



# From Teaching Aids to Classroom Decoration-Create a Learning Environment

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The first impression I had when I entered the elementary school classroom was that it was filled with many posters, charts and pictures. Instantly, I found my group of teachers busy taking pictures and eagerly reading every word on them. Through these posters, pictures and charts, we came to know almost every detail about the students' daily routine and core curriculum of specific grade. These posters, pictures and charts were not only functioned as classroom decoration but also as teaching aids. They helped students to get used to their daily routine, review learning content, build up self-esteem, learn the process of group work, manage their behavior and more. These classroom decorations were not all ready-made most of them were made by the teachers themselves. Despite the various forms, their contents could be divided into four categories: subject learning, classroom management, mottos and exhibition zone. In this report, I'll describe how these decorations came to be teaching aids, how teachers made them and used them in class, and how students learn from them.

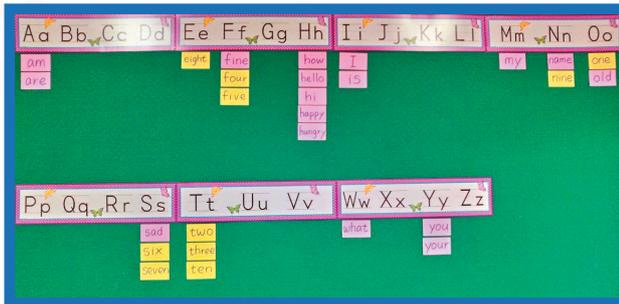
## (1) Subject learning

- **Word usage and recognition (word wall, sight words, amazing words, festival words etc.)**

There was a “word wall” in almost every classroom we visited. Teachers wrote the new words students had learned on the word cards and post them alphabetically on the word wall. Whenever teachers mentioned any word that is on the wall, they could ask students to point to the word right away to enhance their memory and connect with the word. Some of the classrooms had “amazing word” chart which teachers incorporates some adjectives they want students to use in their writing. This chart works well because students would look at that chart, find the word they want and use it in their journal. There was also a festival related word chart functioned as a writing guide to inspire students their writing topics about that festival. After this visit, I started to design a word wall in my classroom. I found that it not only organized the words for students but also reminded me words they've learned. It's a powerful means for practicing words review or independent study activity.



Amazing Words



My word wall



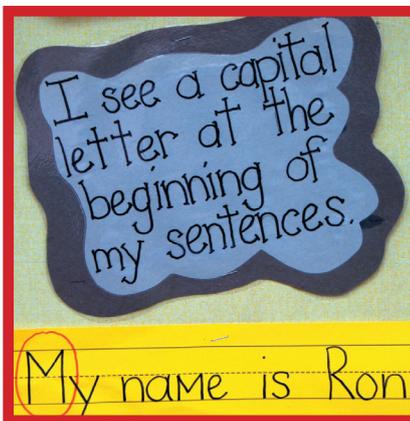
Word Wall



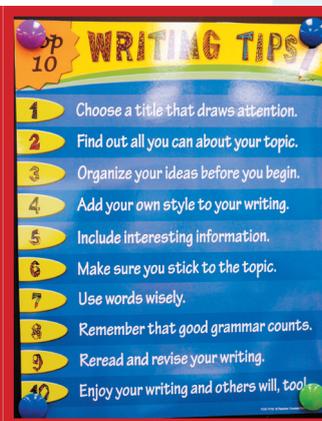
Festival words

### • Writing strategies and editing skills

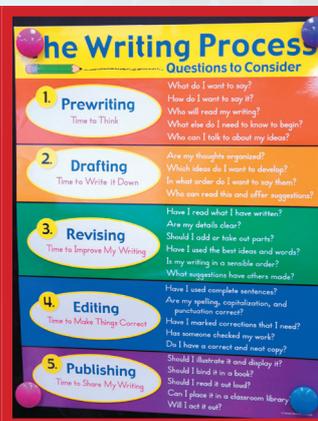
For the low graders, teachers had “writing forms” on the wall to show them how to write a sentence. For example, “I see a capital letter at the beginning of my sentence”. This allows the student to learn to edit their work. For all grade, there were “Writing Tips” and “Writing Process” posters for students to refer to when they were doing independent writing. There were also “Writing Checklist” “Editing” posters for writers to check and revise their writing. Since I teach middle schoolers, I think I’ll try the “writing forms” in my classroom with a bilingual version. In fact my students are beginners at writing sentences, it’ll remind them how to write a sentence in the correct form.



