

THE BEGINNING OF LEARNING JOURNEY FROM IOWA A TWO-WEEK TRAINING TRIP AND THEN... LIN, YU-FEN, YUMIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

"I find the great thing in this world is not so much where we stand, as in what direction we are moving: To reach the port of heaven, we must sail sometimes with the wind and sometimes against it—but we must sail, and not drift, nor lie at anchor" (Oliver Wendell Holmes, 1858). As a teacher, those words are kept in my mind. I keep learning in order to teach my students to become lifelong learners. How lucky I am to get this wonderful opportunity to join this training trip to Iowa.



Following is something I had learned from this wonderful trip. The first part is my observation at Clay Elementary School, and the second is an experiment inspired by this trip in my class.

OBSERVATION AT CLAY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

1. THE DAILY 5, MANAGEMENT SYSTEM FOR READING WORKSHOP.

The goal of the daily 5 is to create engagement, which helps students learn by themselves. This is about creating internal motivation for reading and writing. There is an old saying, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This is a very important concept. Education should give students lifelong tools to deal with different situations during different life stages.

Engagement

Why is engagement important? According to the dictionary, "engage" is to succeed in attracting and keeping somebody's attention and interest, and "engagement" is an arrangement to marry somebody. You won't marry someone if you don't have commitment. The whole system is about how to attract students' interest and make them have fun during learning.

Implementation of the daily 5

The daily 5 is a kind of learning system in which "literacy blocks are broken into smaller blocks with a group mini lesson followed by a 20–30 minute work time. During the work time the kids choose one of the daily 5 rotations while the teacher meets with small groups (guided reading or strategy) or holds individual conferences" (Boushey & Monser, 2006).

The daily 5 rotation is: read to self, read to someone, work on writing, listen to reading and word work. There is no certain order or sequence. Each step only takes 20–30 minutes. Students can start at any point in the rotation.



The key point is that the teacher can guide each student individually according to his learning level while other students focus on their own tasks.

- ① Read to self: Students choose a good book which they are interested in, and find a place anywhere where they feel comfortable and can read uninterrupted, allowing them to concentrate on their book.
- ② Read to someone: This step is about feedback and team work. Learning from each other is a very important skill. When you read to someone, your partner will give you feedback and evaluation, which can improve your communication skills.
- ③ Work on writing: Students might be free to choose the writing topic and style, or the teacher might assign them to the students. Writing styles might include writing a letter, book or poem. Two rules will be applied: There is no walking during writing, and students must work quietly. One tip for students is to leave a blank line when they want to write a word, but aren't sure how to spell it correctly. Practicing writing every day can improve writing skills.
- ④ Listen to reading: Students are allowed to use audio equipment to learn by themselves.
- ⑤ Word work: There are support materials to help in learning word spelling. For example, whiteboards, magnetic letters, etc.

The daily 5 practical skills:

First, discuss the 5 steps with the students.

Second, choose one to three students to model appropriate and inappropriate behaviors for the rest of the class to be sure everyone understands clearly.

Third, start building the right habits with a three minute practice, then apply it to the daily routine after some practice.

Fourth, teach signals for students to return to the whole group, or go back to their initial stage. Tell students that "check in" means they should check how the activities go.

Finally, the teacher should review the lesson.

Remember to talk to students with a soft, steady voice and be patient. Kindly remind students of the rules when necessary, and encourage them when they are doing well.



2. ATTITUDE AND TEACHERS' ROLE.

Students at Clay are independent, respectful and behave well, which is quite different from our students in Taiwan.

The teachers' role is also different from my school. At my school, teachers play active roles in speaking or delivering knowledge to students. Students have fewer opportunities to choose what they are interested in. All students receive the same things without thinking. The pattern is just like watching TV, with the only difference being that teachers give students tests and grades.

At Clay, teachers put more effort into helping students develop themselves, providing appropriate assistance and guiding them when needed. This is a tailor-made way of learning, making variations according to different students' needs.

3. DAILY SCHEDULE AND SCHOOL POLICY.

Daily schedule

Morning greeting:

This is conducted in front of the school by the best-behaved students every morning. Only good students are eligible for this greeting job. Therefore, this is a good way to reward well-behaved students and also encourage the others.

Broadcast:

This is conducted by the school principal. The principal will broadcast special events or names of birthday boys/girls who can receive a birthday gift from the principal.

