

Learn to Read—Buddy Reading

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Background and Motivation

Reading is essential. It's the most important skill for students. Researches said that children and teenagers who love reading have comparatively higher IQs. Reading proficiency and academic success show a strong correlation at all ages, from the elementary school through to university level: students who read a lot and understand what they read usually have good grades. (Pretorius E. J., 2000).

Students who enjoy reading are more creative. Education researchers found that children who started reading earlier have better language skills, and understand the variances in phonics better. Reading can significantly help them do well in school, not only for native English speakers but also for EFL (English as a foreign language) students. EFL students often have limited exposure to English outside classrooms. The home supporting systems for English is minimal. Parents seldom have time and resources to help their children read anything in English. Most students focus on textbook from school or cram school. They have very few opportunities to read storybooks. How to help them remain reading interest and develop reading skills in the classroom is very important.

In my class, I let students read two or three storybooks in one semester. Some students love to read while some show no interests at all. In a mix-ability classroom, I always find it difficult to choose the right storybooks. In order to meet the need of the struggling learners, those advanced learners become lazy and bored. They show no interest in reading most of the time. If I choose a higher level storybook, the struggling

learners would struggle with it and get nervous during class. Therefore, a suitable reading strategy is important for me to reach my first intent which is to find out how to maximize student reading abilities.

Class Observation

From Oct. 31st to Nov.4th, I was assigned to Stowers Elementary School. It is located in Cerritos, CA, USA. Stowers is a candidate school in the International Baccalaureate Organization. They have students from around the world. They encourage their students to be active, compassionate and lifelong learners who understand different perspectives from other people. By developing classes to help students who are able to interact, communicate with, and understand their own, as well as other cultures is the goal of making them lifelong learners and international citizens. According to the State standard, Stowers emphasizes Language Arts and Mathematics. Besides State-adopted textbooks, they provide a variety of award-winning children literature books to give students the opportunity to reach above and beyond.

In order to be above and beyond in language arts, reading incentives are important. Teaching students to love reading in the elementary years is the school reading target. Buddy reading is one of the most effective ways adopted at Stowers. Fifth graders and second graders, sixth graders and first graders are paired up as reading buddies. Buddy reading class takes place about once a week or two weeks.

I was very lucky to have the chance to join Miss Kim Rath's class and observed her teaching at Stowers Elementary School from October 31st to November 4th. She is an well-experienced teacher. She teaches fifth graders. Students in her class show great

interest in reading. They did a lot of reading during class. Many reading activities were conducted there. What impressed me most was the buddy reading.

When Miss Rath said it was time for buddy reading, students were excited and looking forward to see their partners. It was a cooperative activity between fifth graders and second graders. When the fifth graders got ready, they lined up and walked out of their classroom. All the way, they went to the classroom of grade two to meet their buddies. Second graders chose what they want to read and waited in the classroom. It was a sunny day. The fifth graders brought their buddies outside .There were two in a group. They sat under a big tree and began to read. At first, the elder buddy read to the younger one. I can still remember how they enjoyed buddy reading. It was not only a cooperative activity but also a loving and caring learning lesson. When the elder buddy finished reading aloud to their buddies, the echo reading was followed. The younger buddy repeated after the elder buddy. After echo reading, some groups began to do choral reading, while some groups let the younger buddies read alone and the elder ones offered assistance if they got stuck with a word or a sentence. Sometimes they talked about the characters they liked the most and how funny the pictures are. Sometimes the elder buddies read out loud and suddenly stopped at a word and then ask the younger to do the popcorn reading.





A good book and a comfortable place made a wonderful buddy reading. They sat side by side or lied down and enjoyed the storybook together. For me, they looked like brothers and sisters. The younger ones looked up to the elder ones. Whenever they had questions about the book, such as the sounds of words, the meaning of words, the setting, characters and problems of the book, the buddies helped them or gave clues to encourage them. For the elder ones, they had to practice reading aloud by themselves a few times in order to read to the younger ones. They were more familiar with how to read and answered questions. They were also proud of themselves from the process of buddy reading. When buddy reading was over, they accompanied their buddies to go back to the classroom and put away the storybooks. Then they had 10 minutes to go to the playground and play together. I loved this part because the fifth graders had a chance to learn how to take good care of the second graders. “What do you want to play?” “Be careful.” “Let me help you” Lots of caring conversation went on and on. They all looked happy and had a good time. When playing time is over, each buddy reading group started to go back to the second graders’ classroom and said goodbye to each other. After students returned to their own classroom, teachers asked some questions to let them reflect on the experience. These reflections made them keep track of the process of buddy reading and kept the program going better and better.



