

# Hacienda La Puente United School District Observation Report on Successful Learning The Meaningful Linguistic Environment for Language Acquisition

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## Introduction



It was a great honor for me to be a member of Taipei County English Teachers' Training Program 2010. What we saw and learned during this 16-day program had sharpened our teaching skills and strengthened the teaching philosophy we bear in mind.

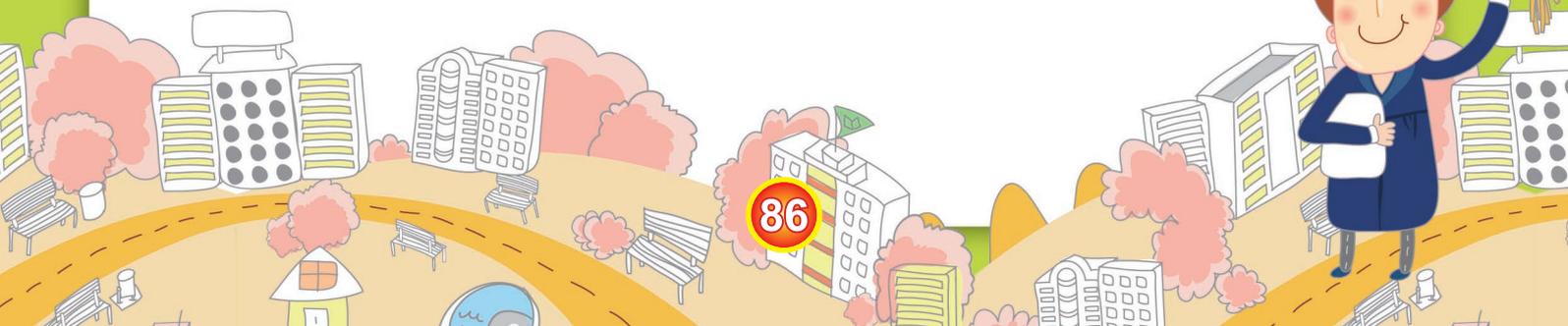
This training program offers trainees a chance to explore the latest innovations in teaching methods and practical applications adopted by local American teachers in public elementary and middle schools. For the first week, we had some regular training courses conducted by Hacienda La Puente Unified School District Language Arts Program specialists who first put their excellent teaching experiences and techniques in our hands. Then in the second week, we are sent to local public schools, the very frontline of education, for classroom observation which brought us more empirical information.

The message that both the training courses and the classroom observation try to convey is that teachers should run a meaningful environment for students' language learning. Listed below are the how and why educators should put efforts on building an effective classroom for language learning.

## Successful Language Learning

Teachers always dedicate themselves to providing a successful learning environment for their students. Somehow, for language acquisition, it is the learner's role that weighs the most.

Active participation in interaction and developmental level of our students should be considered the most in their learning processes. Listed below are three crucial elements that reinforce our students' language learning and some implications for educators from Marcia Brechtel, *Bring It All Together* (2001).



### **1. A Low Affective Filter**

- Develop a classroom where high self-esteem, low anxiety, and inclusion for students are the norm (Krashen, Cummins, Baron, Sagor, and Wink).

#### Implications for Teachers:

- Provide a safe and comfortable learning environment for all learners, including those with special needs by posting messages the teachers want the learners to receive.
- There must be mutual respect and trust between the teacher and the student for optimal learning to take place. A friendly first impression can make learners feel comfortable even if they have no understanding of the teaching.
- Spare time for students to cultivate and focus on the joy and purpose of learning.
- Provide a classroom that encourages risk-taking and avoid overcorrecting. As a result, children are helped to become more independent and confident learners.

### **2. Comprehensible Input**

- Do not assume that what you say, repeat, or write on the board is understood. Check that you are understood (Krashen, Cummins).

