

My Learning Trip in Indiana

Sharon Hsu

Acknowledgment

I would like to appreciate many organizations and people in Joint Taiwan- East Central Indiana Teacher Cultural Exchange Program. First, I would like to thank New Taipei City for giving me this precious opportunity to have this fantastic trip. Second, I would like to be grateful to Taipei Economic and Cultural Office in Chicago for helping arrange this program. Also, I want to show my thanks to Director Rose Chen, John Y. Lin, Mrs. Yu-Ching Liu, Jennifer and Wendy for introducing me different faces of Chicago. Last but not least, I would like to appreciate Jay County Corporation. Dr. Tim Long is a good leader. He was in charge of everything with his endless energy and good humor, and Mr. Tomas Jerles arranged me participate the great classroom observation in elementary schools. Learning from different teachers is like having different treasure maps, so I got more than I expected. Because of great effort from varied parties, I really had a rich and meaningful trip in these two weeks.

Reading Activities in Indiana

Before sharing reading activities I learned in Indiana, I would like to give a brief introduction of the three elementary schools where I visited- East Washington Academy, Albany Elementary School and Redkey Elementary School. *East Washington Academy (EWA)* is a new school in Muncie. EWA is developing a partnership with Ball State University to implement a Chinese language component in daily instruction. *Albany Elementary School* and *Redkey Elementary School* are both excellent schools where I learned a lot from their teachers. Each school has about 300 students, and its principals and teachers are nice and hardworking. No matter what questions I asked, the principals and teachers gave me the clear and detailed answers with their most patience. I really have the impressive learning experience from different teachers in these schools.

In Indiana, there are clear curriculum standards for teachers to follow up. Each grade has its own curriculum standards to achieve. From K to 2nd grade, students have to learn the concept of prints, phonemic awareness, and decoding and word recognition; moreover, they also start to read nonfiction and informational texts. From 3rd to 5th grade, students focus on reading comprehension in nonfiction and literary texts. The students read and understand grade-level-appropriate materials, and they deliver oral summaries of books that they have read.

K-2nd grade

To help students learn the concept of prints, teachers would use different strategies to reach their goal.

- **Reading Routine**



Teachers would assign students to read a small book every day, and ask them to read the book to their partners in school and to their parents at home. Additionally, the teacher provides parents reading strategies in order to help parents to teach their children at home. The teacher will show

students the cover, the author, the illustrator and the publisher at the beginning of reading a book every time. Students are also immersed in amount of reading materials in their classroom. They always can find a book to read whenever they finish their work earlier.

- **Reading Recovery**

Students have to take a standard test when they enter 1st grade. The lowest-grade students have to attend Reading Recovery (RR), which is a highly short-term intervention of one-on-one tutoring for lowest-achieving first graders. Individual student receives a 30-minute lesson with a special teacher, who is trained in Reading Recovery Program, in each school day for 15 to 20 weeks. As long as students meet



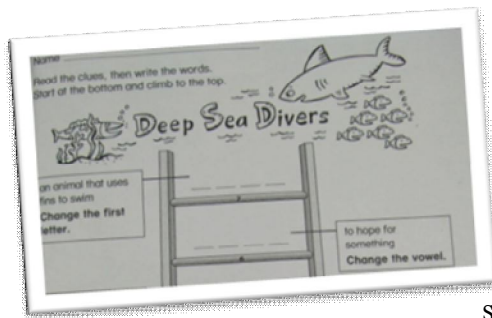
grade-level expectations and demonstrate that they can continue to work independently in class, their lessons will be discontinued and then new students will come to RR beginning their individual instruction. In RR, there are a series of books to check students' achievement. For example, in "No Shoes," there is a page printing lines form right to left, and students require answering the opposite direction of line to get the right answer.

To make students achieve the curriculum standards, teachers do several reading activities in their class. Teachers apply different interesting activities to check students' phonemic awareness and decoding and word recognition.

