

Inspire the Love of Learning-English Activity Design

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First, I would like to express my appreciation to Dingpu Elementary School and New Taipei City Bureau of Education to give me the chance to visit schools in Chicago and Indiana. During two weeks there, I tried to immerse myself into the culture and environment. The scene and life there became part of my memory. This experience is totally different from the way we read from some traveling books. I cherish the opportunities to have classroom



observation and training program “Quantum Learning,” “SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol),” and “Balanced Literacy.” After having classroom observations and training programs, I am going to integrate some teaching concepts and ideas into design of teaching activities. The following reflection and thoughts are divided into two parts. The previous part is about activity design. The focus of the second part is on implementing ideas in my teaching.

Activity Design

Good activity design leads to successful teaching and learning. What are the elements of activity design? According to Richards and Rogers (2010), it is necessary to develop a design for an instructional system. Design is the level of method analysis in which we consider (a) what the objectives of a method are, (b) how language content is selected and organized within the method, that is the syllabus model the method advocates; (d) the roles of learners; (e) the roles of teachers; and (f) the role of instructional materials. The following activities are analyzed by the above elements.





1. Daily 5 Check List

At the beginning of the class, the teacher usually explains the agenda of the day, and then

has the students to complete their Daily 5 Check List which comprises seven reading activities. The reading activities are inclusive of “read to self, read to someone, listen to reading, word work, work on writing, work on computer /iPad, and guided reading.” The objective of “read to self” is to get both fluency and accuracy in reading. By reading the story to someone, the students can differentiate the good intonation from the other. “Listen to reading” is to train students’ listening comprehension about the content of CD. For “word work” the students can manipulate the suffix or prefix of words. For example, the teacher provides some nouns with students, and they should put the correct “s” or “es” after the appropriate noun. For “work on writing,” the students have to integrate the reading materials they have learned before, and write some paragraphs or journals on their own. During last activity, “work on computer/iPad,” the teacher may find out some reading comprehension website or apps to test students’ reading comprehension. After students finish their own reading, they may choose an interesting game which consists of some questions about their reading book. The role of a teacher in the whole activities is a facilitator. When students have some difficulties during guided reading, teachers help students solve their reading problems. Every station work serves as different equipments to meet every student’s needs. By attending to different station works, it is easy for students to combine different learning strategies in reading activities. It helps learners become good readers.

How does the Daily 5 work? Every student was assigned to different reading work. After fifteen minutes, they rotated to the next station. I like the design of the activities because students take responsibility of their learning. During the fifteen minutes, teachers can implement guided reading according to students’ different levels of reading ability. The rest of the students complete different kinds of reading skills at the same time. Thus students can benefit not only from language skills developed by themselves but also individual instruction from teachers. Thinking of my own teaching, although I knew the importance of

student-centered learning, however, I was afraid of using these activities before. During the observation of these activities, to my surprise, each student can focus on their learning without chatting or interrupting others. The teachers said that children have been familiar with the learning style since they were in kindergarten. Thus in kindergarten time, teachers should spend a long time training kids to get their learning on track.

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|---|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |
| daily 5 check list | listen to reading | word work | guided reading |

2. Reading Activities

According to Bruner, “the teacher role is part of the scaffolding, a resource to help learner expand their capacity to acquire new knowledge and skills.” After students master what they have learned, teachers withdraw the scaffoldings to make students become independent learners. One of the training programs “Balanced Literacy Instruction” consists of reading and writing given by Christi Sosin, a very well-experienced language teacher. She shared amounts of reading activities by watching videos and group discussions. With the clear demonstrations from the video and our classroom observations, we believe that reading could be taught effectively in a systematic way.



Christi explained how shared reading is done by using the video. We learned lots of useful strategies from her.

Reading process comprises four activities, including shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, and read aloud. All of the reading activities can facilitate students’ autonomy so that they become independent readers. The following chart is the comparison of the four reading activities.

| Reading activities | How to teach? | Text/ grouping | What is taught? |
|----------------------------|---|--|--|
| shared reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · works with the whole class · all eyes on same text · Teacher models use of skills/ strategies | Text book, smart board, document camera, big book, copied article | specific skills and strategies, particular text type or genre, phrasing, intonation and fluency |
| guided reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · bridge between shared and independent reading · students are placed in small flexible groups · students are taught skills and strategies at their instructional level | Groups are flexible in size and configuration and are formed based on students' need, interests, experiences, and achievement (ISBE) | Teacher introduces the level of stories and assists the children in a way that helps to develop independent reading strategies |
| independent reading | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · students will build fluency in reading and confidences | Text read before, library book, personal book | Students practice and apply reading strategies |
| read aloud | Enable children to hear the rich language of stories and text they might not be able to read on their own. (Routman) | Books and materials at the students' listening levels | Teacher uses think aloud to model reading strategies |

