

# Report on L.A. Educational Trip:

## Literacy Work Station-Making Independent Practice Work

By Liping Lee, Tinghsi Elementary School

Visiting California was an unforgettable experience in my life. I learned a lot from this training course which was designed for Taipei county English teachers. I would like to thank Taipei County Education Bureau and those who made this wonderful trip possible. I also appreciate my fellow teachers who have helped me so much during this trip.



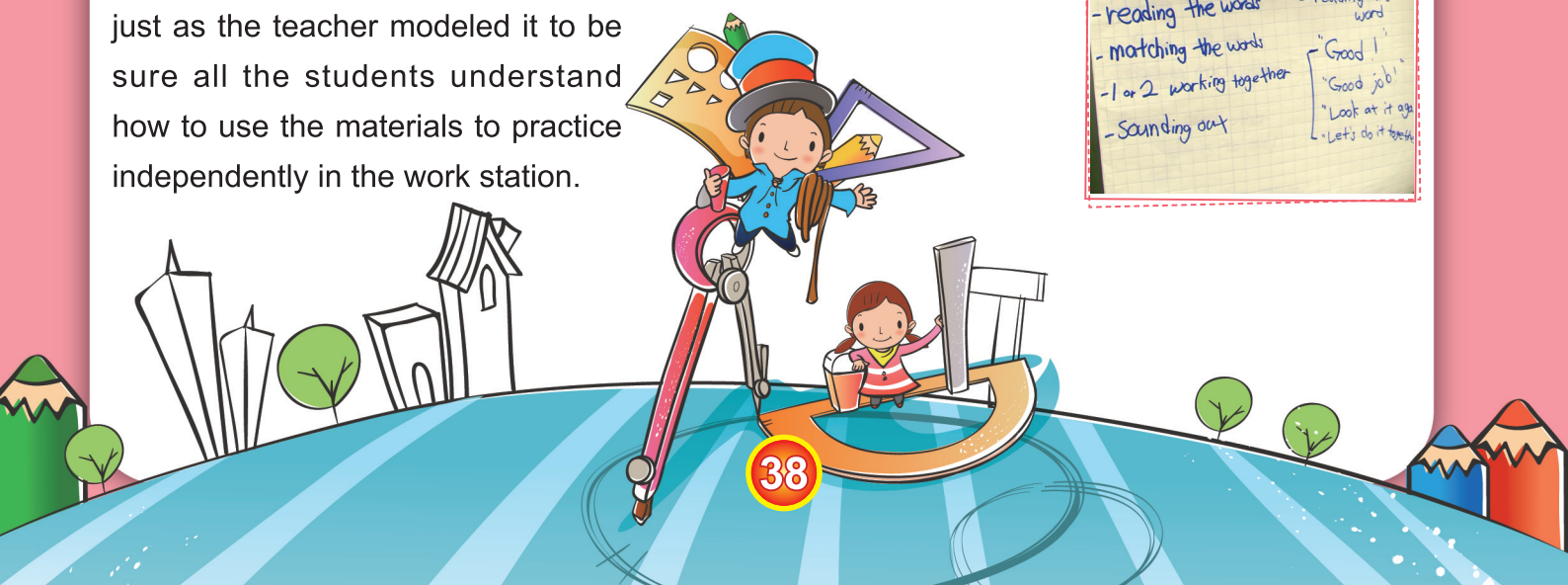
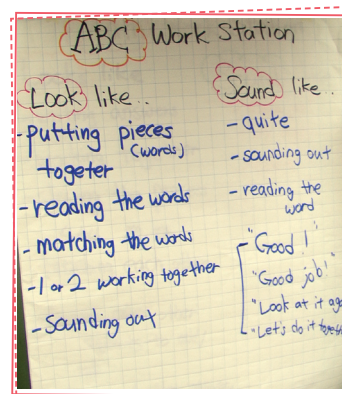
Not only had I learned some practical teaching knowledge and strategies of GLAD model, but also I got the opportunity to observe the real teaching process in Los Molinos Elementary School in Hacienda La Puente Unified School District. The ways teachers in Los Molinos educating their students were so impressive to me. Respects, kindness, caring and professionalism are their mutual attitude, language and act. There are lots of things which are worth sharing with our teachers in Taiwan. Most of them have been mentioned on the Reflection Reports of 2008 and 2009. I suggest those who want to know more details about the training trip read these reports.