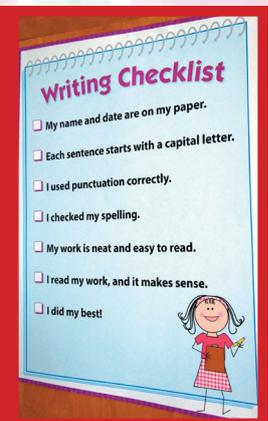
Writing Forms



Writing Tips



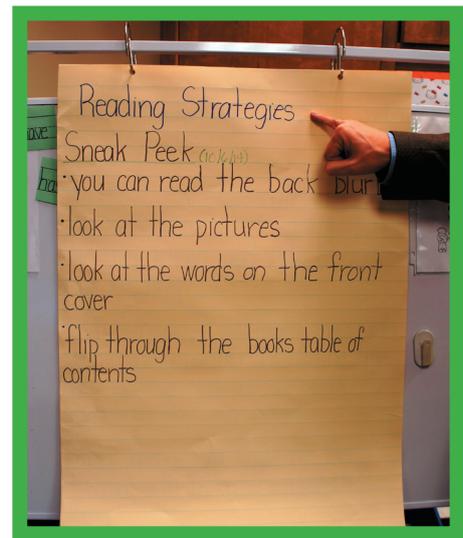
Writing Process



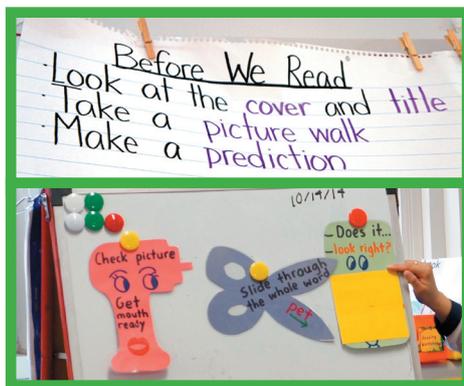
Writing Checklist

## • Reading strategies and discussion

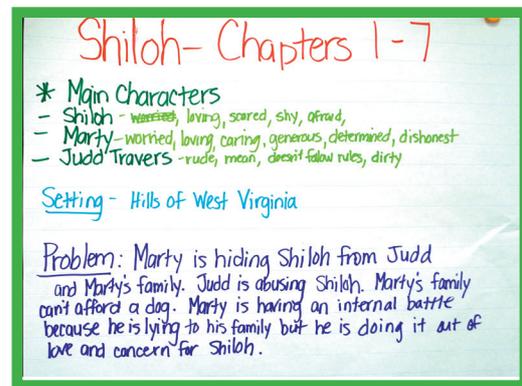
Whenever teachers complete teaching specific reading strategies, they'll write them on the flipchart, then stick or hang it on the wall after the class. During independent reading time, the teachers would work with individual student to check if the student had applied some strategies. If the student was not able to read fluently, the teachers would suggest him/her to use certain strategy on the chart that can help him/her effectively. Also, the teachers would hold a class discussion about the reading content and write down the guide line of the story on the flipchart as well. Thus students could get to know more about the structure of the story as they learn to analyze it. At the end of the class, the flipchart would be hung on the wall, and students would have the chance to review it all the time. I think I'll definitely teach student tips "Before Reading". Students would learn to look at the cover and title, go through pictures, and make a prediction. This will help students develop their own thinking and creation, and it'll be great if I have a poster to remind them to follow the strategies.



Reading Strategies



Reading Strategies



Reading Discussion

## • Daily routine (weather , date, attendance check )

Most of the classrooms had weather chart. Teachers used it to ask students "What's the weather like today?" and let students observe the weather outside of the window. Then, teachers would ask students about the temperature, if students answered "it's cold today", teachers would ask students to come up with some other synonyms. Meanwhile, most of the classrooms had a big calendar which is used for teaching students how to count the days, identify the month and date, and helped students to write the correct date on their notebook.



Weather Chart



Calendar

• **Phonics**

Systematic phonics chart is helpful for students learning to read and spell word. If there's a phonics chart, teachers can always refer to it when they teach new words. This way students will become familiar with the phonics rule and apply the rules to every new word they learn.



