

TR's Trip Report to Colleen's Art Teachers Open House (Feb 26, 2014)

Thanks to Ms. Colleen for inviting me to attend her Open House in her Art classroom at Tillicum School!

Going in I was like a piece of white paper ready to be painted. I came back with many pictures painted not on my forehead but in memory... I hope my storytelling here does justice to Colleen's great work and the energy level of the 15 or so teachers who came to the event, from many different schools and grades.

I did not see students doing the work, but could very well picture how the students had great time learning in the room. First they would "wonder" about how or why something works, and then they learn to "know". Looking at some of the output the students had made from this Art class, they clearly had learned something about Chinese culture and developed their own interpretations. I could also see the teachers attending the Open House picking up ideas...

What this trip also taught me is how CE can expand our help for teachers AFTER their tour, to help them execute the teaching (this we can only do in-directly) and share the experience (that we can definitely participate directly).



The Art classroom is a very open space, with 8 or so large work tables, and each set up with materials Colleen had assembled from her trip, her personal collection, and some of the students' work. The ceiling was also adorned with Chinese-themed items, very cool. Colleen also ran her slide shows and made that available on CDs for the teachers – I also wanted one, but the supply ran out...



Colleen has also made permanent additions to the classroom displays (picture below-left), one showing the main theme: "Animals in Chinese Art & Culture". I wish I had the same artistic touch : -)

Tillicum, like many schools in the Seattle area, is a very diverse school with students from many parts of world and many states in the US (below-right). The Art Classroom décor is multi-culture, with artifacts from many countries and cultures.

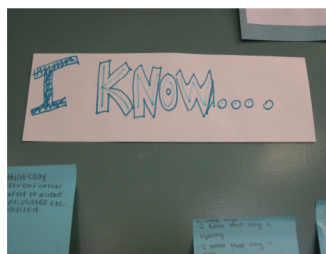
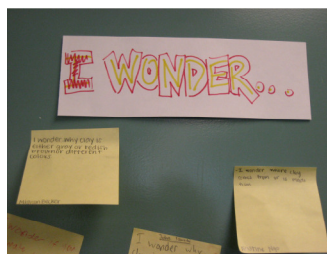


For the event Colleen also enlisted help from her assistant principal who has a really cool “lion’s head” used in Chinese lion-dancing (he used to do the lion dance). Below-left is certainly a very fitting picture for Colleen and Lioness... We can just imagine the excitement the students would have in thinking about doing the Lion Dance, maybe with break-dance music. Maybe this would be a cool joint project with the Music Room or the Drama teacher.



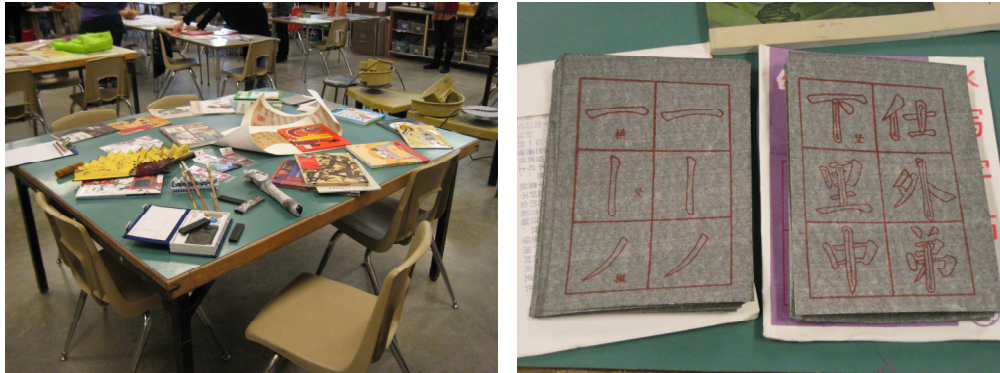
Talking about inspiration made possible in the multi-cultural environment, the above-right picture on the wall in Colleen’s classroom got my attention...

How would one help the students’ inquisitive minds, to inspire them to be curious, learn, do, and share? I found a pretty good technique used by Colleen. She asks students to write down, on posters, about “I Wonder” and “I Know”. Then they’d post them on the board to share with their classmates. I saw some interesting ideas about clay – see below. It’d have been great if the questions posted were about “Chinese Culture” – I am sure Colleen would get to that at some point...