#### Implications for Teachers:

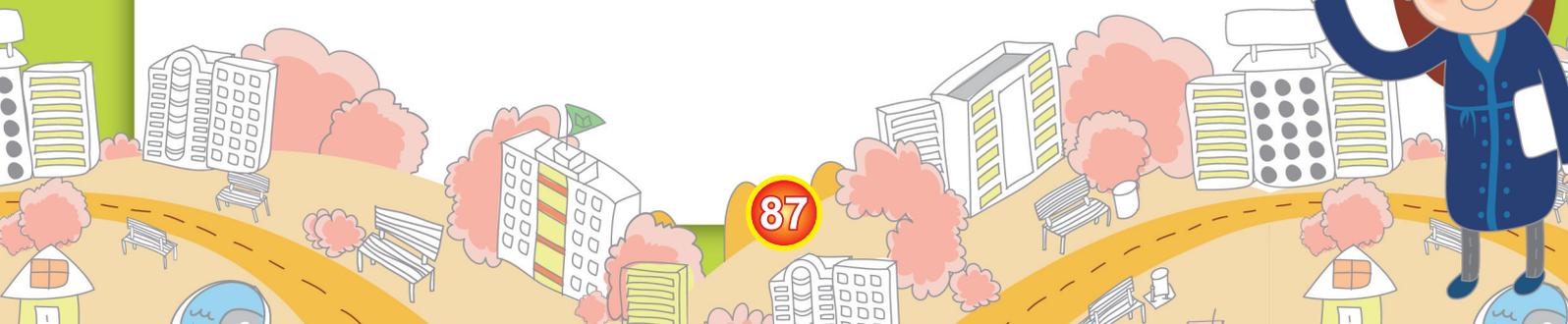
- The learning environment should meet students' developmental needs.
- Use graphic organizers, such as the pictorial input chart, to imprint information in a pattern that makes learning retrievable over a long period of time.
- Use different kinds of strategies which utilize music, art and chants to assist students' learning.

### **3. Learning is Essentially a Mental Process**

- Language is acquired by meaningful immersion, demonstration, and opportunities to practice (Krashen, Cambourne).

#### Implications for Teachers:

- Ensure that language is used interactively. Use various grouping strategies for scaffolding.
- Offer a lot of modeling and opportunities for students to practice new skills and concepts.



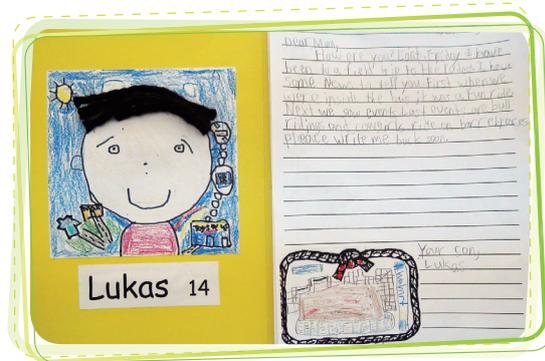
# Meaningful Linguistic Environment

The meaningful linguistic environment can be built anywhere, including classroom decorations, daily schedule and routines and also the social and emotional atmosphere. Researchers have studied the role of environmental factors in language acquisition and their results confirmed the positive contribution of meaningful linguistic environment. The results also indicated that language learners make remarkable progress when immersing in a language functional classroom. What makes your classroom environment functional? Details are listed as following:

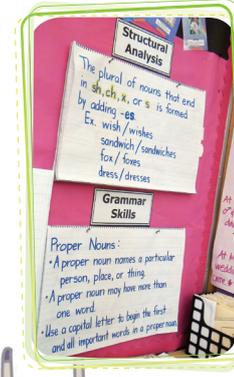
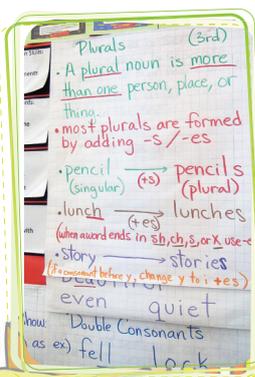
## • A Living Wall in the Classroom