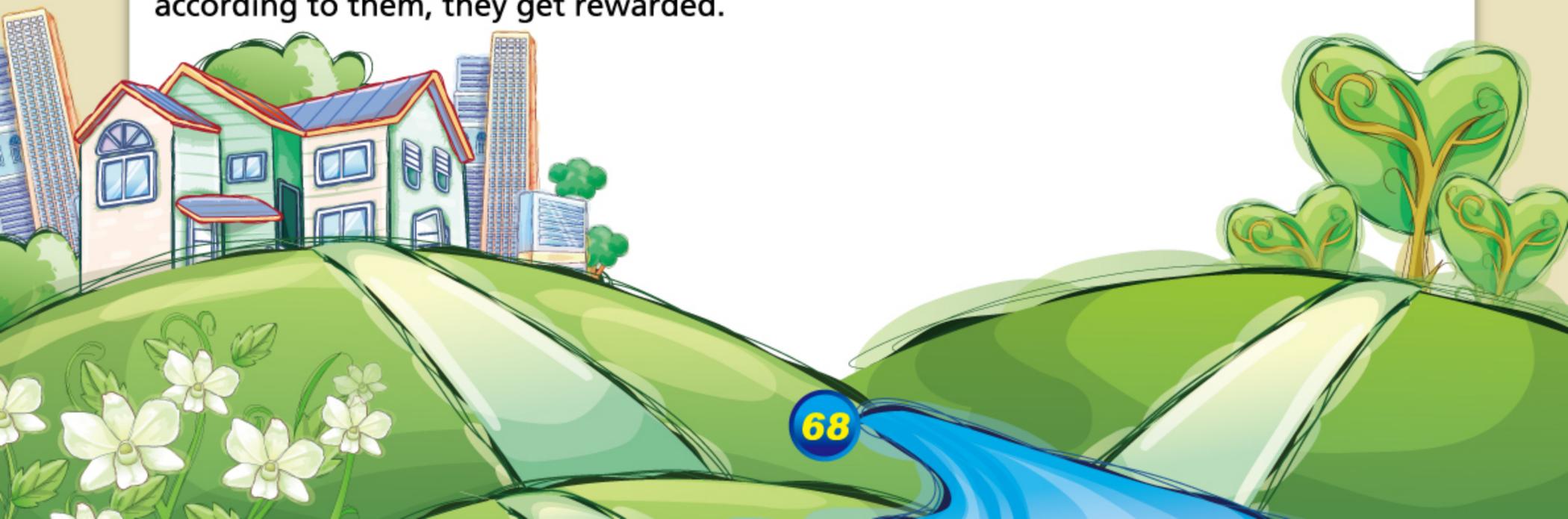
Only 15 minutes break during the morning class:

Even with only one fifteen-minute break during the morning, students are still in very good spirits, full of energy, and behave well and pay attention to what they are learning.

School policy

Schools in the same district are empowered to make their own school policy. At Clay, the school expresses clear behaviors/expectations of what students should do or should not do. The school delivers the message in different ways, such as having teachers keep reminding students, or by putting posters on classroom walls.

For students who behave according to school expectations, teachers will recognize these positive behaviors by giving them a reward ticket. Students can collect the tickets and be rewarded by having the chance to be one of the greeting angels, etc. The school sets up clear directions/goals for the students; when students act according to them, they get rewarded.



Leveled behaviors mean those behaviors which are not allowed to happen at school. Four kinds of leveled behaviors are addressed and they are leveled A, B, C and D.

A and B level behaviors are minor, unacceptable behaviors such as singing in class. Teachers should respond as suggested by the matrix, such as by using a visual cue.

C and D level behaviors are more serious behaviors, such as threatening others (one of the bullying behaviors). The teacher will handle this first and then involve school administrators on an as needed basis. Teachers are not left alone to deal with difficult behaviors.



The "Leveled Behaviors Matrix" is a table with four columns representing behavior levels: Level A (Minor), Level B (Minor), Level C (Serious), and Level D (Serious). Each column lists specific behaviors and provides corresponding teacher responses. For example, under Level A, behaviors like "Singing in class" and "Talking out of turn" are listed, with responses such as "Use a visual cue" and "Use a verbal cue".

"Leveled" Behaviors Matrix



The "Referral Form" is a document for recording student behaviors. It includes fields for Student Name, Grade, Date, and Time. It has sections for "Reporting Teacher" and "Person Referring", and a large area for "Behavior Description". There are also checkboxes for "Behavior" and "Referral" and a section for "Teacher's Comments".