- **Big Ear**

In Mrs. Flynn's class, she would read a word and then ask her students to write down the word on their whiteboards. If they had difficulty to spell the word, she would reread the word in chunks. For example, the teacher would read the word 'acorn' as 'a-c-or-n.' Therefore, students had to listen carefully to decode the words with chunks and then wrote it down. After writing down the word, students were asked to explain the meaning of the word.

- **Word Ladder**

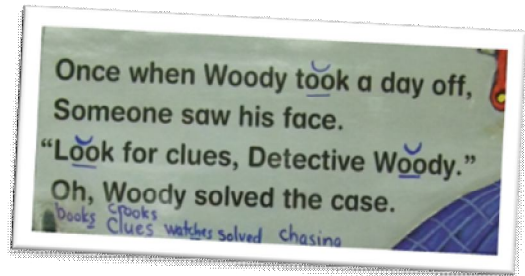


Mrs. Flynn also used a worksheet about word ladder to practice her students’ reading ability. In this worksheet, students had to follow the description to climb up the stairs. For instance, one of the descriptions is “to hope for something/ Change the vowel”, and students had to change “wash”, which they

already had, to the word “wish.” In other words, students had to not only know the meaning of the word “wish” but also recognize which letter presenting as a vowel in the word “wash.”

- **Special Mark**

Mrs. Jacob would make special marks on the big picture book to help her students read the book. The special marks just like magical notes. Once students saw the mark, they would make the connection between the sound of the word and the shape of the word.



For example, when Mrs. Jacob taught the sound ‘oo’, she drew a little curve on each word with the ‘oo’ sound on pages. When students saw the little curve, they should pronounce the ‘oo’ sound.

- **Class Discussion**

In Mrs. Miskinis’ class, she would do class discussion when students met a new word in the book. She preferred discussing the question with students to giving the answer directly. If students could not come up with the accurate meaning, she would give them some clues to figure out the meaning. For example, the 2nd graders met the word “halfheartedly” in their reading book. At first, students did not know the meaning, so the teacher told them that the word is a compound word and asked them to find out which word they can see in “halfheartedly.” After class discussion, students decided to separate the word into “half” and “heartedly.” After word separation process, students started to guess the meaning of the word. Furthermore, Mrs. Miskinis would give several examples to help her students guess the meaning. Last, she would ask students to provide some examples to check their understanding of the meaning.

3rd–5th grade

From 3rd to 5th grade, students have more contact with various texts in school. Schools provide different reading programs for their students.

- **READ 180**

In Redkey, 5th graders have the READ 180 program, which is a comprehensive system of curriculum, instruction, assessment and professional development proven to raise reading achievement for struggling readers. In a class, teachers would begin and end each class with whole group instruction that engages the entire class. During the class, students are divided into three groups to rotate through three stations in the classroom. One group of students would do independent reading with CD; the other one would do the online tests or practices with the READ 180 software; another one would have a small group instruction with their teacher. Each group would take about 15 to 20 minutes to finish their assignments. After all groups finish, students would rotate to the next station.



In Albany, there is a reading class every day, and according to different reading groups, students would go to different classrooms. I would be lucky to observe one reading class, and to learn some teaching skills from Mrs. Hannah.

- **Group Reading**

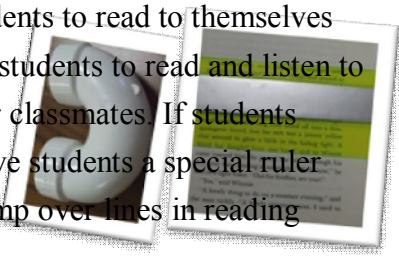
In Mrs. Hannah's class, each student had one book, and she would ask them to read passage by passage. After student read one passage, she would have a discussion about the passage. She also wrote down the setting, characters and the things students knew from the book on the board. If students had difficulty in reading some vocabularies, the teacher would help them at once.

- **Prediction Worksheet**

In the reading class, Mrs. Hannah would pass down a prediction worksheet, and ask students to do the prediction of the story. Students are required to write down their reasons after they read a passage, and then they would discuss their predictions of the story. Even though every student might have different opinions, Mrs. Hannah would accept students' predictions as long as they had enough evidences to prove their predictions.