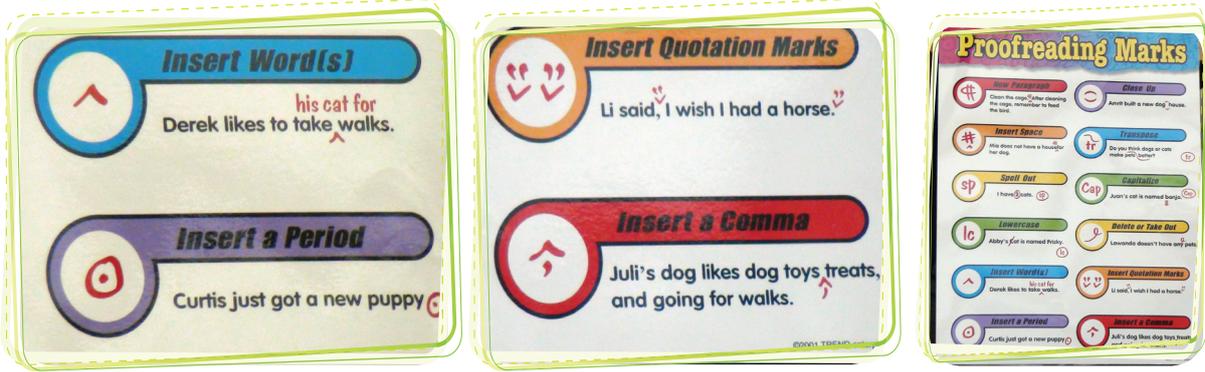
- Display students' work attractively on the wall as classroom decorations. Put them at their eye level.



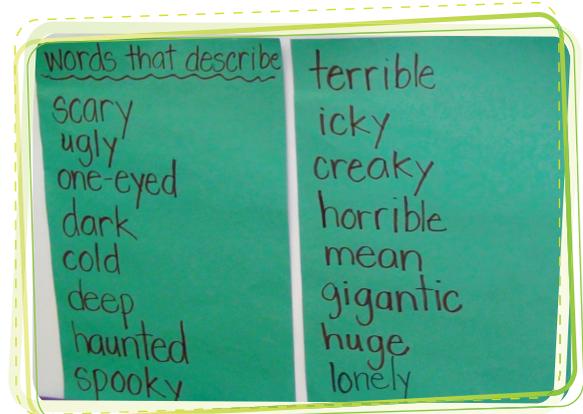
- Walls should be dripping with the language of the students. Walls are not bulletin boards that only display the top ten perfect works.



- Walls should be dripping with contents the students are learning also with the language of academics that help students' reading and writing skills.



- Print products are meaningless if the students simply ignore them. Walls shouldn't be merely art bulletin boards. A meaningful linguistic environment should have many visual props to enhance teaching.



- Word walls are nothing but decoration if the students do not interact with the contents. Teachers must design activities that motivate students to use this resource.



o **A Library in the Classroom**

- Teachers have to supply some literacy resources for those students who come to school without any literacy background



- A library of picture books at various levels is essential for language learning.





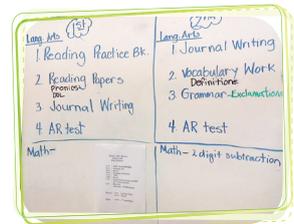
- Many students are in the so-called “silent period” at the beginning of their language acquisition process. Sharing stories and illustrations in the books can get their attentions and build up their language.



- In classrooms, there should be books on tape or e-books for computer-based learning which can be used by individual student.

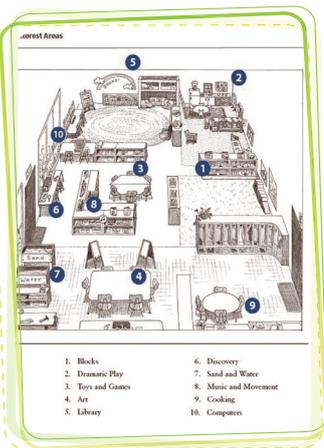
o **Clear Progress Schedule and Objective in the Classroom**

- List the objectives for each day to begin the class. By doing so, students know what to expect, and what is expected of them. When learners are aware that their learning environment is predictable, they would be able to settle into learning. By giving a sense of order in teaching, it creates a sense of order inside students’ learning.



o **Setting in the classroom:**

- A meaningful learning classroom should be organized into different interest areas in order to offer multiple opportunities for students to explore, discover, and grow. Separate interest area setting is viewed as an ideal setting for preschool children. We saw the similar settings in K-1 classrooms at Mesa Robles School.



