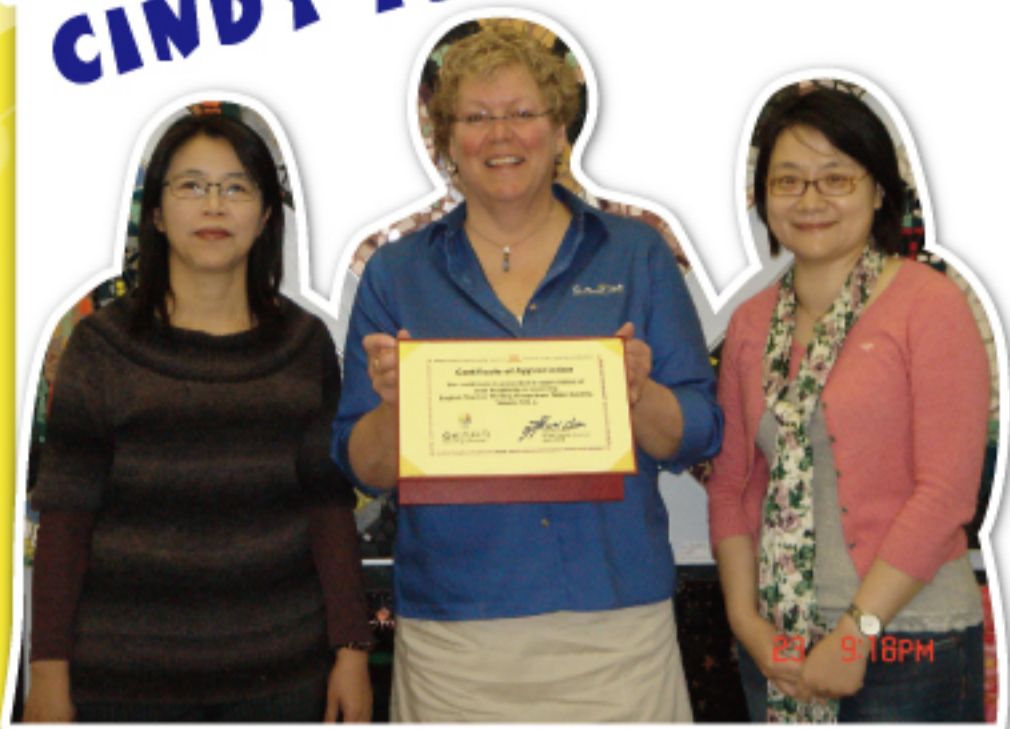


THE TRIP TO IOWA

CINDY TSENG, SHINPU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



First of all, we are much obliged to the Iowa Department of Education, the Taiwan Ministry of Education, the Taipei County Government and all the people who have helped make this visit possible for the fourteen of us, elementary English language teachers from Taipei County.

Honestly speaking, I'd never been to any other country before this trip. It was so exciting for me to be one of the members of the Educational Training Trip to Iowa offered by the Taipei County Government. Except for the severe tension on the flight and the serious jetlag of the first three days, I really enjoyed the time there. I felt like I hadn't seen enough of America, and then our time was up and we had to return to Taiwan.

My report consists of three main parts, the Willow Brook Elementary School experience, the Daily Five, and the Daily Five in Action in Shin Pu Elementary School. For more details on Iowa Education Policy, the Heartland Area Education Agency and Iowa Public Television, please refer to the publication *Study Insight in Iowa 2009*.

THE WILLOW BROOK ELEMENTARY EXPERIENCE

On the first day, we went to Willow Brook Elementary School with Robin, the principal of Willow Brook Elementary School. She asked us what we would like to see or know. Frankly speaking, we didn't know what to see or how to get started even though we had learned something from the previous year's trip reports in the book. We just knew that we would like to see some methods for teaching reading. It was really hard to have a clear picture of the things to see, so Robin made a plan for us and sent us to different classes to do classroom observations.

We really appreciated that she made these arrangements for us. They allowed us to see the whole teaching process in real classrooms. I learned a lot from the ways teachers instructed their students and how they structured the learning environment to create a different atmosphere in the classroom. We could see that some routines and procedures had been practiced for an amount of time to foster students' independent literacy behaviors.

This was quite different from the situation in my class where I tried hard to "manage" students, rushing around the room trying to recapture their attention from whatever was happening outside the classroom windows. And during my observations it gave me a new look on how I was supposed to change my role in the room when I went back to Taiwan.



CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

It's a good and useful way to learn things through classroom observations. We stayed in the classroom to do classroom observations each morning of the week.

MRS. HANEY'S CLASS

Mrs. Haney is a third grade teacher. After morning announcement, Mrs. Haney would gather her class in front of the classroom. They would sit on the floor and talk about Sunday and things that happened at home, at school or anywhere between. Then they would be prepared for the day's learning.