- **Self Reading**

After reading a chapter, Mrs. Hannah would ask students to read to themselves by using a piece of PVC water piping curve, which helps students to read and listen to themselves. Therefore, they will not be disturbed by other classmates. If students could not read the book line by line, the teacher would give students a special ruler with an opaque tape in the middle so that they will not jump over lines in reading

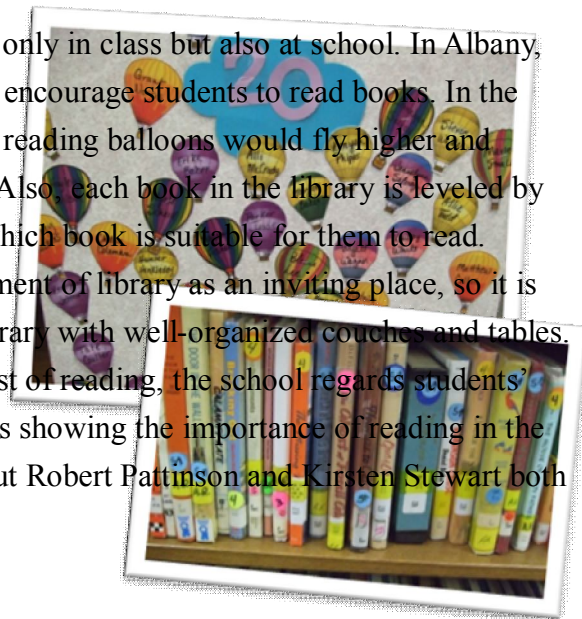


- **Helping Program**

In East Washington Academy, the 5th grade teacher held a helping program. In this program, her students helped low-graders to do the reading activities. One 5th grade student will sit nearby one 2nd grade student, and they read the book together. When the 2nd grader had a question, the 5th grader gave his hand at once. The 5th graders also taught low-graders how to use the computer doing their online reading practices or tests.

- **School Reading Competition**

The reading activities take place not only in class but also at school. In Albany, the school holds a reading competition to encourage students to read books. In the library, if students read more books, their reading balloons would fly higher and higher within a special chart on the wall. Also, each book in the library is leveled by librarians, so that students would know which book is suitable for them to read. Moreover, the school creates the environment of library as an inviting place, so it is very comfortable to read a book in the library with well-organized couches and tables. Additionally, in order to arouse the interest of reading, the school regards students' idols as the reader models who read books showing the importance of reading in the poster. For example, there is a poster about Robert Pattinson and Kirsten Stewart both reading a book on the wall.



Reflection

In Taiwan, because English is a foreign language, some activities may not be suitable for the students in Taiwan. Therefore, I would like to adjust what I observed and learned at the school in Indiana, instead of copying the entire materials and instructions.

First, I really like their well-organized reading program, which includes not only official instructions but also remedial one. The program is really important and helpful for those low-achieving students to provide extra help at school. In Taiwan, we also have remedial instruction, but the instruction is different from school to

school. Some schools may have remedial instruction in one grade; some schools may have it in several grades. If we could have a well-planned remedial program from Education Bureau of New Taipei City, our students would get more help from schools instead of cram schools.

Second, it'll be useful to apply some reading activities to our middle- and high-graders. Some activities are really good to help students in reading English books. For instance, because the descriptions are not too hard for Taiwanese students to read and I believe that the worksheet can arouse students' curiosity. I would use the worksheet of word ladder. On the other hand, it's fun for students to break each stage while doing the worksheet. For checking students' concepts of prints, the book "No Shoes" is good to check whether students are familiar with English format or not. Actually, in Taiwan, there is a series of books just like "No Shoes", and I believe that teachers can use these books in their classes.

