Around the Classroom

It's really common in the U.S. classrooms that all of the directions, written or printed, are with specific and detailed explanation. 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 they will help learners to acquire the rules and directions easily and quickly. For instance, different gestures are used to represent different usages that pupils frequently use in class. Students can use the gestures instead of interrupting the flow of instruction during class when they need to use the restroom or have questions.



May I use the restroom?/I have an answer.

I have a question./I have a comment.

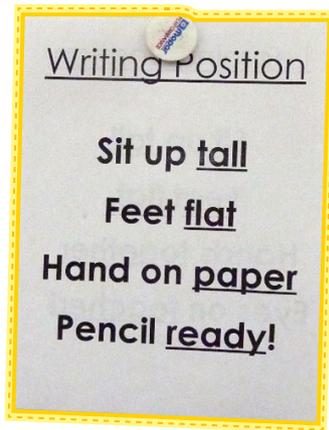


More examples will be provided, and they are all useful in EFL classrooms as well.



### Line-up

1. Quickly
2. Quietly
3. Straight
4. Facing Forward



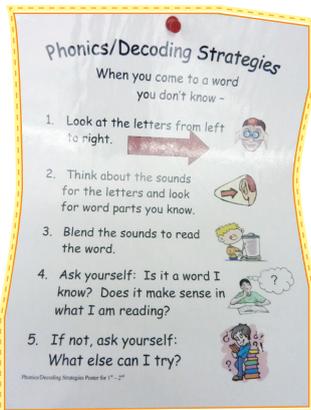
### Writing Position

- Sit up tall.  
Feet flat.  
Hand on paper.  
Pencil ready!



### Classroom Rules

1. Listen carefully.
2. Follow directions.
3. Work quietly. Do not disturb others who are working.
4. Respect others. Be kind with your words and actions.
5. Respect school and personal property.
6. Work and play safely.



### Phonics/Decoding Strategies

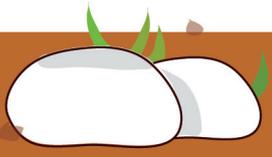
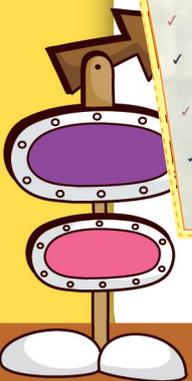
When you come to a word you don't know-

1. Look at the letters from left to right.
2. Think about the sounds for the letters and look for word parts you know.
3. Blend the sounds to read the word.
4. Ask yourself: Is it a word I know? Does it make sense in what I am reading?
5. If not, ask yourself: What else can I try?



### UA (Universal Access) Time

1. I work quietly.
2. I am responsible with materials.
3. I complete Must Do's first.
4. I am quiet during May Do's also.
5. I use a quiet voice when working with a partner.
6. I ask my questions before my teacher begins group time.



#### 4. Focus Wall

A focus wall is a bulletin board in a 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 you will 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

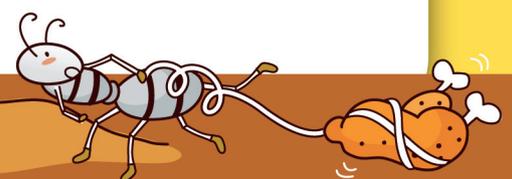
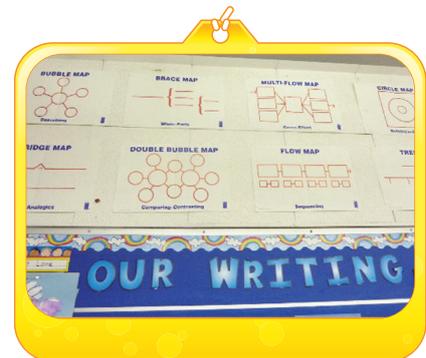
Alphafriend cards and sound spelling cards are used widely in every Bixby classroom. Teachers use sound spelling cards a lot because these cards can help learners to connect sounds with spellings. Once students understand the Sound/Spelling system, they are able to decode and encode words.



#### 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

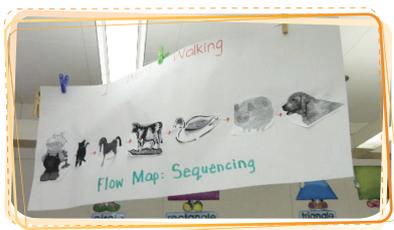
the instruction of other content areas, such as social studies, mathematics, etc. Therefore, thinking maps play a crucial role in classroom decoration. Thinking maps can be divided into eight different types. Each map has its own function and purpose. It guides students to think deeper and systematically.