A READING



They had reading class every morning. They studied vocabulary and language usage like we do in English class. Mrs. Haney discussed the content with students to make sure they got the whole picture of the story. They had time to read to someone, read to self, and listen to reading. The students had to raise their hands before they could get permission to speak.

B WRITING



After they finished doing activities like reading books, or doing crossword puzzles or worksheets at the folder center, Mrs. Haney taught them how to draw conclusions from the story and practice writing guided questions.

Mrs. Haney gave out two worksheets to every student.

One was for writing down their conclusions based on the guided questions, and the other was for coloring a pair of pants. After the students finished their writing, they colored the pants on the worksheets. Mrs. Haney checked their writing one by one, while the other students, if they were finished with their writing, were coloring their pants. I think it's interesting because every student had his or her own style of textile and patterns on the pants.



C MATH



Math is a difficult subject for most students. Some are smart and like to think about things so they like math better than others. But more than half of the students are not very interested in math. Some even hate it. I saw the same situation in this class. Mrs. Haney was so patient that she would even bend down to work with slow learners. I didn't see her get mad in her class. And the students' behavior was great.

Math concepts can be applied to our daily life. They worked on Multiple '3' and measuring things with rulers. They learned about different rulers and measure units such as centimeters and inches. It was interesting that a lesson about learning measurement could be integrated into their reading unit 'Poppa Pants', their reading content.

MRS. SAYRE'S CLASS

A READING



Mrs. Sayre is a first grade teacher. Right after Mrs. Haney's class, Victoria and I went to Mrs. Sayre's class. She would gather her class around and her students would sit on the floor. Mrs. Sayre started to teach with an easel by her side. Sometimes they did echo reading and pair reading. Echo reading is when Mrs. Sayre asked a student to read a sentence. Then she would say it again with stressed words or phrases, and ask her class to repeat after her. Pair-reading is when she paired up her students and asked them to pick a classroom spot to read and re-read the story in the book.

I was impressed by the way in which she always talked to her students with positive words, like 'You can go back quietly. That's very good.' And her students never went out of control in the class. You know, young students are really hard to control.

B WORD LEARNING

We were also greatly impressed by the way she taught new words to the first graders with clear sounds and hand gestures. She sang a little or showed them hand gestures to remind her students how to produce the sounds of the new words. That's visual phonics. They did a lot of spelling practice. Because they're young students, they need special methods to get focused on the words. With hand gestures Mrs. Sayre successfully brought them back to learning.



MS. O'HARA'S CLASS

SOCIAL STUDIES

Ms. O'Hara is a nice lady who invited us to her class to see her instruction on Social Studies. She is a warm friend and gave us the hand-outs they were working on. They had just finished their 'learning district', so they moved on to see the whole world. There are two ways of seeing the world. One is on the globe which is sphere and round, the other is on the flat map.



After Ms. O'Hara's introduction of the concepts of oceans and continents, she asked the students to play a game of 'catch the ball'. The ball was a plastic globe. The one who caught the globe should say the names of the continents or oceans that both his or her thumbs were on. Ms. O'Hara would mark on the board when the students passed the ball. In a few minutes, after everyone in the class, including Victoria and me, took turns to catch the ball, Ms. O'Hara counted the times she had marked every ocean and continent on the board. After that, the students knew that the oceans and continents with the most marks were the biggest ones of all. It was really a great activity on social studies.



DAILY 5

After the first day of observation at Willow Brook Elementary, every one of us shared what we experienced at school. One of us was informed that teachers here applied in the classroom a strategy called the 'Daily Five'. This was new to us. So as we had a chance to get the book at the Learning Post, each of us would like to buy one to read. We would like to learn what practical strategies could be used to engage students in independent, meaningful reading, and how each student in the room could behave so well. What I saw in the classroom was quite different from the impressions I had from TV or movies about American students. I had never thought that students in America were so well-behaved before I heard about the 'Daily Five'.

What is the Daily Five? The Daily 5 is a series of literacy tasks (reading to self, reading with someone, writing, word work and listening to reading) which students complete daily while the teacher meets with small groups or confers with individuals. The Daily Five is more than a management system or a curriculum framework—it is a structure that helps students develop the daily habits of reading, writing, and working independently that will lead to a lifetime of literacy independence. It also shows how to train students to participate in each of the five components.



READ TO YOURSELF

The best way to become a better reader is to practice each day, with books you choose, on your just-right reading level. It soon becomes a habit.



READ TO SOMEONE

Reading to someone allows for more time to practice strategies, helping you work on fluency and expression, check for understanding, hear your own voice, and share in the learning community.



WORK ON WRITING

Just like reading, the best way to become a better writer is to practice writing each day.



LISTEN TO READING

We hear examples of good literature and fluent reading. We learn more words, thus expanding our vocabulary and becoming a better reader.



