

A Jump-Start on English Teaching

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It's a great honor for me to attend this training program in Cerritos, CA. It's my first time to be in America. Staying there for two weeks, I experienced American culture that I cannot learn from textbooks. Besides, I've learned new teaching skills and tips especially in reading, writing and classroom management from class observation. In the following part, I would like to present my observation and learning in the order of English teaching skills, classroom management tips and culture experiences.

I. English Teaching skills

In Stowers Elementary school, I visited and observed Kelshey's 6th grade class and Shielah's 5th grade class. The ways for both teachers to teach vocabulary, reading and writing were very similar. According to the principal, Dr. Tracy, teachers in Stowers received the same training programs. Here are some tasks and techniques that I found quite useful and I would like to implement in my class.

1. Vocabulary teaching

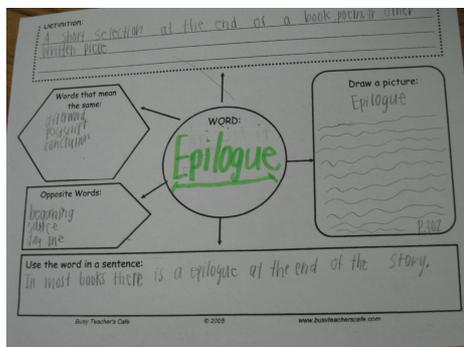
Both Kelshey and Shielah usually teach target vocabulary before reading a context. They usually define the word first, engage students to think of other related words and then encourage students to make sentences by using the word. Each student takes notes when their classmates come out with new ideas. Lastly, students draw a picture to show the word's meaning. That is to say, vocabulary teaching includes word definition, related words, sentence

making, and visual images. Kelshey and Shielah usually use the following “tools” to organize these learning elements.

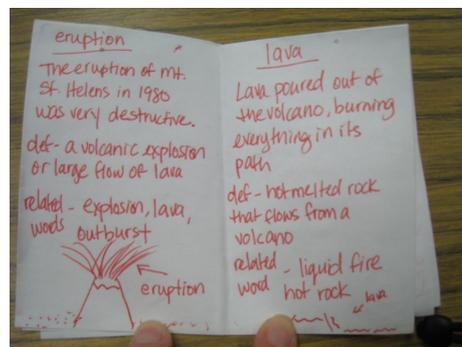
A. Vocabulary Matrix

Word	Definition	Related words	Sentence	Visual

B. Vocabulary Chart



C. Mini Book



2. Reading

Observed from Kelshey’s and Shielah’s classes, the process of teaching reading can be divided into three phases, i.e., before reading, while reading and after reading. Each phase has different learning focus.

A. Before reading

In this phase, students are expected to have a general understanding about the context. As a result, teachers introduce the author, background of writing, central ideas and key concepts before they engage students to read. Then, students share ideas they already know before reading and pose questions about the context. Target words are taught in this phase, too. Here is a list of procedures and leaning focus.

- a. Introduction to the author and background**
- b. Structure (theme, key concepts,)**
- c. Story prediction**
- d. Quick overview of the story**
- e. AQUA (Already know, Questions, Understanding, Answers)**
- f. Theme/ target words**

B. While reading

In this phase, the class reads the context together. The teacher explains either when they come across new words or when they finish a paragraph. Sometimes when the teacher finishes reading a paragraph, she might randomly name a student or a group to read the following paragraph. It's called spot reading which serves to make sure that students pay attention and catch up tightly. When the class pauses to reflect, and the teacher guides them (e.g., using AQUA) and give them feedbacks. The teacher also poses questions to check understanding. Besides reading aloud together, the teacher also assigns a few pages for students to read in class on their own silently. Silent reading develops abilities of independent reading and thinking. It cultivates students' reading habits as well. The procedures are summarized as follows.