Referral Form

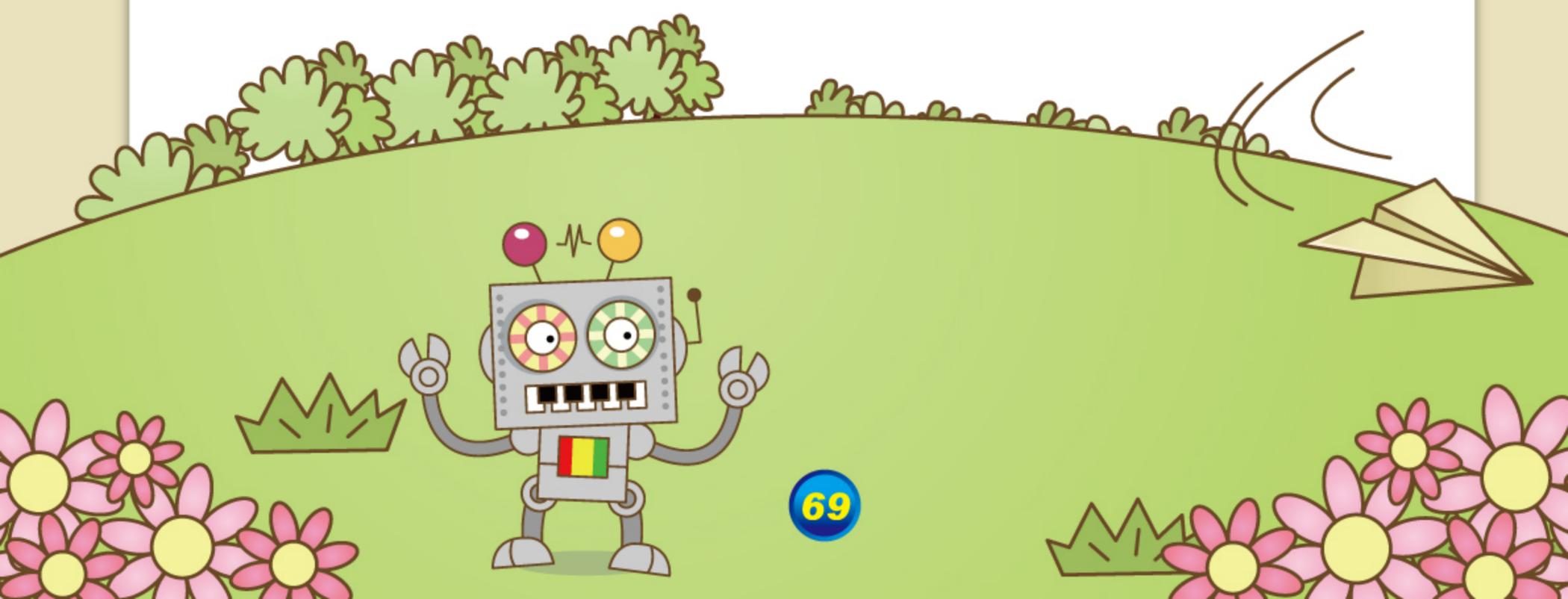
This is a very good standard procedure to remind and guide teachers how to react appropriately and involve the school when needed. At Clay, the school administration plays a more active role in education.

Referral Forms are used to record good or bad behaviors and give feedback from the school side. Behaviors, no matter good or bad, are documented on the referral form. This is a very good communication tool that can be used between teachers, the school administration, students and parents.

4. DECORATIONS

Decoration is also part of an important system to keep reminding students of things such as how to treat others, be helpful and be fair, etc. For example, the slogan of Clay is RAMS way, which stands for Respectful, Always responsible, Manners and Safety. This system also reminds students of policy, rules and goals because people forget things easily and need to keep being reminded.

Teachers decorate with learning strategies in the classroom to remind students. All words and material already learned is posted on a word wall to remind students as well. The students' work is posted in the front of the classroom. Every student can easily see and be reminded of these things.



Teaching calendar

Calendar time is useful to let students know what day today is and what the weather is. By doing this, students can become more familiar with verb tenses, or calculate how many days are left in the semester. This can help students to build up daily common sense, and allow students to easily know what they have learned during the semester.



Decorations at Clay Elementary School

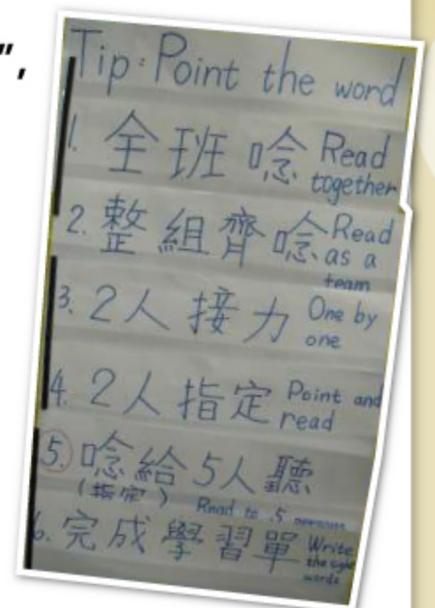
THE EXPERIMENT IN MY CLASS

The teaching way at Clay really inspired me, especially the daily 5. This skill focuses on making engagement happen and has students participate in more roles during the process. The most important result is that through this process students may become self-learners, and this is what we teachers want, don't we?

