

## College of Education: Taiwan Summer 2018

By: Edward Blanco

### **Background Knowledge:**

All of my life, I knew I wanted to explore more than a culture of my own. If it wasn't for the scholarships I earned, I would still be hoping for that one opportunity to study abroad. Most people travel to European countries, but I wanted something different or beyond my comfort zone. That is how I came across Taiwan. Taiwan is a country about 100 miles away from the coast of China. It is a small island filled with so much love. I studied abroad here from May 17<sup>th</sup> to June 15<sup>th</sup>. While studying abroad in this beautiful country, we observed and engaged in classes in and out of Taipei. There were occasions where we observed schools in the rural parts of Taiwan, which were my favorite trips.



### **Education**

The education system was not that different from ours. For Special Education, they used the same system of document, and called it the same name too, which was IEP. Something I

noticed in Taiwan though, is that breaks are highly valued. Between every class, students had 15 minute breaks to relax and reenergize for the next class. For one of the breaks, it turned into a 30-minute session of free time. The other shocking difference that surprised me was how reliable students were for themselves. Every day after school was over, classrooms and students were assigned roles in which part of the school to clean. Students also helped the cafeteria ladies pass out and make the lunches for the school. Another thing that caught me off guard was the time period of how long students were in class for. Students in Taiwan were in class from 8:30 am to 4:00pm. After this, students were expected to go to an after-school camp which required more work from the students. This would go on until about 7 pm. A lot more expectations were put on Taiwanese students than American students.

### **Culture Shock**

I am a firm believer that we learn most when we are out of our comfort zones. And I was definitely out of my comfort zone. Not knowing Chinese was one of the most difficult parts of this trip, but the most educational. I grew from this though, because most of the time, I felt out of the loop, and I am so grateful I experienced that. My English Language learner students will feel the same exact way when they do not know English. Being in this situation, made me think of creative ways of communicating with people. I will apply these to my future classroom as well. I also made sure I knew some of the basic needs of Chinese, like hello, how are you?, bathroom, how much is it?. It wasn't a huge struggle not knowing Chinese, because Taiwanese people are one of the friendliest people you will ever come across. I remember taking the MRT (public transportation) for the first time by myself, and I was completely lost. I asked the

conductor of the bus if he was willing to help me about he did not know English. Even though it was a bit embarrassing, he went out of the way to make sure I was on the right bus by yelling at everyone in the bus if anyone knew English. After this, several people were willing to help and made sure to get off at the stop they told me to get off.



### **Host Family**

One of my most favorite part about studying abroad was my host family and how close I was with them. Even though they knew very little English, we made it every way possible in trying to find a way to communicate with each other. My host family made it possible that I had the best experience alive. I appreciate them very much for all they did for me. By the end of the trip, it was sad saying goodbye from how close we were. They taught me how it is like living in a Taiwanese home and introduced me to so many delicious foods and treats. Every weekend, when we were all free, we would spend it together wandering and seeing what historical landmark we haven't seen yet in Taipei.