- a. T reads and explains.**
- b. Spot reading /Reading relay (individual, group)**
- c. Pause & Reflect**
- d. T asks questions to check understanding.**
- e. Silent reading**

C. After reading

When the class finishes reading a context, the teacher encourages them to share thoughts

and comments. Students discuss with their table and then some of them volunteer or are named to share with the class. What followed is usually a reflective journal. The students are given about five minutes to write down or draw out their thoughts. Then they write on the post-it to finish AQUA (Already know, Questions, Understanding, Answers) and paste the notes on the wall. For the next class, the class works on the grammar, which is also a learning focus. Student will be evaluated by a quiz on vocabulary and grammar. Finally, the reading lesson is usually wrapped up with a writing project. Briefly, the teaching procedures are listed in the following.

- a. Ss share thoughts and opinions.**
- b. Table discussion** (No. 2 in every group speaks up to share)
- c. Reflective journal** (5 min : pictures, essay, poem, a few words)
- d. AQUA (Already know, Questions, Understanding, Answers) --**
everyone post-it on the wall
- e. Grammar** (e.g., pronoun problems)
- f. A quiz**
- g. Projects** (tasks)

3. Writing (tasks)

After reading, the teacher assigns a related topic and involves students in writing. There are various kinds of writing tasks. Among all, reflective journals are the easiest and take the shortest time to finish. Details and examples are given in the following. As to book reviews tasks, students usually start from writing chapter summary& reviews, then compile and edit them to make book reviews. Once they finish, the class will take turns to present and share their project.

A. Reflective journals

Kelshey has students write reflective journals whenever they finish a class session. She regards it a good ways for students to rethink, review and remember what they have learned. Students are free to use any kind of ways to record their learning. They can either write an essay, a poem, or draw pictures. Nobody is going to check or score their journals, so students do not suffer from pressure. All they need is a pencil, a notebook and 5 minutes. Kelshey even let students share their thoughts to wrap up a school day before they leave the class. Some students say a few words to summary a lesson, some express their feelings and still others may just speak up to respond to their classmates. I think it works well to cultivate the ability and the courage to express oneself. In short, book reviews tasks include writing chapter summary, then editing chapter summary into book reviews and finally giving an oral presentation.

B. Book Reviews

a. Chapter summary

b. Book reviews

c. Oral presentation

C. Writing of related topics

Sometimes students are assigned to write narrative, expository or persuasive essays. To have a clear start, the teacher shows students the scoring guide and format at the very beginning of writing. Then the teacher gives examples and models. Students then get their writing folder and start to write. They may discuss with their classmate or refer to any resources. They first come up with a draft, then the revision and at the end the final work which should be clean and neatly typed. Students put their final work into their writing portfolios. The teacher may have a copy of each and display in the classroom. The following list presents writing procedures.

- a. Scoring guide
- b. T demonstrates and models (beginning, middle, end).
- c. Writing folder
- d. Draft, revision and final (typed)
- e. Writing portfolio



II. Classroom management tips

1. Teacher supplies/ Students supplies

Schools allocate certain budgets to teachers and students supplies every year. Therefore, teacher supplies are always handy and available. As an English teacher who needs to go to different classrooms to teach, I would like to prepare some student supplies such as, pencils, markers, red pens and scratch paper for students who may need one of those supplies. I believe class will go smoother if I have these supplies available for students. Of course, I may have to set up a borrowing-and-returning system as well.

Besides, I have learned how homeroom teachers in Stowers Elementary School make use of these supplies for their classroom decoration. They are so creative that they could turn plain paper into a piece of great arts work of learning. Then, they display these written, drawing projects on the wall.



2. Classroom jobs

Every student has a job in the classroom. I was very surprised to know that students get paid when they do their jobs well. I thought money was used in a real society but not at school, not in the classroom. This time I had a chance to ask my mentor, the homeroom teacher Kelsey the reason for using “money” in the classroom. Therefore, now I realize the reasons for doing so.