It has been a long time for me to think about how to make my teaching more effective, keep students interested in learning and make them work more independently. After I observed the teaching from Ms. Park and Miss Chang, I must say that literacy work stations are one of the excellent methods to accomplish my expectations of teaching. Debbie Diller mentioned in her book that there are many benefits to teaching with literacy work stations. All students get to participate in work stations for equal amounts of time, get a direct opportunity to practice and share in the decision making process. It also allows teachers to differentiate students for various levels within a classroom so as to better meet students' needs at a particular station. Disciplines problems are reduced because of all students are involved with hand-on activities they are interested in. Thus I would like to focus on the sharing of the practical teaching methods of literacy work stations to help teachers make the best use of their class time.



Before I mention how to operate and manage literacy work stations, it is better to know what it is first. In her book, *Literacy Work Station—Make centers work*, Debbie Diller defined a literacy work station as “An area within the classroom where students work alone or interact with one another using instructional materials to explore or expand their literacy. It’s a place where a variety of activities reinforces and/or extends learning, often without the assistance of the classroom teacher. It is a time for children to practice reading, speaking, listening, writing and working with letters and words.” Comparing to a traditional learning center, a literacy work station is quite different in several ways. The obvious one is that new materials in a literacy work station are taught with and used for instruction first. Then they are placed in the work station for independent use. The emphasis in literacy work station is on teacher modeling and students taking responsibility for their own learning. On the contrary, new materials are placed in the traditional learning center without first being used in teaching. Centers were often used for fun and motivation to encourage students to finish their work quickly.

In Los Molinos, I met Ms. Park and Miss Chang, two grade 2 teachers who has been running literacy work stations successfully to benefit students’ learning. The skills and experiences they showed me are quite practical and valuable. I was very concerned about how Los Molinos teachers manage and teach with work stations. According to Miss Chang’s suggestion, it is better to begin a literacy work station with teacher’s model. Unavoidably, there would be arguments and conflicts among the members in a group when they discuss how to assign roles to each other, how to take turns, how to share materials, how to use the equipments, and how to solve a problem or answers of the station works when students start their station work. Hence teachers must model appropriate behavior and provide a risk-free environment. For example, you begin by having the students sitting on the floor around you, telling them explicitly what you expect them to do and what should the work station look like and sound like, and focusing on the directions to the independent practice. Then you have two children to role-play what it would look like and sound like if they were now at the work station while the rest of the groups observe. After that, have several students tell you what they noticed that the role-modeling students did. Then pair students to role-play just as the teacher modeled it to be sure all the students understand how to use the materials to practice independently in the work station.



Let's move on to the second step which is to provide several choices of activities of proper independent work level within a work station. Why should a work station include a variety of things for students to choose from? This is to allow the students to choose the activities that meet the practice they need which will enable him or her to learn more. Make sure that the activities are not too hard for the children and the purpose of the task is clear. Before you put the materials into the work station for independent practice, remember to model the use of them to class or a small group first!

Another important thing when you manage the work stations is the way to group your students. At the beginning of the school year, it is better to let children work in pairs. Reducing the number of student groups not only will help decrease the noise level, but also help students learn more when working with a peer to practice something new. Sometimes you can even allow students work alone. You may group them according to their numbers at beginning. Later, when you understand your students more, you can try to put the students who are helpful and those who need help in the same group.

Here I want to share some activities and materials using in my grade one class. I have carefully modeled the use of the materials before placing them in the stations.



### 1. ABC/word work station



**(1) ABC puzzles** First, cut each letter card into several pieces.

Then, put these pieces into a zipper bag. Finally, put all the zipper bags in a pocket chart according to alphabet order. Get the students to work in pairs to finish their chosen letter puzzle. Then exchange the puzzle bag with another pair who has finished the other letter puzzle. As they learn to form letters, they are learning the letters' visual features.