SPELLING/WORD WORK

Correct spelling allows for more fluent writing, thus speeding up the ability to write and get thinking down on paper. This is an essential foundation for writers.

And there are also key materials, routines, and concepts introduced to children in the first days of school that are crucial to the success of the Daily Five:

- ★ Establishing a gathering place for brain and body breaks
- ★ Developing the concept of “good-fit” books through a series of lessons
- ★ Creating anchor charts with students for referencing behaviors
- ★ Short, repeated intervals of independent practice
- ★ Calm signals and check-in procedures
- ★ Using the correct model/incorrect model approach for demonstrating appropriate behaviors

DAILY 5 IN ACTION AT WILLOW BROOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



In this part I focused on two parts: Read to Self and Read to Someone. Having children read to themselves is the first step in the Daily Five and is the foundation for creating independent readers and writers. Launching Read to Self could be started by gathering the class on the floor in front of the teacher with an easel by the side. Or by letting students choose their own favorite books to build their stamina in Read-to-Self time. It is a fun way to read one’s own favorite book.



There are three ways to read a book.

- ★ Read and talk about the pictures
- ★ Read the words
- ★ Retell a previously read book

When we start to read a book, we always start with reading pictures, or we may choose to read the words, then we can retell a book. This understanding is essential if students are to read independently for extended periods of time. To launch Read-to-Self teachers use anchor charts.



1 Pick Good Fit Book

- I look at a book
- Purpose
- Interest
- Comprehend
- Know all the words

3 Ways to Read a Book

- Read the Pictures
- Read the Words
- Retell the Story

Read to Self—Independence

- (Student)**
- Quiet whisper voice
- Stay in one spot
- Read the whole time
- Pick a spot you won’t talk
- Eyes on book
- Good Fit Books
- Build stamina
- (Teacher)**
- Teaching children



One way to give children additional exposure to books is to increase the amount of time they hear fluent and expressive reading by others. This can take place in many forms: read-aloud, shared reading, guided reading, cross-age buddies, or books on tape.

READ TO SOMEONE

How can I start with Read to Someone? Does it work in my classes? Could I just apply one of them in my class? How could I start some time doing it? Here's my application of Read-to-someone in my 4th grade classes.

It was just the right time when I taught the new content of Unit 5. It was a short story about the pets in a pet shop. The sentences are easy to read, but half of my students might not be able to read them fluently. So I divided my students into six groups of five. I told them that I would stop by and sit with them to listen to their reading. They could read to the one next to them or do it as a group, but they had to keep their voices as low as they possibly could. The result was fine because I found that some of the students were fluent readers who eagerly showed how it sounded to those in the group who were not fluent readers. Those who were afraid of reading or who were not feeling confident in reading English began to open their mouth to read. This was because they felt more confident in reading with their group. And no one had time to run around the classroom or interfere with others. The students did behave better than they had on other days.



I went on practicing reading fluency in other classes that week. Every class worked out fine. The success of Reading to Someone was that students needed to listen carefully to their peers, offer assistance, and share materials fairly.

The result came out much better than I expected, so I started Read-to-Self time. I spent some time teaching the students how to read an English picture book. For most of them, it was the first time they read an English book. I taught them how to read a book with three ways: read the picture, read the words and retell the story. I chose books of their levels and let them decide what book and with whom they wanted to start Read-to-Self with.

READ TO SELF

Class 403, 405, 407

Time 40 min.

Preparation 25 story books (basic level)

Procedure

1. Teacher introduces three ways to read a book. (5 min)
2. Teacher asks students to choose his/her partner(s) and pick a book. (3 min)
3. Students pick a spot to sit down and share a book with his/her partner. (2 min)
4. Students talk about the pictures and story with his/her partner(s) and read the words. Students take turns reading the same book. (20 min)
5. Teacher works with students or joins them to listen and check for understanding.
6. Discussion. (10 min)

At the end of the class, I asked them how their story reading was going based on these questions.

1. Which type of class do you prefer, the traditional English class or reading a book?
2. What do you like about the type of class that you prefer?
3. Give some reasons why you like it or not.

To my surprise, every student in the three classes preferred reading a book. Here were their reasons:

1. At the beginning, some of the students in each class were afraid of reading English books. But after the reading a book activity, they were not afraid of reading English books any more.
2. It's more fun because they could choose a classroom spot, and it didn't matter how
3. they sat. They could sit on the floor, on the platform and with their favorite partners. They could choose their just-right level books; they could read and know most of the story.

They learned more vocabulary. That's why they thought their literacy ability was

4. improved.

Some of the students mentioned that they found that they could read English books

5. independently. I was glad to hear that.

They complained that the time was too short.

6. But several students said they preferred English class because they like Read to Someone to work on fluency and expression in English class.



MY GENERAL REFLECTION

It was really a great experience to learn things from education in Iowa. I know my little experiments on English reading were not perfect ones. They could be refined and greatly improved.