The first table showed Chinese writing, with books and tools for calligraphy. I had some interesting discussions with several teachers about how the Chinese characters are structured and how one learns calligraphy, starting very young. One thing I learned from this trip is that CE can support event like this by helping interpret the items, as it'd be difficult for our teachers to explain how the items are used, like how one learns Chinese writing one "stroke type" at a time. For example, when I explained that the character "Wang" is composed of three horizontal strokes and one vertical one, and each stroke uses a set of techniques to vary the width of the ink path, that helped several teachers relate that to cursive writing in English, and certainly connecting with painting.

I was really impressed with Colleen's collection – she has a lot of stuff, much more than what I have at home.



The other table showed "personal stamp making" with carving tools (picture below-left). I thought about making one for myself to use in place of my signatures... This certainly is a good way to allow students to "make" something, versus discussing ideas only in concept or only with pictures.

The idea of stamps is a big part in Chinese painting, which is shown on another table with many books about painting (picture below-center).

Colleen also collected a lot of Chinese books (below-right). Next time I get to chat with Colleen I'd ask her which books or stories got the most attention or interest.



Colleen had a great time in China when he met with the paper-cutting master in Shanghai. The paper-cutting work was showcased prominently in the middle of the Art Classroom (picture below-left). Interestingly I did not see students' work with paper-cutting... Maybe it's too hard to learn and do well?

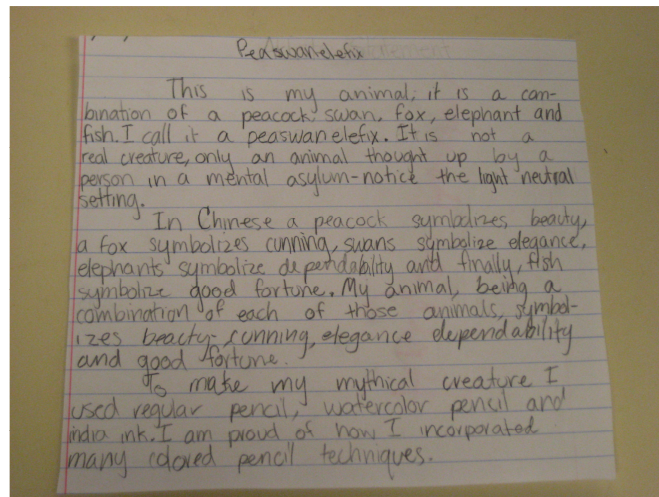


Now let's get to what the students had made in Colleen's class... How did they get inspired by what Colleen showed them?

The first example is about what students learned about the "combination animal", inspired by the "Qulin" (picture above-right, which Colleen had snapped in Beijing). Qulin is kind of like crane in the Western culture where a crane delivers a new baby – Qulin is what would deliver a new son. After Colleen's trip to China, she and I had long discussions about the many pictures she had taken in China. One item that piqued her interest was the mythical combination animal, Qulin. I can picture her talking about that, with many pictures, in her classroom, leading to a drawing project for her students.

A student came up with his (or her) interpretation of a combination animal, and he talked about the symbolism of peacock, fox, swan, fish, and elephants in the Chinese culture in his written explanation (pictures below), all displayed on one of the work tables at the open house.

I think this is just a BEAUTIFUL illustration of how the tour helped a teacher acquire personal knowledge about an item, then impart that idea in her students who will forever remember this experience, and now share that teaching experience with her fellow teachers.



The student's work that left the deepest impression on me is the ceramic work inspired by the Terracotta Soldiers (see below, displayed on the ceramics table next to the spinning wheels – the classroom also has two kilns to "fire" the ceramic work items). Colleen also asked the students to think about items that they'd bring to the after-life.

The thing I like the most here is that it's not about making a Terracotta soldier shown in the pictures. The students made what they had in mind, about what's important to them and what they would like to look like.



A boy made one with books and eyeglasses, and interestingly with a “rougher” look.

A girl made one with a double inspiration, from the Terracotta soldiers AND the movie “Hunger Games” which she adores, as shown with the bow-and-arrow and the hairstyle modeled after the lead female character. She also added a soccer ball that she loves... I really like the flowing line of this work, very elegant but still maintaining the fighter aspect. If I were the grader, I'd give this girl's work “A+”.

The picture below was taken by Colleen when she visited a school in Taiwan, and is included in her slideshow used in the Open House. How very fitting -- an “A+” definitely goes to the smiling Ms. Colleen.

