

## **Diary of a School Principal: When I was a School Principal in the United States**

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Qian Zhilong. *Diary of a School Principal: When I was a School Principal in the United States*. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2016.

There are a lot of books referring to school management, no matter issued by school principals themselves or other researchers, but not much of this kind that discuss this issue based on personal experience from abroad. There is an old saying in China: Stones from other hills, advices from others. This book adopts the form of an educator's diary and vividly demonstrates the observation of a US school principal from China. With lively and interesting stories, the book contains the comparison and thinking between Chinese and Western education. There are many ideas about education deserved learning.

In November 2016, Qian Zhilong's "Diary of a School Principal: When I was a School Principal in the United States" was issued by China Renmin University Press. Qian graduated from Peking University, and then he got two Master degrees in America and a PhD degree awarded by the University of Southern California. Now he is the principal of the International School of

Peide Academy. He has very rich experiences. In this book he said: "I have been primary school principal and university professor; I have administered kindergarten, tutored postgraduate, worked for professor, served in a canteen, and worked as tutor, translator, calligrapher, painter, truck driver, street vendor, even illegal worker and TV anchorman. (Qian Zhilong, 2016) This book described his experience and thought when he worked as the principal of an international school in America.

Different from obscure traditional academic monographs, this book has vivid language and literary grace in the form of diary. It involves 49 chapters, i. e. 49 independent diaries, which demonstrate colorful stories and profound thoughts when Qian had been director of the Chinese department and principal of Upper Elementary<sup>2</sup> in Peninsula International School for three years. The stories happened between principal and teachers, principal and children, principal and parents, principal and head principal, principal and the board of directors. Each chapter is accompanied with a beautiful and thought-provoking illustration.

The Peninsula International School located in Palo Alto, Silicon Valley, and was built more than 30 years ago. When Qian Zhilong was at school, there were 600 students and more than 100 staffs from nearly 40 different countries. In the school, 55 percent of families were cross-racial, and there were nearly 20 different kinds of second language. Undoubtedly, Peninsula Inter-

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<sup>2</sup>Author's note: Some of American primary schools are subdivided into Lower Elementary(including 1<sup>st</sup> -2<sup>nd</sup> grades) and Upper Elementary(including 3<sup>rd</sup> -5<sup>th</sup> grades), because these two age groups have significant differences on learning and social communication.

national School provided a multi-lingual and multicultural environment. Through each independent story, it is not difficult to find out the implications of education.

Qian Zhilong did not know how to deal with parents' doubts at first, but he had been greatly encouraged in NAIS<sup>3</sup> annual meeting when hearing an old principal's speech upon receiving the lifetime achievement award. The old principal said: "Speaking about property right, our school is a private school, but in essence, it is independent. The word independent means that we are independent of universal values in the society and their corresponding evaluation system no matter whether they are correct or not; we are independent of government's education policies and regulations and parent's demands no matter whether they are wise or not, and reasonable or not. The most important reason for independent schools to survive and get sustainable development is that we dare to insist on what we think is right."

The leading countries of the world always used favorable salaries and benefits to attract excellent people into education industry. Qian Zhilong pointed out there must be a clear direction of improving education and the quality of instruction, that is, to improve teachers' social status and provide them with material rewards for their arduous work to maintain their dignity. If that is the case, this industry would have become more challenging and competitive, so more and more people with talent, independent thinking, creativity and

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<sup>3</sup>Author's note: National Association of Independent School. Approximately 10 percent of the US primary and secondary schools are private. They do not accept government subsidies and supervision.

innovation will join in. A good principal should do everything possible to improve teachers' happiness index. The methods include, but are not limited to, increasing teachers' salaries and benefits. It is also important to give teachers a sense of accomplishment, honor and belonging. In addition to living a rich and dignified life, they need to be recognized, appreciated and encouraged.

Teachers should love students and insist on learning. Teachers' care and help for students must be from the heart and originated from love. Regardless of the number and age of students in a class, everyone must be respected comprehensively and be appreciated for their sensitivity to new things, and be praised sincerely. If teachers love their students and have the sense of mission and passion for education, it is not very important whether they have accepted normal training in college or not. Skills could be learned and upgraded gradually. At the same time, teachers should keep on learning. Long tenure should not exist in Education in the first place. The day a teacher stops trying is the day students start to suffer.

Student management should be focused on their thinking rather than behaviors. Both teachers and parents should be more concerned about and make every effort to ensure the following things: Are the children happy to go school every day? After getting off parent's car, is he or she excited to rush into the classroom to find his or her partner? Does the child show strong curiosity in each class and has countless questions? Do they have the chances to ask these questions? Does he or she do better than many others in any field such as origami or hockey? Is child's mouth always filled with a confident smile? In the face of difficulties, are they willing to seek help and know how

to do so? Can they have enough and timely help? Can they gradually learn to face their own challenges under the guidance of adults? Do they have enough free time each day? Is it possible for children to fly their imaginations in the playground like the wind? Is it possible to let children think about topics that fascinate them?

Parents should do their best to support the teacher and become an ally of school education. Some parents always thought themselves to be condescending consumers and regard education as consumer goods. Definitely, this is wrong. If parents criticize the teacher and school in front of the children, the only message is that education is not worth respecting. Schools and teachers will lose their noble status in children's eyes, and children will pay the price in the end. Parents have to give up their identity as "customers" before they can become an ally of school education.

Successful classroom management absolutely does not mean making it as silent and orderly as a graveyard. What should classroom be like? Qian Zhilong recalled what happened in one simulation classroom. His teacher let them put the camera in the front of the classroom facing the students, and said: "Teachers are more familiar with the content of open lectures than drama lines. It is meaningless to record him. To inspect the real effect of teaching, we have to look at the students to see whether their expression is immersed or perfunctory; whether eagerly or forcedly; whether concentrated or distracted; whether excited or lazy; whether they put up their hands just to cooperate with the teacher, or because they were actually inspired by the teacher. Moreover, we have to observe how the desks are put, whether students have chances to communicate with their classmates, whether they have

enough time to speak, and whether they want to stay or are eager to leave when class is over. (Qian Zhilong, 2016) In addition, there are many other meaningful contents in this book, such as establishing a clear mission for the school, valuing the strength of alumni association and alumni, and so on. Definitely, the content of this book refers to all aspects of school management.

This book contains valuable information and observations not only about real education scenes in the US but also a special perspective. So we can look closely at the education scenes in the US, find the differences between Chinese and Western education and get some inspiration. I quite agree with Qian Zhilong: The richer teacher experiences and the more he sees, the more he can influence the child's world view in an Inclusive and gentle way so that they can build a spacious, peaceful and dreamful future.(Qian Zhilong, 2016) Meanwhile, excellent educational idea in different countries and schools must be interlinked. In the context of international education, many ideas in this book are worth studying for primary schools, secondary schools, and especially international schools. Nevertheless, it can't be copied directly without analysis for different background. As Qian Zhilong said: This book is neither a prescription nor a practice guide. (Qian Zhilong, 2016) However, there are also issues worth mentioning. The sub-structures of entire book are a little incompact, short of inner logicity and theory.

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On the whole, this book can be recommended to primary and secondary school teachers, principals, parents as well as the leadership of educational authorities.