**(2) ABC lottery** Put foam capital letters and lower letters in a

bag. Have one student put her/his hand into the bag and pick one letter, touch it, feel its shape, and try to figure out what letter it is. She/he who makes the right guess will get a "Hurray!" from the other group. Let students take turns to play the guessing game in a small group. Using sense of touch to deepen students' recognition of the letter shapes.

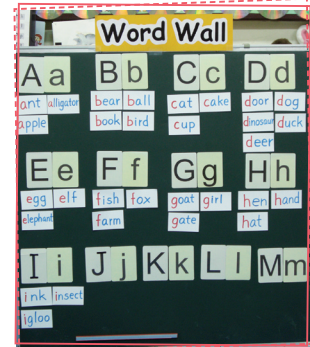




**(3) ABC charts** First, start every period of class by singing ABC song to build students' concept of alphabet order. Then provide ABC chart at the ABC work station for students to practice reading. Children can also match letters to the letters on the chart and name the letters as they do so.



**(4) Alphabetical word wall** Have a word wall arranged in alphabetical order in classroom. Students can take the word on and off the word wall as they practice learning the initial letters of the words. For example, when they learn "b is for bear," they put the word card **bear** under the **B b** card on the alphabetical word wall. They can unscramble the individual word cards teacher puts in a word storage container into ABC order.



**2. Listening work station**

Prepare some books with CDs and a CD player for the students to listen to the songs or books that the teacher has taught them. The teacher can also place the lyrics posters and a pointer in the work station for students to use the pointer to run under the line they hear when they are listening to the song. Having children use pointer to one-by-one word matching helps them pay attention and notice what a word is. Remind them to use the pointer carefully and lower their voice when they repeat after the CD to sing the songs. Remember not to turn the volume too loud.



### 3. Spelling work station

Paste the picture card of a word on one side of an envelope and on the other side of the envelope you paste the spelling



word card of the picture card faced down. Inside the envelope are individual letter cards to form the word. Children first choose the word envelope that she/he wants to practice spelling according to the picture on it, then they take out the letter cards and put them in the right order to match the word, after that, flip the spelling word card over to check if the answer is correct. If the student can not spell the word, she/he can still put the letter cards in the right order according to the word she/he sees on the spelling word card.

### 4. Pocket chart work station

Daily English are being practiced frequently in this station. The teacher supplies the children with tags and pens for them to write their names on. When the students managed to read out the sentences in the pocket, they

1. Good morning.	早安。
2. Hello there!	嗨!你好。
3. Please.	請;拜託。
4. Thank you.	謝謝。
5. You're welcome.	不客氣。
6. I'm sorry.	對不起。
7. Excuse me.	不好意思。
8. Never mind.	沒關係。