Third, I would like to teach my students the reading strategies which I observed in Redkey. Here are the strategies I learned from Mrs. Hannah:

- *Bird's Eye*
Look at the pictures!
Look at the pictures for clues to help you figure out the word.
- *Stretch: "S-t-r-e-t-c-h" is out!*
Stretch out the word out slowly.
Put the sounds together to figure out the word.
- *Skippy: Skip It, Skip It!*
Skip the word.
Read to the end of the sentence.
"Hop back" and read it, read it.
- *Tryin' Lion: Try It Again!*
Try to reread the sentence.
Try a word what makes sense.
- *Chunky Monkey: Chunk the Word!*
Look for a "chunk" that you know.
Look for a word part.
- *Lips the Fish: Get Your Lips Ready!*
Say the first few sounds of the word out loud.
Read to the end of the sentence and say the sounds again.
- *When you can't go on...*
Ask for Help!



After you have tried all of the other strategies, ask for help.

She made posters for each strategy, and asked students to read these strategies when they had problem in reading a book. These are good strategies when teachers teach picture books in Taiwan.

Fourth, when the class is reading a book, it's good that teacher writes down the discussion on the board, and uses story star to let students get the main idea of the book. In addition, prediction worksheet is also an excellent method to teach students. I believe that students will create different thoughts by participating these interesting activities.

Fifth, I like the program READ 180, but it's too difficult for high-graders in Taiwan to complete the task. If there is a program like READ 180 for EFL students, students will learn a lot from that program, and teachers will have more time to deal with students' other required help.

Culture Experience

During these two weeks, I experienced a had a lot of first-time experiences there. In this trip, I met many nice people. Tomas Jerles and Julia Jerles are my host family, and their friendliness amazes me. It is a pleasure for Sophie, Michelle and I to stay with them in Indiana. Tom, a hospitality person, is the principal of Redkey, and gets up early to prepare the breakfast for us. Tom's Famous

Breakfast is great! After having the breakfast, he took us to schools and arranged classes for us. After school, we loved to share what we had observed in the family room. Sometimes, we played with puppies in the yard. One day, Tom taught me how to mow the lawn. Because I didn't have a driver license, I felt a little nervous at first. However, it was just like playing racing car games in video games. Tom said I did a good job! On Friday night, because Julia wanted to see a movie, we recommended her to see 3 idiots. We brought some snacks and drinks down to the basement and saw the movie together. After seeing the movie, "All is well" became our pet phrase. On Saturday evening, Tom held a BBQ picnic and all of my members and their host families came to Tom's house. We played an interesting game called corn hole. It's difficult for me to the throw the corn bag into the hole, because the distance is too far for me. Tom was busy cooking and feeding us. Everyone had a great time in the picnic. On Monday, Tom invited us to attend a teacher's baby shower after school.

different life in Indiana. I



The room was decorated with pink. They prepared a big cake, some nuts and soft drinks on the table, and every guest brought her gifts and cards. The mother-to-be opened each gifts and said "thank you" to everyone. We sent her a water bird flute, a traditional toy in Taiwan. She liked it! Maybe she can play it with her baby.

During these days, we also introduced Taiwan to students in Redkey and Albany. Through the Power Point, students knew more about Taiwan. Some of them even asked to live in Taiwan if possible. We also made some traditional fried rice for teachers in Redkey. Tom helped us to prepare the ingredients and let us use their kitchen in school. We added a secret weapon- soy-bean sauce into the fried rice, and the cook gave it a try and asked us how to make it. We are very happy that teachers loved our traditional dish. It was another special culture exchange experience.

cultures



Just like what I've mentioned in the beginning, everyone I met in this trip is so nice. Moreover, we learned from each other. We treasure the friendship between us. Dr. Long said, "It's always happy to say hello, and sad to say goodbye." The truth is that we will not say goodbye, since we still can contact with each other online. Thanks to all my friends. I have a fantastic and unforgettable trip in Indiana!

[Reference]

Reading Recovery http://www.readingrecovery.org/reading_recovery/facts/index.asp

READ 180 <http://read180.scholastic.com/reading-intervention-program>