Phonics Chart



Double e

• **Songs & Chants**

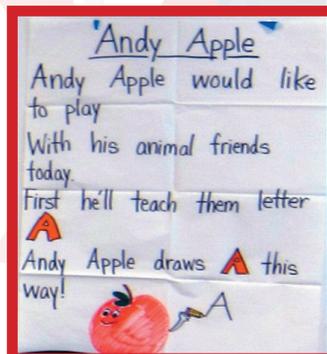
Some of the teachers like to create a song with the tune of popular nursery rhyme, and they can post the lyrics on the wall. When there's some spare time between two sections, teachers can always have students sing any of the songs on the wall. Since I teach a lot of songs in my class, I try to write the lyrics on the poster, too. It works well because every time I want students to sing the song, I'll just have to point to the lyrics without playing the video or music which is time consuming and distracting.



A Student points to the lyrics and sing.



Song List



Chant



My Poster- Song of Classroom English

## • Learning Goal and Target

To set up a learning goal and a target can help students to become aware of their task, thus, focus on the task. Moreover, students can also evaluate themselves by checking if they've reached the goal or finished the task. We seem to lack this kind of posters in our classrooms. Sometimes we don't tell our students the clear learning goal (maybe it is because we always want students to learn more without stopping on the goal we set) and students might not know they've reached the goal or not. Maybe I should try to do it in my classroom, see if they'll be more concentrate on the learning target and prepare themselves well to achieve it.



Learning Targets



Learning Targets

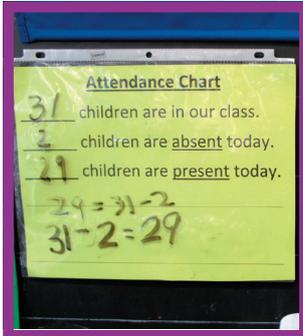


Learning Goals

## • Other Subjects (Math, Science etc.)

One of the teachers, Jessica Kim smartly used the attendance chart to teach students the concept of counting, which is a great way for students to learn math based on real life experience. At the same time, she had students count the sticks to know how many days they've been at school. By visualizing the numbers, students got the idea about how to use counting in life instead of counting on paper. There was a school we visited that had a curriculum about trees and rocks also used visualization skills. All over the school, we could see paper trees on a wall or a window, posters about rocks at the hallway, samples of rocks and leaves in every classroom. These created a strong scenario for students. By surrounding students with the trees and rocks projects, students could learn something about trees and rocks everywhere.

Coincidentally, I have to design school-based curriculum this semester, maybe I can borrow some ideas from this, and discuss with other subject teachers to create our own curriculum.



Attendance Chart



Tree Facts



Days at school

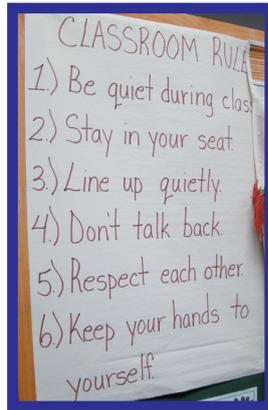
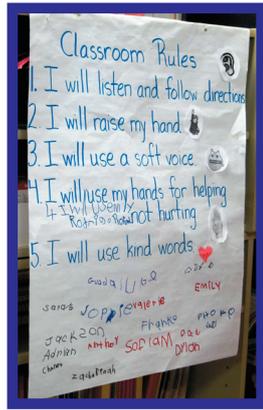
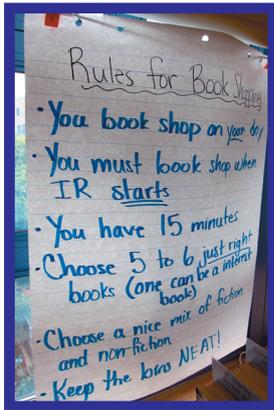


Rock Facts

## (2) Classroom management

### • Rules (Class rules, rug rules, group work rules, book shop rules)

For young learners, it is important to let them know exactly what they should do before you let them do something. If you want them to finish the work properly and efficiently, you need to explain every detail it takes to finish the work. Because students tend to forget about the rules and process you say quickly, it is useful to have a poster of the rules on the wall. The poster can remind students to follow the rules and discipline themselves. Some posters had students' signature to ensure that they agree with the rules and promise to follow them. I think it's a great idea, but if I have my students sign on my poster, there will be hundred and fifty names on it. Can't imagine how big the poster should be, however, it still worth trying if it does make student behave themselves.