(Adapted from Balanced Literacy in Schaumburg School Dist. 54)

After the classroom observation and training program, reading has been seen as a very important part of teaching. Our English in Taiwan, especially some rural schools, is still on language learning. Due to less teaching time and the language environment, it is hard for students to be elevated to content level. However, if teachers provide enough comprehensible

input, such as stories, interesting comic books or newspapers which contain a strong connection with students' life experience, they may have more learning motivation in reading.

3. High technological device, iPad, was used in the kindergarten of Ball State University

Like some classes we observed before, station work is used in teaching. All kids are responsible for their learning. There is a great tacit understanding

between the teachers and kids. Children are under-control in teachers' commands.

Teachers there used positive words in the sentence. It takes quite a long time for instructors to train every step of learning. Classroom management is settled down.

Therefore, teachers may design diversities of teaching activities.

High technological device, iPad, is used in students' learning. In a math class, the students are grouped in pairs to show the process of solving the problems on the iPads. During the time of solving problems, it is really amazing to see kindergarten kids integrated some useful learning strategies to solve math problems. At the same time, one of the teachers walked around to see how students come up with their ideas. Then another teacher used a document camera to display some children's answers. When the students showed their solving process to everyone, the teacher always asked "why" and "how" in her questions. The kids should explain what learning strategies they used and understand that there were different kinds of ways to solve problems. Sometimes teachers think it is not appropriate to let such young kids use high technological devices in class. We are afraid that they may not use those devices correctly and nicely. However, through many times of practicing how to use the devices appropriately, the students could be a good high technology users and learners.



4. My mini lesson

In this educational visit, my partner, Wanling, and I prepared a mini cultural lesson of

Dragon Boat Festival to kindergarten students in Triston

Elementary School. We used flashcards and a poster to tell the story about a scholarly government official, Chu Yuan. Then we displayed what Sachet was, passed it to the kids to smell, and asked some simple questions about the story. It is a little pity that the lesson we have prepared is for fourth graders. After storytelling, we wanted to teach them how to make Fragrant Sachets. We didn't go to grade four class so Sachets became gifts to teachers there.



Implementing Teaching Ideas

We really learn tons of useful teaching ideas there. Some ideas benefit for students' learning, such as layout of the classroom which is arranged appropriately, students' work on the wall, or the process of teaching on the posters which were my favorite one. Here are some teaching ideas that I would like to implement in my future teaching.

1. Express agenda of a day

It is important to have students understand what they are going to learn in one class. Not just displaying the topic of the lesson, we can list what we are going to do on the board. It is easy for students to gain a sense of safety from the class.

2. Alternative ways to do station work

Since we did not have sufficient time and enough resources to do station work in our normal class teaching, I did find it beneficial to students' input and output. We are lucky that we are going to have extra teaching time next semester. What I want to do is to design a one station work after three lessons. It could be a part of review activities. For the second graders, they are still working on alphabet learning and the phonics of CVC. We can design a

check list. When students finish their activity, they can move to the next one. For “read to self” and “read to someone,” we can prepare phonics book or sight word books for learners to read. For the “word work” activity, we prepare four to five sets of letters for students to manipulate the sounds. “Listen to reading,” is what I want to overcome. Listening is a major component in language learning for young learners. Unfortunately, some students have few opportunities to listen to the CD at home. What I want to do is to stretch their time of English listening. We can still have a place for students to listen to the CD, but not to interrupt other groups learning.

3. Soft speaking in English class

Some teachers will set the levels of volume when student talk in the classroom. Students are trained to speak in a soft voice in the classroom in order not to interrupt others. Educators there put a lot of emphases on characteristics of respect. Thus, when they are doing their station work, students are asked to respect others instead of interrupting others.

Conclusion

I feel grateful to meet principals and teachers in New Taipei City. The principals and teachers are glad to share their teaching philosophies, opinions toward curriculums, and teaching tips with others. During the educational trip, it is a suitable timing for me to reflect my teaching and some thoughts. By understanding the variables in classroom management, I can take some important opportunities to sharpen my skills as an English teacher. For me, the next step in summer vacation is to arrange my teaching procedures and have different teaching styles.

Reference

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