I decided to use the daily 5 in my class. Although there were only less than six weeks left until the end of the semester, I started with "read to someone", one part of the daily 5 which I think is easier, but important.

Why does read to someone matter? During "read to someone", not only does the reader have to read, but he also has to make the listeners understand. Through the reading and listening process, readers can get feedback from listeners, and monitor themselves by this. This is a two-way interaction.

The following is the steps of this experiment: First is grouping. I grouped six students together as a big team, and two students together as each other's learning partner. Those two students are not at the same level, and they are friends who would like to help each other. Second, find ten sight words from the textbook. The reason I chose these sight words is that they are "high-frequency" words. Knowing these words can help students when they read. Then write these ten words on the blackboard. Third, review these words. Fourth, write down the procedure of how to practice "read to someone", which is: read together, read as a team, read to each other, point and read, read to five persons and do the worksheet. Explain each of the six steps they need to do. Fifth, give each student a word card which includes the ten sight words. The most important thing is that students should point to the word as they are reading it.



The following explains the six steps of “read to someone” and gives some reasons why, then I also share some experiences and point out some problems that happened when my students did this type of learning.

1 Read together: During this step, maybe some students still can't read by themselves. By doing this, it can help these students to read.



2 Read as a team: When everyone reads together as a class, some students might try to skip reading because they might lack confidence in reading. During this step, when students are divided into a six-person group, the teacher can monitor every student easily. Although some students are reading as a team, the others still have to point to the word when their classmates read it. At the same time those students who can't read by themselves will try to listen carefully from others and learn.

3 Read to each other: Everyone can be a teacher to help their classmates. In a thirty- student, forty-minute class, there isn't enough time for the teacher to teach all students individually. But when every student helps each other, all the students can benefit.



4 Point and read: Students point to a word randomly to let their partner read it. This is more difficult than reading words one by one. When students point to one word and ask their partner to read it, they have to know the word they are pointing to in order to check if it's right or wrong.

5 Read to five persons: During the process, no matter reader or listener, everyone is practicing the words. Making everyone each other's teacher lets them help each other.



6 Do the worksheet: When students finish the five steps, they have to do a worksheet about sight words to review these words.



When we implement this kind of learning, there are some problems that need to be solved. First, some students are not familiar with the procedure and try to ask the teacher questions all the time. The teacher can direct these students to read the procedure on the blackboard. Second, "read to five persons" took too much time. It made it impossible for students to finish the worksheet on time. So, the best way is to adjust how many persons they need to read to according to how much time is left. Third, practicing is really important. I believe that when students are used to this procedure, the whole process will be smoother.

At my school, there is a learning gap situation. Some students learn English not only at school, but also after school at cram school. But other students have no chance to practice English outside of English class. It creates a learning gap. In this situation, and with limited time, the students' learning does need some help. Through this process, everyone becomes each other's teacher. It not only allows students to help others to succeed, but also helps themselves to succeed.

CONCLUSION

Teaching is a complicated and time consuming activity, therefore, teachers need more support from the school. At Clay, the school provides a good environment to foster pro-active attitudes in the students and gives them the ability to learn by themselves. Teachers make engagement happen during learning, while the school plays a greater role in teaching, developing standard procedures, policies, and strategies, and working closely with teachers to teach students.

It also places more emphasis on developing students' core behaviors such as a lifelong reading habit, treating others in the right way, and valuing different individual characteristics. Again, the old saying, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."

Students can easily know where they are in the semester according to their classroom decorations, which show how many days have passed, how much material has been learned, and of course, the goals. The clearer the picture students have of things, the more effectively they can learn. In addition to the above, students learn from each other through the daily 5. All the things I learned from this trip are really good ideas and really inspired me. I am appreciative for this opportunity and cherish this memory and experiences.

I would like to thank the Education Bureau of Taipei County for giving us this chance to visit the United States to learn new things. I would also like to thank Lea, the principal of Clay Elementary School, and the teachers there for giving us the opportunity to observe closely, letting us gather firsthand information about teaching, and answering all the questions we asked with patience. Thanks to Robin, the principal of Willowbrook Elementary School and our host, the sweetest and warmest person I've ever known. Thanks to all our partners on this trip and all who we met in the United States. I learned a lot from all of you and it wouldn't have been such a fantastic trip without all of you.

Reference:

Boushey, G., & Monser, J. (2006). *The Daily 5: Fostering literacy independence in the elementary grades*. Portland: Stenhouse Publishers.