Classroom Rules

Instead of just lecture time, most of the class we observed spent a lot of time on group work. This allows the students to know the rules and importance of group work. I found many posters with pictures showing students how to work in groups. The teacher would remind students again about the rules every time if they fail to do it, and students would easily catch up when they see the rules on the wall. The students could not work well during group work has always been my trouble, and I finally know the way to end it. That is, make one poster soon and be persistent in the rules on it.



Pair Work Rules

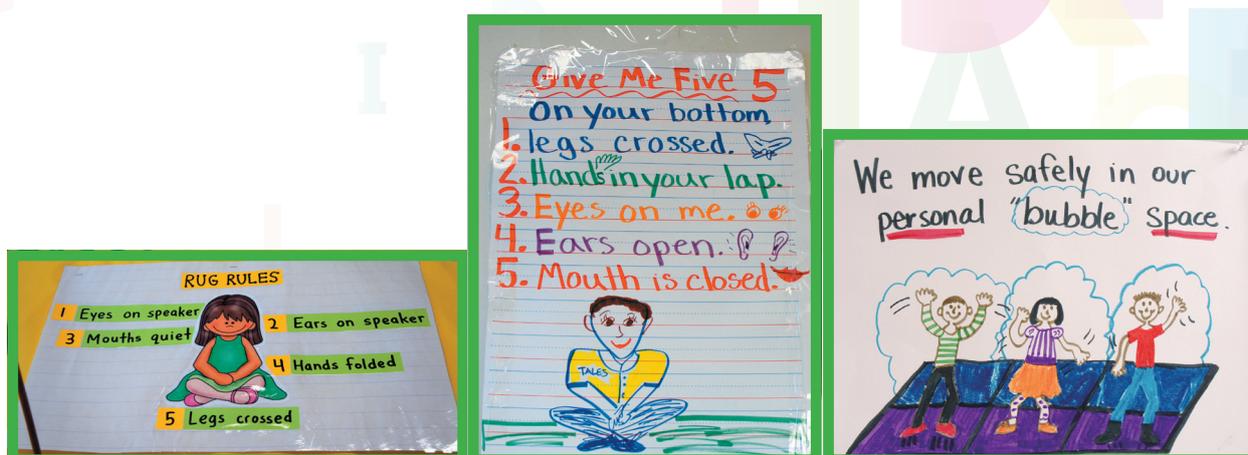


Independent work



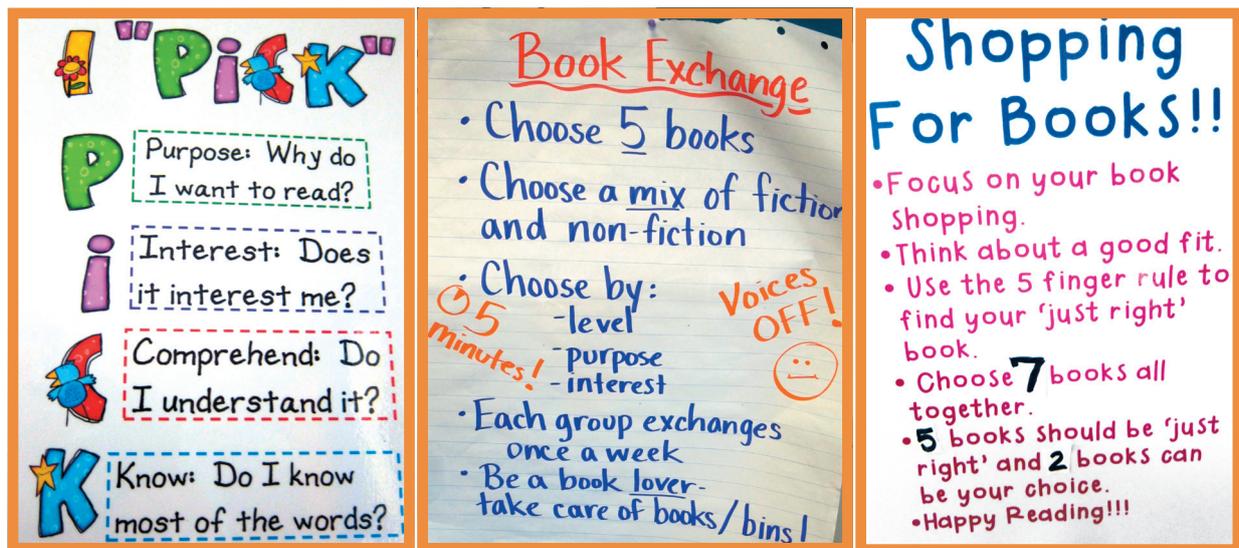
Pair Reading

Also, if I had a rug in my classroom one day, I would have rug rules, too. It's good to have students sit together on a rug listen to a story or discuss about something. The rug shortens the distance between S&T (students and teacher) and S&S (students and students). It brings the sense of security and comfort so that the students won't be afraid to speak up their ideas and opinions. However, the rules for the rug time should be practice first to prevent students from becoming rowdy when they sit with their peers.



Rug rules

In fact, there were rules for everything, even picking books (books shop). I asked the teacher about the process and she said, "Though there are rules for them, still it takes a lot time to make up their mind. The first time it took 40 minutes, but overtime they improved." I wonder if there are any rules or process to help our students to select books in Taiwan. It was difficult for me to find books I want to read when I was a child. I hardly went to the library or checked out any books because I didn't think I could understand what's in the books. If there