

## Reflection on Teacher Training in Indiana

Virginia Chen, Juguang Elementary School

### Preface

In May, 2011, I had a once in a life time chance to join an inspiring trip to Indiana. I was impressed by positive learning environments, interesting reading instruction and systematic remedial instruction in Indiana. This successful trip was attributed to Dr. Long, Superintendent of Jay School Cooperation, Mr. Jerles, Principal of Redkey Elementary School, Mr. Pettibone, Superintendent of Adems Central Community School (hereafter, AC), Mr. Hou, Principal of Zhu-Wei Elementary School, Mr. Chen, Principal of Qian-Hua Elementary School, executive staffs of Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Chicago, all staff of Adems Central Community School, and everyone who were involved in this Teacher Cultural Exchange Program. In particular, I would also like to convey my gratitude to Dr. Long and Mr. Jerles who worked extremely hard to arrange this fantastic teacher training program in Indiana. In addition, I was so blessed to have Mr. and Mrs. Pettibone as my hosts who were very friendly and hospitable to my dear roommate, Anna, and I. With their warm company, I experienced Midwest American culture, attended a variety of interesting activities and made many friends.



### Adems Central Community School

I was very lucky to stay in Adems Central Community School (hereafter, ACCS), a wonderful school with great teachers and staff in Monroe. Different from schooling system in Taiwan, ACCS contains Adems Center High School, Adems Center Middle School and Adems Center Elementary School (hereafter, ACES). In ACCS, teachers and staff members work together to provide students with a positive learning environment. In the morning, for instance, Mr. Pettibone, Superintendent of ACCS, and Mrs. Laurent, Principal of ACES, welcomed each student at the front door of school building. I also noticed students' big smiles and laughing when they gave five with Mr. Pettibone. I could not help myself thinking if I were one of the students in ACES, I would love to go to school



every day even on vacation. Similarly, taking Mrs. Bluhm's class for example, when I entered her class, I immediately perceived the positive environment and caring among the teacher and students. Also, teachers and staff in ACES arrange many exciting activities to create a fun environment for learning such as elementary track meet and summer camps. In my opinion, it is the positive learning environment which encourages students' learning and accomplishes ACCS as a 2009-2010 Indiana Four Star School!

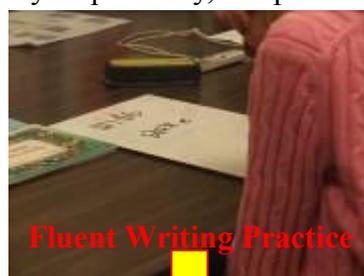
Besides, in ACES, the most impressive observation is reading instruction. I observed a variety of reading instruction and activities that motivate students to keep reading and then love reading. Therefore, I would like to introduce these impressive reading instruction and activities as followings: reading recovery, guided reading, read-aloud, book club and summer reading camp.

### Reading Recovery

First of all, I would like to thank Mrs. Spalding and Mrs. Frey for sharing their experience in this remarkable remedial instruction with me. Without them, I would not have this opportunity to know this successful program. Reading Recovery is an effective remedial instruction of one-to-one tutoring for lowest-achieving first graders. It aims at reducing the number of first graders who have extreme difficulty learning to read and write. These students will receive a 30-minute pull-out lesson each school day focusing on phonemic awareness, vocabulary, phonics, reading comprehension and reading and writing fluency. After a full 12- to 20-week series of lessons, more than 75% students will achieve grade-level expectation and are able to perform well in classroom without extra individual support. To achieve this significant success, professional teachers and supporting systems play crucial roles in Reading Recovery. Teachers in local schools, teacher leaders in districts and teacher trainers in Universities work together to develop this effective program. Teachers of Reading Recovery are highly trained in a full academic year and also receive ongoing development sessions in subsequent years. Teachers are trained in how to analyze each student's strengths and needs, select procedures and make teaching decisions on the run, and assess the results to inform their next teaching moves. With this powerful teacher training and qualified teachers, Reading Recovery really makes a difference!

In ACES, I had an opportunity to observe Mrs. Frey's Reading Recovery instruction. In her two lessons, working with a girl and boy respectively, she put emphases on phonics, vocabulary, comprehension and fluency. Her teaching procedures are as follows:

1. **Fluent Writing Practice:** Before the lesson began, Mrs. Frey and the student had a quick review



on vocabulary. The student had to write down words he/she knows as fast as he/she can in order to use these words fluently in writing.