Name: Michael Number: 10508

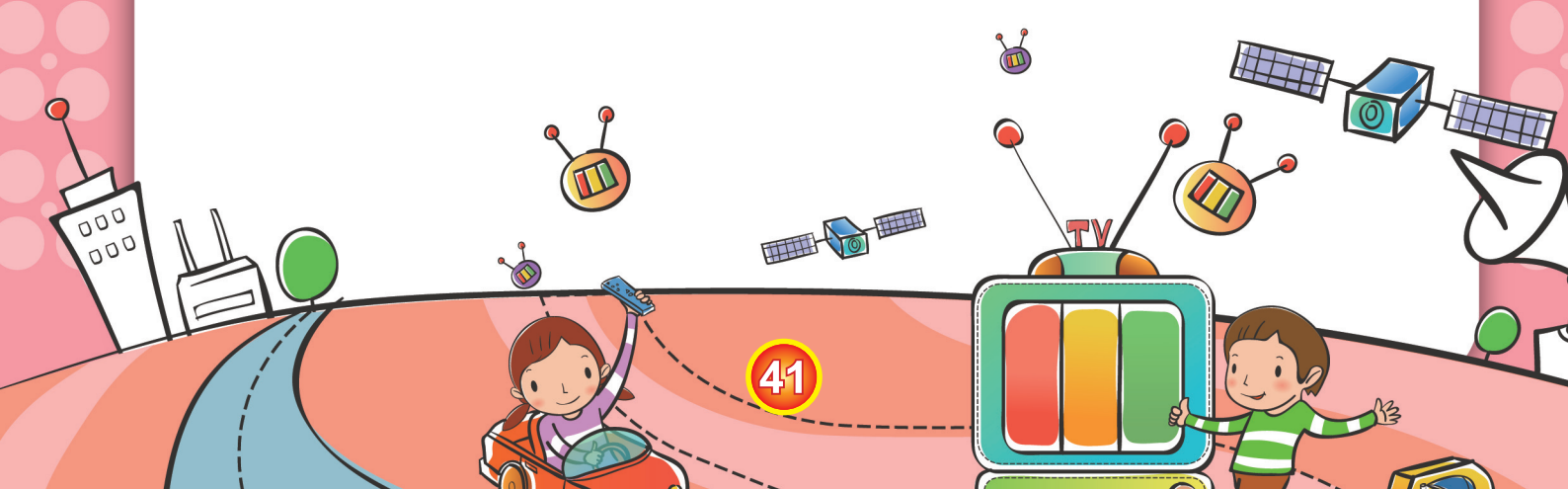
頂溪 100 句——一年級上學期

① Good morning.	早 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 安。
② Hello there!	嗨!你 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 好。
③ Please.	請 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> ;拜 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 託。
④ Thank you.	謝 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 謝 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 。
⑤ You're welcome.	不 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 客 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 氣 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 。
⑥ I'm sorry.	對 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 不 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 起 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 。
⑦ Excuse me.	不 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 好 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 意 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 思 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 。
⑧ Never mind.	沒 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 關 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 係 <sub>ㄉㄨㄢˊ</sub> 。

put their name tags onto the margin of the sentence strips in the pocket. Another way I use is supplying the check lists for the students to circle the numbers of the sentences they can say correctly.

### 5. Buddy reading work station

First, pair the students up. Then, have them practice reading and re-reading of the familiar books previously taught in shared reading. Finally, let each pair choose one book they would like to read together and sit beside each other, taking turns to read the pages alternatively. Modeling a variety of ways to do buddy reading for children will help them read the materials better and enjoy reading.



### 6. Writing work station

Have the children practice writing letters or words here. Provide four line dry-erase exercise papers, letter formation cards, several kinds of blank papers and a variety of writing tools, such as whiteboard markers, crayons and pencils. Let students look at the alphabetical word wall to choose the letters or words they want to write and the tools



they want to write with. The first-grade children require more clear instruction on how to form letters. Other than the teacher demonstrates correct letter formation during modeled writing as she/he writes in front of the class, children need more opportunities to practice letters-writing to ensure that they can write neatly and fluently.

### 7. Computer work station

I have only one computer in my classroom but I can still have a computer work station and use it to help students learn English. Allow the advanced students to play vocabulary, spelling or alphabet games and add options one at a time. Of course the teacher should model how to use the materials here effectively and make sure that children know how to play the games and use the computer properly. If a game is overused, I will remove it and suggest them to play another one.

Do not rush to have many work stations at one time. One at a time is more comfortable for both the teacher and the students. Once the first work station has run well with the students, then it is the time to move on to the next one. It might take six weeks or even longer for a grade-one homeroom teacher to prepare her/his students to work independently in work stations. For English subject teachers like us, being patient while managing work stations is an important factor to guarantee success.

In conclusion, trying all possible ways to help students interest in learning the knowledge of English and learn independently and effectively are the English teachers' responsibilities and expectations. Autonomous teachers will always actively find ways to foster the students' learning autonomy. I found this trip beneficial to me as I had learnt ways to use literacy work stations, which I found to be very beneficial to my students' learning.