were rules helping me to find the books that met my reading ability, I think I'd be a book lover. Thus, I strongly recommend that building a reading system which covers the whole process about reading from books selecting, books offering, reading strategies, guideline about reading competence is necessary for kids. You can't ask a teacher to teach reading if there are not enough of books for students to select from. You can't evaluate students' reading competence if there's no guideline for teachers to refer to. Reading and writing abilities are the basic abilities to learn other subjects. The schools we visited all spent lots of time on teaching reading and writing as formal courses not just extra time learning. This needs the government to design and run the whole system but not the individual school to work on its own to develop reading strategies.



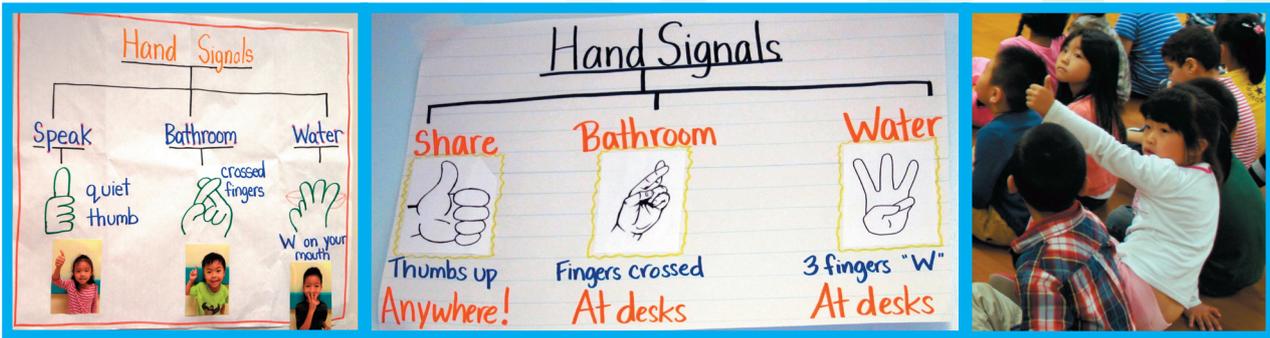
Book Shopping Rules

### • Hand Signals

Hands signals were used in two ways: to check students' understanding and for students to tell teachers what they need. The first time I saw teacher using hand signals was in Taipei American School, somehow I didn't use it in my class. Maybe it was because it is time consuming to train students to do that and I was too busy to practice it. Yet, this time I really want to build my own hand signals in class. I found that it's a sufficient way to quickly check students understanding without having any noise or disturbance. I might combine the two kinds of hand signals together so that I can kill two birds with one stone.



Two kinds of hand signals to check students understanding and the student did use the signals in the class.



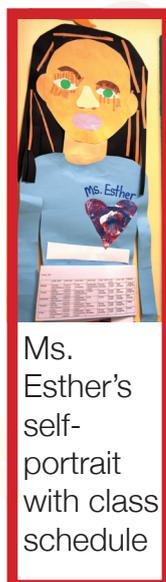
PS 244 elementary school has its own hand signals and has a poster of the signals in almost every classroom.