2. **Rereading Familiar Books:** The student chose his/her favorite picture book and read it like a story. Mrs. Frey encouraged the student to read like the way a good reader does.



Rereading Familiar Books

3. **Taking a Running Record:** When the student read the picture book, Mrs. Frey paid attention to the accuracy and fluency and did running record. She quickly noted down her observation about the student's progress and reading difficulties, and then made decisions on following teaching procedures.



Taking a Running Record

4. **Word Work:** After the student read books, Mrs. Frey asked he/she to build words with magnetic letters on chalkboard by utilizing phonics rules which he/she knows. For example, when the student had difficulties in pronouncing long vowel sounds *a\_e*,



Word Work

Mrs. Frey asked students to build "bake" with magnet letters on chalkboard. Then, she asked students to build "cake" rhyming with "bake". Finally, students have to point at these words and read them out loud again.



Writing a Story

5. **Writing a Story:** The student wrote his/her own story on a writing book. Whenever the student had

problems in spelling, Mrs. Frey helped his/her to figure out the spelling by thinking of the spelling patterns which he/she learned.



Cut-up Sentence

6. **Cut-up Sentence:** After the student came up with his/her story, Mrs. Frey wrote it on a long strip of paper. Then, Mrs. Frey asked the student to read it again and cut it up. The student had to take it home and put it back together.

7. **New Book Introduced:** Mrs. Frey picked a new



New Book Introduced

picture book for the student. First, she led the student to read pictures and think about the story. Then, she drew the student's attention to some important words.

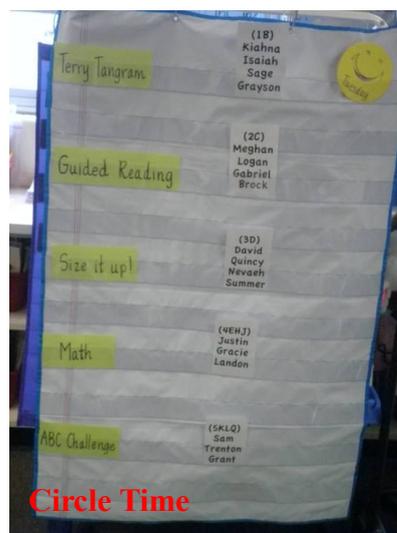
8. **New Book Attempted:** Finally, the student read the new story out loud in five minutes. In the meanwhile, Mrs. Frey noted down students' performance.

After observing Reading Recovery, I noticed an amazing amount of resources which teachers and students have in Reading Recovery program. First, a variety of picture books are available. Therefore, they enable teachers to choose books based on each student's ability and interests. Also, students are allowed to borrow their favorite books and assigned books home and work with their parents. Second, each student receives costly but beneficial one-by-one tutoring which enables teaching instruction to meet the students' individual needs. Third, Reading Recovery teachers receive a year-long training on professional development conducted by teacher leaders who cooperate with trainers in universities. These supporting systems facilitate the effect of this remedial instruction. However, in New Taipei City, remedial instruction seems lack of these supporting systems. Although the government keeps advocating the importance of remedial instruction, appropriate teaching materials, holistic curriculum and teacher training programs are not developed.

## Guided Reading

Guided reading is a strategy that helps students become good readers. The teacher provides support for small groups of readers when they learn to use various reading strategies. Although guided reading has been traditionally associated with primary grades, it can be modified and used successfully in all grade levels. For example, older students may need to learn new strategies to understand how to read an information book in a way that is going to give them access to the information they are seeking.

In Circle Time, Mrs. Mishler separated kindergarten kids into five groups with different assignments, guided reading, size it up, math, ABC challenge and Terry Tangram. These assignments rotate from Monday to Friday. Therefore, while Mrs. Mishler was doing guided with one of the groups, other groups were doing their own assignment. When Mrs. Mishler was going to do guided reading, she put on a blue scarf called "the quiet scarf" in order to inform her students that they were not allowed to disturb her. Before reading, Mrs. Mishler asked some questions to elicit students' background knowledge or to clarify some



unfamiliar words. During reading, she read the story for students and sometimes stopped to ask questions to assess students' understanding. After reading, she led students to review some important words in the story. In this guided reading, all of the students in this small group were supported by and benefitted from Mrs. Mishler's instruction.



