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**Training Program in L. A.**  
**for English Teachers**  
**from Taipei County**

**Preface**

This fall in 2008, 16 English teachers from Taipei County are selected to join the training program held in Los Angeles, USA. This two-week long training program is hosted by **Hacienda La Puente Unified School District**. Teachers from Taiwan are able to visit the local public schools and have a first-hand observation of the teaching skills of their teachers.



Hacienda La Puente Unified School District is in the East San Gabriel Valley, located in the county of Los Angeles, with 34 schools from kindergarten through 12 grades (grades k-12) that includes a student population of 21,858. In order to obtain a closer look, after taking a series of intense training courses in the district office, 16 teachers from Taiwan are divided into groups of

district. ↵

The following observations are made in **Grazide Elementary** and mainly focused on English language arts program and teaching methods. However, some other cool ideas do come up from time to time when teachers walk through the math classes or social studies as well. ↵

This is the chance of a life time. This great experience may be served as a power booster in our own future English teaching! ↵

### **The first week at the district office** ↵

Series of training courses were given in this first week, including human resources, language arts instruction, support for new teachers, data analysis and class management. Through these intense trainings, we were able to obtain an overall

perspective of Hacienda La Puente Unified School District. ↵



※ Human resources †

In this school district, only six subjects are taught: reading, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education and visual and performing arts, which is quite different from our curriculums here in Taiwan. According to the California State law, there are certain requirements set by the state commission on teacher credentialing (CCTC). Besides of a bachelor's degree, Passage of a validated statewide subject matter examination (CSET) is a must to meet the highly qualified teacher (HQT) standard. †

The elementary credentials may include a 2-year university intern, a 5-year preliminary multiple subject and a 5-year professional clear multiple subject. However, in Hacienda La Puente Unified School District, an attempt is made to attract and retain quality personnel who demonstrate strong, positive leadership that promotes a culture of collaboration and teamwork and creates an environment in which all stakeholders feel respected, valued and dedicated to every student's success. †

Moreover, teachers are evaluated according to their seniority. For instance, temporary contract teachers and probationary 1 and 2 teachers may be evaluated annually, while permanent teachers are to be evaluated every two or five years. These teacher evaluations are carried out continuously either in a formal or informal way, which may include several times class observations. †

One interesting thing here to be mentioned is, parents are not supposed to have a direct conversation with the teacher if they have questions about the teaching or any other problems. Only

through the school district board and the principle will make this act possible. Thus, the authority of teachers is highly valued and respected.

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#### ※ Support for teachers

The Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment (BTSA) Induction Program is a highlight of this week. Compare to our own teachers' support, which is not much to be mentioned, the BTSA program is considerably thorough and thoughtful.

The main purposes of BTSA are to provide an effective transition into the teaching career for first and second-year teachers in California, to improve the educational performance of students through improved training and assistance for new teachers, to enable new teachers to be effective in teaching students who are culturally, linguistically, and academically diverse, and to ensure the professional success and retention of new teachers.

Several experienced teachers are assigned to be support providers, Teachers on Special Assignment (TOSA). They visit schools and observe new teachers' classes within two years. Weekly meetings and formative assessment are made to help the new teachers develop a professional portfolio. Meanwhile, series of professional development trainings are provided to the new teachers, such as: classroom management, English language learners, special population's students, equity for all students and content and pedagogy.

“What keeps new teachers in the swim?” “Schools that support their work!” The BTSA induction programs can further school improvement by fostering spirited collaboration among teachers, and by valuing inquiry, problem-solving, peer coaching and reflection.↵

Unfortunately, our new teachers in Taiwan sometimes have to face their own problems if they receive no support from their own schools. Although we do have a consulting group of 9 members in Taipei County, due to the immense county area and huge amount of schools, new teachers are not able to be visited, observed and given direct conversations so often. ↵

However, we do look forward in the future to building up a collaborative circle among teachers in the same school or from the same school district. Perhaps this may help both the new teachers and the senior teachers to work more comfortably, confidently and efficiently under a more supportive atmosphere.↵