- A setting that is safe, comfortable, attractive and well-designed helps learners engage in the activities that the teachers offer.





- Bright colors are used on walls to highlight focus areas or mark surroundings on surface.



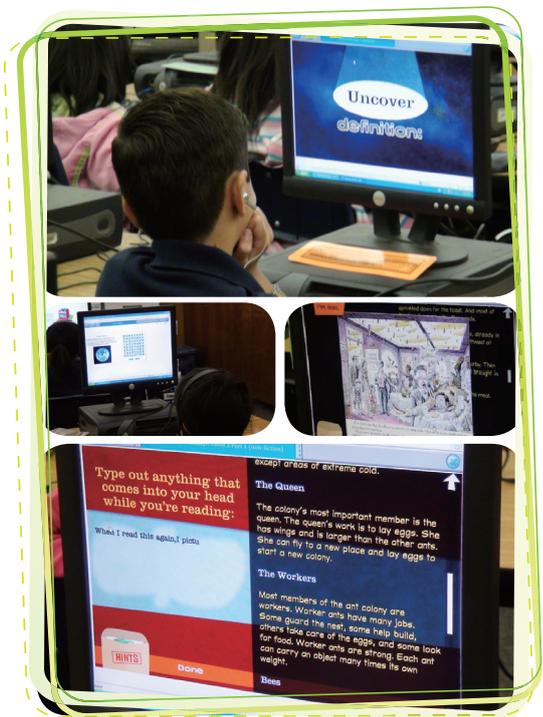
- Teachers observe and interact with students in positive ways in such environment, which supports the academic goals teachers set for learners.

o **Multimedia Learning in the Classroom**

**1. The Blackboard e-Education Platform**

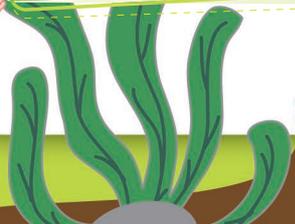
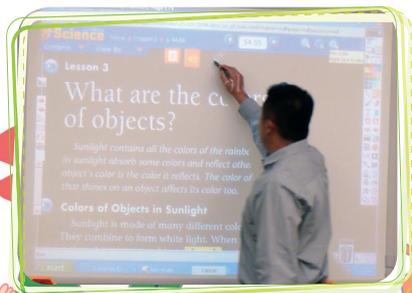
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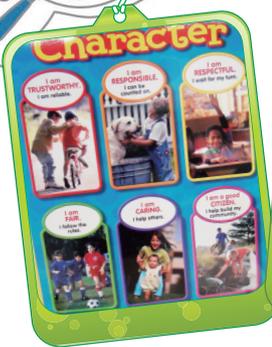
- In the computer lab at Mesa Robles School, Mr. Xiong is leading his G3 students reviewing subjects that are already been taught for the past week by using the built-in mutual interactive learning software on Blackboard Learn Site. The Blackboard e-Education platform is designed to transform the Internet into a powerful environment for education. Students can also access this learn site at home by logging into the system.



**2. The Interactive Whiteboard**

Electronic whiteboard is useful for teaching and presentation. The touch screen and data capturing features make it useful in multiple applications. Teachers can write notes on it with a stylus or fingers. When teaching grammar skills, students can interact with the software on the electronic whiteboard and use the highlighter tool” to highlight the verbs, or objective words.





### o A Community in the Classroom

- Create a socio-emotional environment in a community classroom by treating learners in positive ways and encourage learners to do the same for others.

- Walls are not bulletin boards that only display the top ten perfect works. Each student's work is displayed and complimented.



- Each student has a cubby or a basket with his/her name or picture on it to keep personal belongings. On their working tables, there are labels of relative linguistic elements that students learn recently.



- The positive social climate in the classroom helps learners feel good about this learning environment. By feeling so, students can learn best to their ability.



## Summary

The meaningful linguistic environment should be a rich combination of events that engage students in learning. Learning is no longer accumulations of knowledge but an understanding of knowledge in meaningful ways. With the recent emphasis on learner-center classroom and learning activities, it is important to build a meaningful learning environment, which meets the needs of the learners.