Based on Kelshey, it is a reward system based on the real society. She regards the classroom as a city-like society, the school as a bigger organization like a country. As a member in the group, each student has to work together to make the society function well. In class 307, they have a librarian, a police officer, a computer technician, a shop keeper and other occupations (jobs) just like what we have in real life. Payment varies based on job types. Students choose their own jobs, rotate once a month and learn from doing these jobs. Surely, students get paid when they do their job well. On the other hand, they might be fined if they don't finish their jobs or violate class rules. That is how Kelshey expects students to learn and experience values, duty & rights, and attitudes.



3. Sound reminder

Shielah uses different sounds smartly, so she does not have to give many instructions. For example, the desk bell sound means the end of discussion and all the students should go back to their seats. She also has music for routines, such as slow soft music for journal writing, and Jazz for homework checking and collecting. What surprises me most is that the students are used to talking to their table so quietly that Shielah does not need a microphone or a loud-speaker. I learn that most learning habits and manners can be pre-taught. It may take much time at the beginning but it lasts long and works well.

4. Worksheet displays

It's very common for homeroom teachers to decorate their own classrooms with students' worksheets and lesson focus. Besides, they keep adding more details and changing the content based on the lessons.

III. Culture Experiences

1. Taiwan Culture (Mini lessons)

I prepared three mini lessons to share with American students. These lessons were an introduction to a school day in Taiwan, the song Heartbeat of Taiwan and Chinese greetings.

To present a school day in Taiwan, I have to know more about elementary school lessons besides English as well as the class schedule, school routines and the differences between two countries. It indeed stimulated me to explore elementary school life in Taiwan. Meanwhile, the process of exploring school life in Taiwan brought about questions to American school life. To get answers to these questions was one mission I had to accomplish when I visited Stowers. Then, to find out symbols of Taiwan culture was difficult, too. Sometimes it's hard to identify these cultural symbols because they are always around and we are used to them. It's really

troublesome to prepare these lessons; however, I admitted that it triggered me to think and research hard. It turned out that I got to know Taiwan culture even better before I went to America.

2. American Culture

In Taiwan, we study American cultures. During the trip, we had the chance to experience American life in person from the food, clothing, language and facilities.

In America, learning materials are everywhere. The signs, the tags, cereal boxes, juice cartons, and even the market flyers are good resources. For example, by exposing myself in an English speaking country, I picked up lots of simple but useful English words that I might not acquire easily in Taiwan. Besides, I realized how the US created friendly environment for family with babies and physically challenged people by actually seeing it. (There are always a few reserved parking lots for the disabled in every parking area. In Disneyland and Universal Studios, the rental stations for wheelchairs and strollers are big and are at a very obvious and convenient site.) Also, I experienced how American people used smart devices in daily life. In my host family, they have a remote controller functioning for the light, fan, heat and air conditioner. In Kelshey's and Shielah's classrooms, they have lemos (document cameras) to present the textbook and smart boards that work well in involving students in interactive learning. Last, culture experiencing was best of all. During those two weeks, I ate hamburgers, pretzels and chocolate chips; I drank Coke, Pepsi and Dr. Pepper; I heard Spanish and met people from Latin America; I shopped for T-shirts, sweaters and leggings. I could hear, speak, read and feel the culture, so the word culture is not an abstract term in the textbook any more.

Then, I noticed a change in myself when I heard people say or see tags read "American style" in Taiwan. I used to believe, never doubt so called "American style". But now, since I've been to America, I "judge" when people declare something is very American. I don't do

it intentionally, but naturally. Maybe my subconsciousness wants to make sure if it fits my impression on America. That's a fun change. Maybe I'll find something different from what I know about America (California). I'd like to visit the USA again to refresh my impression in that case.

To sum up, this wonderful trip bridged the gap between the knowledge in the books and real culture. Therefore, I can present and share with my students not only the language itself but also its country, people and culture. In other words, this trip enriched my English class and brought me a jump-start on English teaching.