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#### ※ Use of Data↵

A quite exceptional phenomenon needs to be pointed out here is, Hacienda La Puente USD is considered highly performance in API. As a result to this, all kinds of data are used to monitor schools’ progress and students’ performance. Formative assessments for all students are carried out three times a year. The assessments cover even pre-K students, whose results are shared with the school’s kindergarten teachers so they have a strong sense of their incoming students’ proficiencies and needs. ↵

Nevertheless, during recent years in Taiwan, we have a tendency to decrease tests and formative assessments in order to relieve student's stress, which in a way might also cause a certain decrease of learning motif. In my point of view, assessments and evaluations need to be done in consistency and with high quality. By analyzing data teachers get to know what to be improved in their own teaching, and what students need to march on in progress. Problem-shooting should be the center goal of all kinds of assessments and data analysis. ↵

### **Grazide Elementary~Swimming Together for Excellence**↵

The school my partner and I visited is Grazide Elementary. "Swimming Together for Excellence" is their slogan this year to achieve a higher API goal of 930. ↵



The school principal Ms. Gloria Alderete is a vivid, bright and generous lady with a great sense of humor. The very first day of our visit, she even played a role of the crossing guard, which we

can't imagine happening here in Taiwan! So, she was sort of taken by surprise and envy when she heard we have 4 deans under school principals, and many other chiefs under the deans to help.

To my surprise, Graziade has its own student council. Every morning the president and vice president will show up in the principle's office to make an announcement of coming-up news, right after they lead recite the pledge to the national flag and their own school:

I pledge today to do my best in reading, math, and all the rest. I promise to obey the rules in my class and in the school. I'll respect my self and others, too. I'll expect the best in all I do. I am here to learn all I can, to try my best and be all I am.

Through this routine, students are to be ready to school and to learn. Now we don't do this anymore in Taiwan, which is a great pity because students seem so unfamiliar with our own national flag and not respectful neither responsible enough to their own learning.

A copy of parent-student handbook was given to each of us so that we can quickly know how the school runs in an incredibly efficient way. In this handbook, all school regulations are clearly listed out, and after reading this handbook, the agreement page needs to be signed and returned by the students, their parents and the teachers. Maybe that's why the students are so well behaved and everything is totally under control.

Graziade is a small-sized K-5 school with only 300 or so students,

yet it's full of creativity and energy, just like the old saying goes: the smallest chili is the hottest! The high API performance is a result of the cooperative work of all teachers and students. During this second week, Ms. Alderete assigned us into different classes to get a closer look of teacher's teaching strategies that maybe very helpful to our own teaching.↵

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#### ※ Days with Ms. Kim↵

I was assigned to Ms. Kim's class for two days. It's a third-grade class with only 20 students. Ms. Kim invited me as a TA during language arts session. I was amazed by the idea "Centers", which means to have students do five different tasks at the same time. Students are divided into five small groups according to their language proficiency. While I was leading the storybook reading group, the other four groups were doing their own tasks like sentence writing or vocabulary checking...etc. The storybooks are chosen according to students' levels, so they feel more confident about their own reading and understanding the story. ↵

Ms. Kim is also a great story teller; with a beautiful and enticing voice she creates a magical air when she reads the story "Elmer and the Dinosaur". Kids and I just couldn't wait to discover the top secret hidden in that book! That's how a successful storytelling should be done! ↵

In her classroom, the walls are fully posted with word charts and posters, and students' works are the main theme in this cozy

room. Reading corner or class library are packed with books of kids interests. ↵

Classroom rules are proposed and approved by class, and along with appropriate class management skills Ms. Kim is doing a wonderful job with the students. ↵



During my class observation, I noticed how Ms. Kim dealt with kids with autism. She never raised her voice neither yelled at him; instead she kept calling his name with great patience to remind him of his own tasks. Positive reinforcement and praises are everywhere in anytime. ↵

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※ Days with Mr. Tang ↵

The next two days I went visiting Mr. Tang's class, which is a fifth-grade. Unlike the third graders, Mr. Tang's class is much

similar to my own students in the sixth grade. There are 31 students who are already considered as more independent learners.