## Read-Aloud

Beginning learners may encounter some difficulties while reading independently, since both their word recognition and reading comprehension skills are limited. One of the most practical methods for providing supportive environment is to read a book out loud to children. Reading aloud to children has been undertaken at home and in schools for centuries, and is probably the most highly recommended activity for encouraging language and literacy. Read-aloud opens worlds of new and interesting experiences and provides children with a wonderful model of how good readers read with intonation and fluency. Read-aloud by teachers also helps learners discover units of meaning that should be read as phrases rather than word by word. Moreover, listening to stories facilitates literacy growth and comprehension development. For a long-term development, reading aloud to children is closely related to reading itself and encourages learners to read on their own.

I participated in a read-aloud event in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (2-B). Before Mrs. Bluhm did read-aloud in class, students were allowed to choose their favorite puppets or pillow and lean on a pillow or sit on carpet. To enhance students' interests in read-aloud event, Mrs. Bluhm and students sang a song to express the importance of reading with some movements as a warm-up activity. During the read-aloud activity, each student enjoyed and paid attention to Mrs. Bluhm's fantastic story-telling, facial expression and body language. They also had a brief interaction with Mrs. Bluhm by asking and answering some questions. Through this read-aloud activity, Mrs. Bluhm demonstrated how good readers do and also motivated students to read.

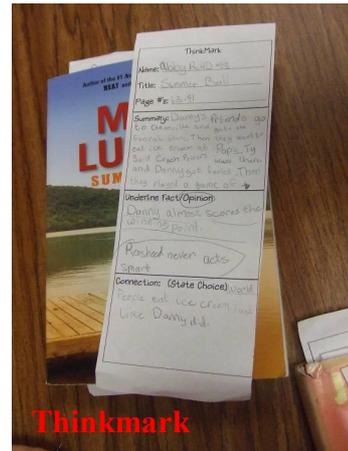


## Book Club

In grade four, students are capable to read novels on their own and share their opinions with others. Therefore, Mrs. Buchan arranged Book Club for students. In the Book Club, students chose one from three assigned books. They had to read about 20-30 pages and completed a Thinkmark before each meeting. In Thinkmark, students were required to write about setting, main characters, summary, underline cause/effect, vocabulary, solution/conclusion, 5 star rating and connection. By completing the Thinkmark, students can enhance their comprehension, gather their thoughts in group discussion, and make reflection on their life. In my opinion, Taiwanese students would also benefit from this activity because most of them are afraid of sharing opinions with others or in public. The advantage of utilizing this strategy in Taiwan is that it draws students' attention to group discussion. Without fancy worksheets, students are allowed to jot down their thoughts even in incomplete sentences as long as the sentences can organize their thoughts. They may spend more time on listening and discussing.



**Book Club**



**Thinkmark**



**How many books have we checked out?**

To sum up, teachers in ACES use many teaching techniques to involve students in reading such as reading recovery, guided reading, read-aloud and Book Club. After the above reading activities, the ultimate goal is to equip and encourage students to read independently. In ACES, a variety of books are available in the library. A comfortable reading environment is also provided. Most important of all, students really enjoy



**61,652 Books have been checked out.**

reading, spend a lot of time on reading and borrow many books home. According to the poster on a wall, 515 students in ACES have borrowed 61,652 books in this semester. That is, each student has read 120 books on average so far! What an amazing number!



**ACES Library**



**Students enjoy reading.**

## Conclusion

After this inspiring Teacher Cultural Exchange Program, I acquire a lot of teaching techniques, perceive different schooling system, and have different perspective on teaching. I would like to take them into practice in Taiwan and discuss the effect with teachers in Indiana.

Additionally, I observed many cultural differences between Indiana and Taiwan. Take food for example. Before I went to Indiana, my 5<sup>th</sup> graders made two videos introducing traditional Taiwanese snack, pearl milk tea and green onion pancakes, to students in Indiana. After watching the videos, the 2<sup>nd</sup> graders in ACES were very surprised at



**Taiwanese Snacks Introduction**

Taiwanese salty pancakes. Also, ACES kids were interested in schooling system and school size in Taiwan. For them, it is hard to believe that there are more than 3000 students in my school, Juguang Elementary School.

Moreover, this teacher training program benefits not only teachers but also students. After this trip, I made a PowerPoint file introducing my observation in ACES and reflection on this trip to my students. They also read letters written by Mrs. Bluhm's second graders. They began to sense that learning English is not for gaining high scores but for making connection with people around the world. Therefore, most of my students decided to work harder and speak English every day!

## Reference

1. Reading Recovery Council of North America. <http://www.readingrecovery.org>

2. Adems Central Community School. <http://www.accs.k12.in.us/jets/Default.aspx>