Buddy Reading

Children feel a great sense of accomplishment once they can read an entire book by themselves. Buddy reading is a wonderful way to help students learn to read. It can bring wonder to students and make students feel interested in reading. It can really help enhance children's love of books and to promote more effective reading habits. It's not difficult to set up a buddy reading program. The buddy reading program usually involves two persons, one who knows how to read well and another one who can't read as well. They choose a book together and find a comfortable place to read. Buddies could be parents and children, higher grade students and lower grade students or advanced learners and struggling learners. The place could be in a classroom, outdoors, at the library or at home. They sit side by side and hold the book. The better reader helps his/her buddy to read the book they choose. They read through every page, discuss pictures, characters and plots and sound out words, phrases and sentences. Buddy reading program pairs up reading partners to help them develop and increase oral language and emergent literacy skills foundation.

A wide variety of reading strategies are used in buddy reading. They are read aloud, echo reading, choral reading, popcorn reading, finger pointing reading and turn taking.

- Read Aloud – better reader reads out loud to his or her buddy and ask his or her buddy to use the finger pointing reading to make sure he or she know where you are reading.
- Echo Reading – better reader reads a word, a sentence or a paragraph first, then let your buddy repeat after you.
- Choral Reading – both read everything out loud at the same time like a choral.
- Popcorn Reading -, the older student reads most of the paragraph on each page while pausing at some word to allow the younger student to read the next one.
- Take Turns Reading – One reads a sentence or paragraph first and another buddy reads the next one. Buddies take turns until it is done.

If teachers want to start buddy reading in class, some preparations should be done before reading. They should explain to the students what buddy reading is and how buddy reading can help them. Let students understand the expectations of buddy reading such as reading the same book, a comfortable place to read and allowing the younger or struggling learner to hold the book and turn the pages. Let the younger or struggling learner feel easy and fun and enjoy reading. A poster can be a reminder to help students to refer to these expectations. Some behavioral expectations are also important, such as paying attention and being respectful to your buddy.

Students can choose books they like from the classroom or library. Teachers can help them choose the books by collecting and sorting the books that you would like the

reading buddies to use into different levels. They can choose books which interest them or which ones they would like to read as long as it is not too hard for them.

While organizing the buddies, reading ability and personalities should be taken into consideration to make sure buddy reading will work well together. Teachers can mix students of the same class or from higher and lower grades. There are different ways to pair students up. The older students can help younger readers so putting older students with younger students may be a good way of pairing. Another possible reading buddy partnership is outgoing/shy students pairings, or you can allow students to select their own reading buddy.

A cozy and relaxing place is the perfect choice for buddy reading. If the classroom is too crowded for all pairs, you can split the class up and have some pairs in a different place. Either on the floor or at the desk will be fine. School library or outdoors is a good place for buddy reading, too. Any place that is quiet and comfortable for reading and able to make buddies feel welcome and not threatened is acceptable. Before starting buddy reading program, you should select one or two locations to help establish an appropriate environment for buddies.

Buddy reading is designed to help encourage children to read and cultivate reading habits. Through buddy reading, students learn to love and share what they read with their buddies. It can be collaboration teaching. Teachers can cooperate with other grade teachers. They can establish goals together for students. Goals may include reading a specified number of books in a certain period. When students understand the goals and try to reach the goals in reading, they are more willing to participate in the program.

Conclusion

We have English mix-ability students in the same class in the elementary years. Most teachers find it difficult to teach reading in English class. Students may be in the same grade but range considerably in their levels. An advanced student possesses a stronger understanding of vocabulary than others. You may find the text book is far easier to advanced learner. However, the low-level student struggles hard to keep up and follow along. The advanced learner sometimes looks down on low-level students. The situation makes it more difficult for low-level learners to learn. Through buddy reading program, we can pair up two different levels students. This program allows advanced learners develop fluency and have a strong sense of pride and the low-level learner feel a sense of accomplishment through repeated reading. We may not have a plenty range of choices of English storybooks for conducting buddy reading or wonderful reading corner but we are great English teachers. We can make a plan first and try to settle down steps by steps. Even with just few pairs during lunch time will be a good start. I would never forget those beautiful and happy faces in Stowers during buddy reading. I wish our students can share the buddy reading program in the near future.

Reference

Pretorius, E. J. 2000. Inference generation in the reading or expository texts by university students. D. Litt et Phil University of South Africa , Pretoria