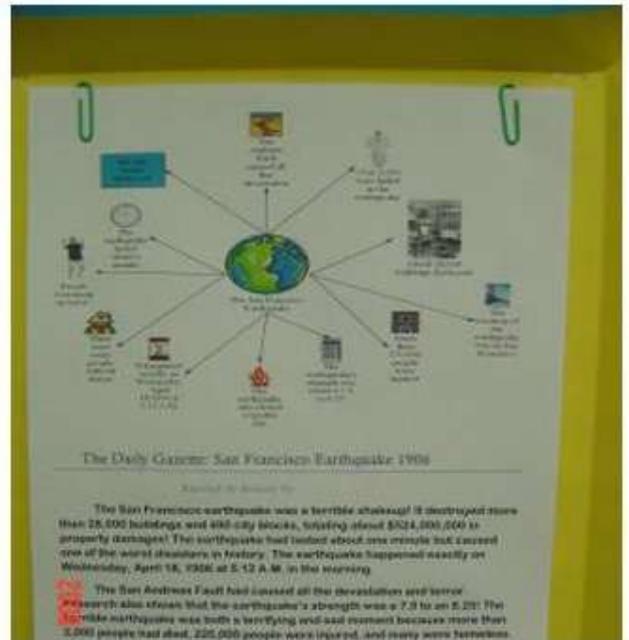
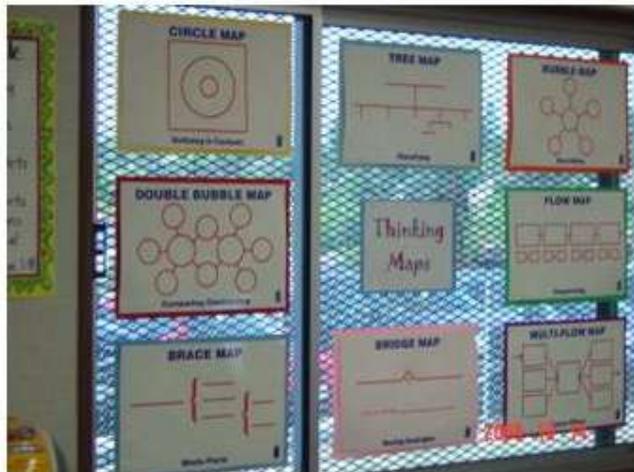
Mr. Tang is a teacher with a great sense of humor, and laughters can be heard from time to time in his class! He expects his students to be responsible to their own learning, yet he never hesitates to help with his students' need. The way he guides the "Rocket Math" practice is really efficient, in minute kids will know where to be worked on and improved.

In this classroom, too, the charts and posters are on the walls, and students' works are displayed in themes. Due to the student laptop program in Hacienda La Puente USD, each student from grade 5 through 12 is packed with a personalized laptop. This enable students to do on-line search in class and accomplish bigger project with the computer.

During the language arts session, practices mostly focused on grammar checking. Mr. Tang uses the overhead projector to assign quizzes and correct students' answers. Later on, he asked students to take out their own laptop and continue the project called "The influential people in the world". Students have to decide their target to do an on-line research and gather all information needed through the internet. After the information has been collected, students are asked to do an oral presentation on the topic about the chosen target.