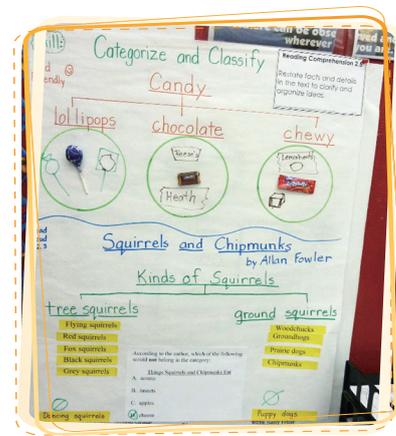
- (1) Circle Map: For defining in context
- (2) Tree Map: For classifying and grouping
- (3) Bubble Map: For describing with adjectives
- (4) Double Bubble Map: For comparing and contrasting
- (5) Flow Map: For sequencing and ordering
- (6) Multi-Flow Map: For analyzing causes and effects
- (7) Brace Map: For identifying part/whole relationships
- (8) Bridge Map: For seeing analogies



Circle Map



Flow Map



Tree Map

### 7. Students' Projects as Decorations

Students' writing and projects are another vital part of classroom decoration. 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 according to different festivals and learning objectives. It is noteworthy that nearly every students' work will be displayed, not just the fantastic ones.



### 8. Books and Teaching Props as Decorations

Not only do American teachers arrange and organize students' work systematically, but their own books and teaching props as well. Plenty of big books, picture books, AR (Accelerated Readers) books, and teaching props can be found in every classroom, but they are not messy. On the contrary, those books and teaching aids are all arranged in order. I really appreciate their diligence.



## 9. 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, such as computer center, reading center, writing center, etc.



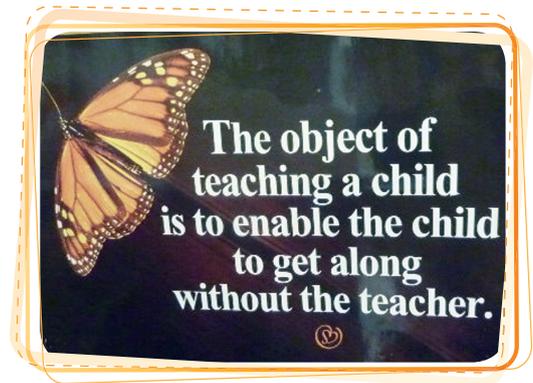
At computer center, pupils can browse the websites concerning language arts and mathematics. Tons of fun and interactive games are set up in those web sites for promoting their language proficiency and mathematical ability.



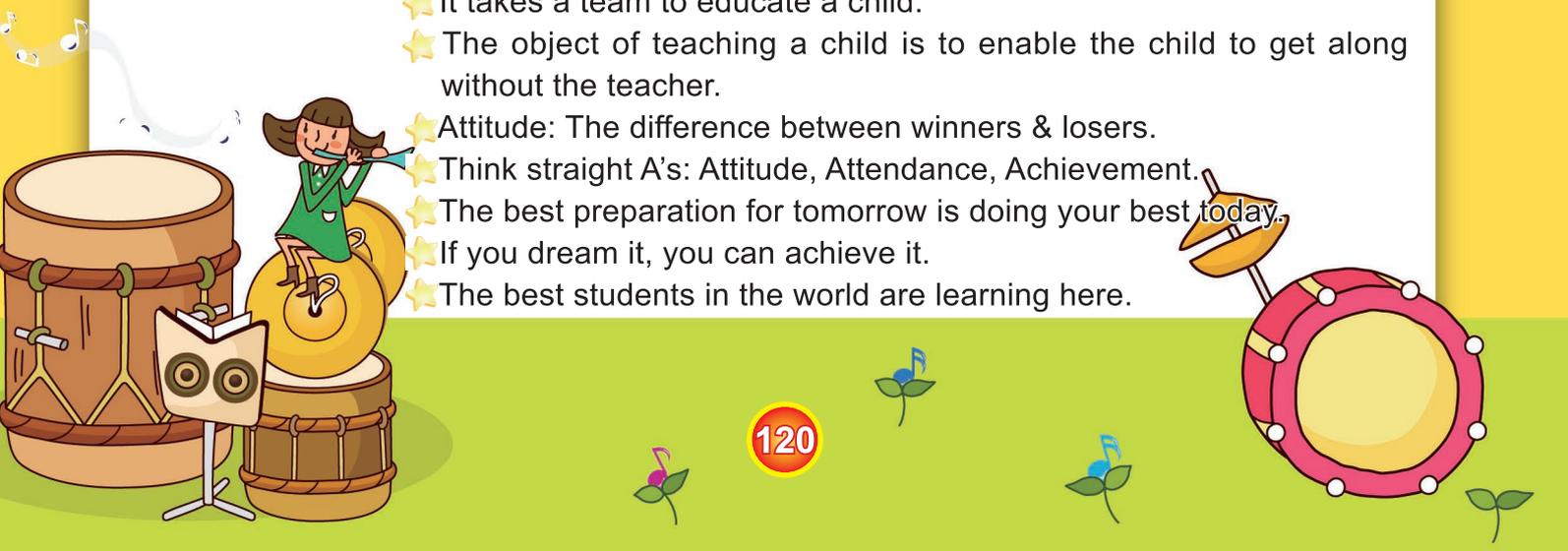
At this learning center, students read the questions printed on the poster and choose the correct answers displayed on the pocket chart. At last, pupils write down answers on the answer sheet. Students enjoy this activity so much.