### • Classroom Introduction

Outside of every classroom, on each door and wall, every homeroom teacher had an introduction for their own class. Either the pictures or names of the students or the work of students would be nicely organized and posted. This kind of introduction made students develop the sense of belonging to the class, and also felt welcomed by the school and teacher. Often times, I did want to make beautiful decorations outside my classroom to welcome students to my class. However, the design of the open building made the decoration exposed to the sun, rain and the wind made it really difficult to maintain. It got dirty and broken easily and had to be replaced all the time. While, schools don't offer any budget to support us buying the materials for the decoration made it even more impossible to accomplish the work. Still, I will try to make it possible one day if I find some material that is strong enough to keep in good shape and overcome this severe condition.



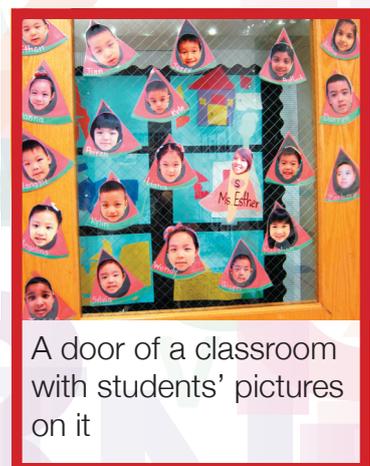
Miss Bilicki's Class with students' name on the fish scales



Ms. Esther's self-portrait with class schedule



A class with students' name on the popcorn kettles



A door of a classroom with students' pictures on it

## • Classroom Responsibilities

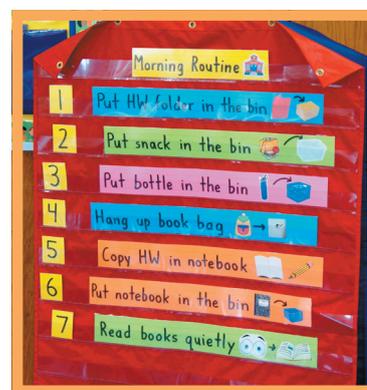
I like how the various designs show classroom jobs in classroom decoration forms. The cute pictures encourage students to do their jobs without feeling that it's a workload. I asked one of the teachers if the students take turns to do the jobs. She said she arranged the students randomly or sometimes she arranged it on purpose to help certain student to learn to be responsible. I think I might imitate her way to arrange the classroom jobs so that I don't have to remember whose turn it is. Also, if you do it right in her way, the students will feel honored to do the job instead of trying to avoid the job.



Classroom Responsibilities

## • Class Routine & Schedule

It is really thoughtful and considerate for teachers to have daily schedule on the wall. Lots of students are absent minded to think of what they have to do next and get blamed for that all the time. I think they lack the ability to arrange time and think ahead. As a teacher, we can kindly remind them to notice the schedule and to build up the habits to be prepared for the next step. It is especially needed for low graders who are not familiar with the school life and have no idea about time. To build up a routine can make them learn to do things in order and ease their anxiety for the unknown. Gradually they'll know that they can develop steps to finish the work, and they'll learn to do things step by step.



Morning Routine



Pack Up Routine



Class Schedule

### • Behavior and Voice Control Chart

For those students who haven't developed the ability of abstract thinking, the teacher has to create visual materials so it becomes concrete which helps make sense to the students. The behavior chart is the best example, for it shows students the different stages and consequences of behavior with different colors or pictures. To make it more effective, students have to move the pin when they misbehave. Furthermore, there is a voice control chart which has visualized the levels of sound. By moving the pin, students need to control their voice according to the level on the chart. I think the teacher must have practiced it with students a lot of times because they can really work with each other with proper voice without disturbing others.



Behavior chart



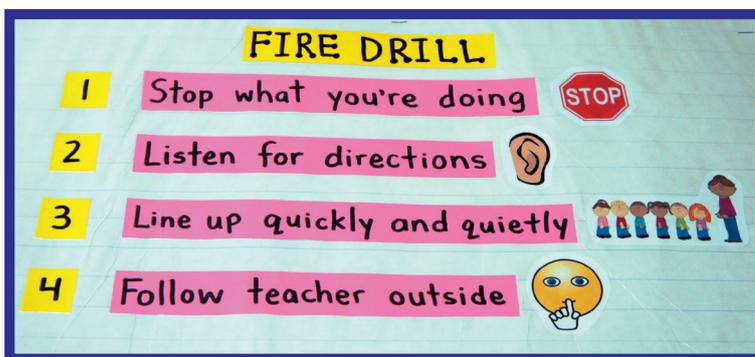
Volume Control Chart

## • Emergency Drill

I think the schools we visited must have printed an emergency sign for every classroom because I saw the same sign attached by the door in every classroom. It's a brilliant idea to let anyone in the classroom know where to go if there's an emergency. Since the 921 earthquake, schools in Taiwan have practiced emergency drills every semester. I think we should have that kind of sign in every classroom, too. Then, even the substitute teachers will know where to go even if they might not have participated in the drill before.