One interesting thing needs to be mentioned here is students are so familiar to do this kind of assigned task either individually or

in groups. They will use tree maps or bubble maps to clarify central ideas and make related thinking. Through this process, their work is considered more logical and complete. ↵



**(Thinking Maps)**

### **To implant and to modify** ↵

Although in Taiwan we don't share the same high-Tec hard wares as they do in the states, some teaching ideas and pedagogies still can be modified or implanted in our own class. Two main aspects will be discussed as follows: ↵

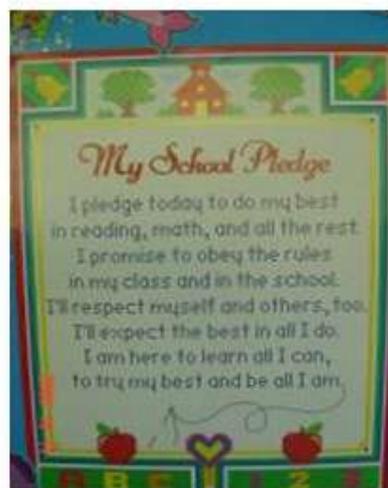
#### **※School/Class management** ↵

In Grazide, there is a certain agreement among teachers, students and parents. If the students don't hand in their

homework, they get benching or detention, which means they can't enjoy recess or need to stay after school to make up their homework. Students are taught to appreciate others' work and to be responsible for their own learning. Although teachers do have their own tips of class management, and they do punish students (not physically), the teaching-learning relationship is still warm and safe. According to Ms. Alderete, if there's a student not so well-behaved, she will have a talk with him/her in principal's office.

Many colorful posters about self-expectations or good manners are to be seen everywhere in the school or in the class as a reminder, such as: "Challenge yourself to ask questions, set goals, be a team player, listen to directions, follow through on assignments, and think for yourself" or "What are my choices?"

-Take responsibilities, use I messages, don't blame, don't tattle but TELL if you need to." "We can only control what we say and do, and how we react to what others say and do." There are always teachers remind students about their manners, behaviors and works to do, in a patient and soft voice. Students react to what they've been expected, and they learn to be respectful if they feel respected!



I was so impressed by the students in Grazide, so well disciplined and organized. During recess, no kids were running or screaming on the hallway. This work can't be done if it's not everybody's cooperation and understanding. There's a huge gap between Grazide and my own school of teaching, I must admit. Disciplines need to be taught, constantly and with great persistency. I wonder if we can follow Grazide's footsteps and try to rearrange recess time and set up clear rules, such as assign different playground for different grades, or FREEZE! for one second and move to the teachers' whistle, or even ask kids to line up when recess is over...etc, probably the numbers of injuries during recess will go down.

✧Language arts teaching

Recent years we do receive a lot of high-Tec teaching aids in order to catch up with the trends, and to boost students' motivation. With the electronic media, kids seem to pay more interests to learning. Moreover, a strong and supportive PTA also plays an important role in school management, and donations of all kind can be well distributed into school running, e.g. the library of Grazide is a fantastic place for kids to relax and indulge themselves in reading!



Hopefully, we can meet up someday to the high end standard of Hacienda La Puente USD, sponsored by some corporations and get a free laptop program. Cross fingers! ↵

Rotations and centers are my personal picks during these two weeks. Teachers get to cooperate and teach the same course at the same time after the students are carefully divided into groups according to their literal proficiency. Guided reading or writing can be carried out successfully if the teacher know his/her students well, and then choose books or topics appropriately. Through group teaching, every student will be better taken care of and able to learn what's more adequate to his/her own level. ↵

In order to do rotations and centers, parents need to be informed before hand, and to be more understanding about this project. Students are not labeled; instead, they are greatly valued according to personal abilities! ↵

Therefore, in Taiwan, if we're eventually able to gain parents' consent and both sides all agree that "No child left behind!" is not just a slogan, then we should take this issue into a more serious concern, because even Confucious once said: "Teach students according to their aptitude!" ↵

## **Epilogue** ↵

There's an old Chinese saying: The stones of those hills may be used to polish gems. The visiting trip to L.A. is indeed a good opportunity to connect our own teaching experiences to teachers in the states. Although some situations may not be 100%

implantable, and some methods need to be adjusted, yet we need to be more aware of the blind spot of our own teaching comparing to them. ↵

We came back with lots of useful resources and awesome ideas, which hopefully will help other teachers in Taipei County. Sharing information and working together for Excellency are essential elements of a happy and successful teaching. May teachers all enjoy their own teaching and make the best out of it! ↵