## 10. Encouragement Banners Around the School

When you walk into an American campus, you will definitely discover many banners or posters for the purpose of encouragement. Those proverbs and sayings are so useful that I write them down so I can share them with teachers in Taiwan. The following sentences can be used for decorating school campuses and classrooms. They all inspire learners a lot.



- ★ It takes a team to educate a child.
- ★ The object of teaching a child is to enable the child to get along without the teacher.
- ★ Attitude: The difference between winners & losers.
- ★ Think straight A's: Attitude, Attendance, Achievement.
- ★ The best preparation for tomorrow is doing your best today.
- ★ If you dream it, you can achieve it.
- ★ The best students in the world are learning here.



## B. 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 positively as reward systems such as stickers and stamps. Those techniques are so useful and practical that they can be implemented in our schools 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 raffling. This method is quite attractive and exciting. I'm sure that pupils are fond of such kind of activities.



### 2. Rhymes and Chants

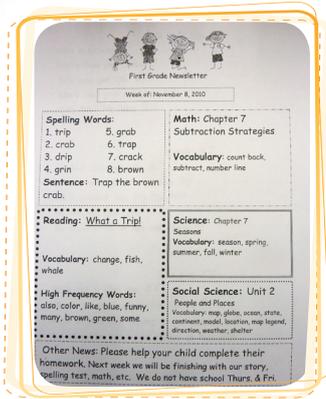
Rhymes and chants are used for classroom management as well, especially for kindergarteners, first graders, and second graders. The following is a chant modified from a traditional nursery rhyme and can be used to help students get ready when they begin to take tests or finish paperwork.

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

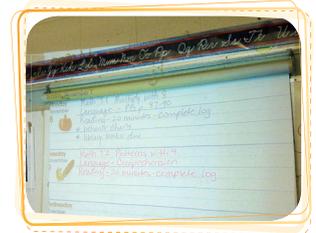
Before I went to L.A., I thought that there were no communication books in the U.S. Actually, American teachers communicate with parents a lot, and they also utilize communication books from second graders, also called agenda books or student planners. For first grade classes, teachers will staple all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





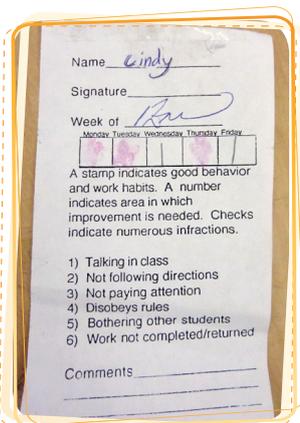
It is a sample of First Grade Newsletter. Teachers will tell parents the teaching points this week, inclusive of spelling words, sentence, math, reading, high frequency words, science, and social studies. Other news that parents should know as well will also be typed in this newsletter. For example, “Please help your child complete their homework. Next week we will finish our story, spelling test, math, etc. We do not have school Thurs. & Fri.”

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 on 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 agenda book to communicate with parents.

Parents in L.A. concern 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 for apology and also gratitude.



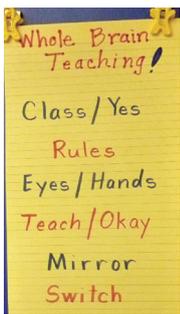
It is a very useful form for recording students’ behavior and it can be a mean of parent-teacher communication as well. There are five squares which represent each day’s performance. A stamp indicates good behavior and work habits. A number indicates area in which improvement is needed. The following are the 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 that process information. Thus, WBL can promote learning efficiency. The following are the big seven of WBL. If you are interested in this approach, you can browse the website, <http://www.youtube.com/user/ChrisBiffle>. 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 at least once in their lives. I am shocked by American teachers' patience and passion. Gratitude and apology 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 do I benefit a lot from the demonstrations by those outstanding teachers in L.A., but also I modify 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 am willing to extend my gratitude to those who make this trip possible.