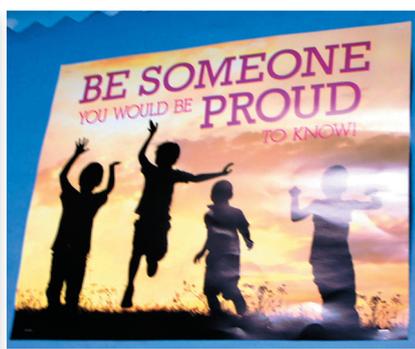
Emergency

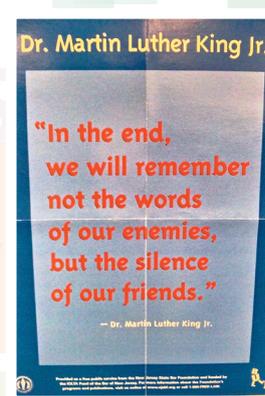
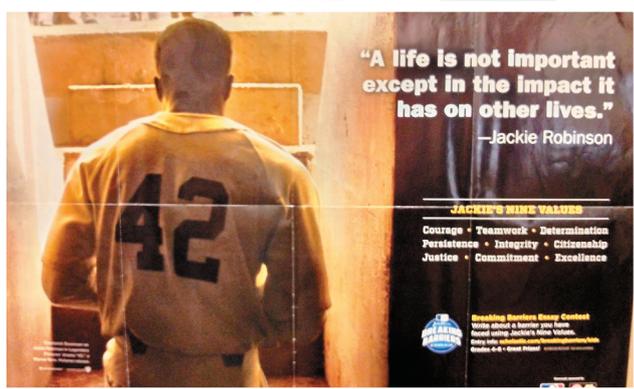


Fire Drill

## (3) Mottos

The mottoes one quotes would show the person's belief and faith. If the teacher wants to promote positive beliefs and thinking, the mottoes will do the job well. Words have their magic; they inspire, encourage and awake people to act right away, as they change their attitude to adjust their values and disciplines themselves. I found some powerful motto posters when I visited the schools. I don't know where the posters came from but they truly touched my heart. I think I should try to make some posters to guide my students, too. Sometimes a short motto is more effective than a long speech.





#### (4) Exhibition Zone

I enjoy viewing the students' work from worksheets and projects. Students can always surprise you with their unique ideas and novel thoughts. The school I visited had done a great job in exhibiting their students' work. There were worksheets covering the whole wall, and every student's work, regardless good or bad, was on the wall. It must have encouraged students to do their best on their work because I noticed that every work was presented neatly, not a sloppy job. I've always wanted to show my students' work on the wall. However, I only got one wall to use and it is occupied by my teaching posters. Maybe someday if I get some budget to buy a portable partition, I can make my classroom gallery dream come true.



Exhibition Zone

I think teaching and learning do not just happen in class; it can actually happen in any moment, any place. Any moment can be a beginning for learning. Everything a person see can motivate him/her to learn. That's why classroom decoration is so important. In fact, it's not decoration at all, but about creating a learning environment.



I used to decorate my classroom without any deep thought, and all I did was just hung the posters and filled the wall. Now I see what a waste it was to waste all the opportunities to help students to learn. It is wrong to have the decoration done at the beginning of the semester and not change it till the end of the semester. The decoration should be changed all the time and it should be related to the content we're teaching. The decoration doesn't need to be fancy, and it can be the teaching aids we use in class or students' work in hand. There should be interactions between students and the decoration. It might be a reminder, a handy dictionary, a guide, or even a supporter for students. Thus, it's time to check your classroom. Does every poster have a purpose to be there? Will students look at it and learn from it? Have you build up the relationship between the decoration and your students? Just try to make some differences in your classroom and see how it helps in your teaching and students' learning!