

WEEK 3: WEDNESDAY JUNE 4TH, 2014 – TUESDAY JUNE 10TH, 2014

This week has been fantastic and I have learnt so much from the Red Earth workshops, as well as during my second visit to the all girls primary school in Masindi. I am really looking forward to putting the new information that I've been taught into practice during my visits to the Link primary schools in Hoima and Buliisa over the next couple of weeks. Hopefully this will help the Link sponsored primary schools to improve on their standards of literacy within the primary 1 to primary 3 classes.

I spent two days this week attending the Red Earth workshops for primary 3 and primary 4 teachers in Masindi. The workshops were actually held in conference room at my Masindi accommodation so I felt right at home. Red Earth is currently working in Masindi schools to improve their standards of literacy teaching. Each of the Red Earth sponsored schools sent their primary 3 and primary 4 teachers as well as the head teacher to attend the workshop. I really liked the idea that the head teacher attended the workshops as well because it offers the primary 3 and primary 4 teachers with an extra level of support that is based within their school. This also helps with the supervision to ensure that the teachers are implementing the positive changes in literacy teaching within their primary school.



The first day of the Red Earth workshop focused on combining consonants and vowels to achieve a vowel sound so for example, ee (e), ay (a), ow (o) and igh (i). The facilitators of the workshop proposed the use of repetition, songs, handmade flashcards, pictures and other classroom games to keep the children engaged and to assist them in familiarising themselves with speaking, writing, and reading the letters. Each time a teacher introduces a new letter combination they should review the letters and their sounds as well as teach the correct pronunciation before moving onto a classroom activity involving the new letters or blending the letters together to create a word.

The facilitators demonstrated activities that the teachers could utilise within the classroom setting and we collectively practiced these amongst our groups and then each group created a lesson plan on how to teach the ee, ay, ow, and igh sounds and performed these for the facilitators and the other groups at the end of the

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workshop. Upon finishing the presentation each group then received feedback from the facilitators and other workshop participants, including what they enjoyed about the presentation and areas that could have been improved. I really appreciated that all groups received feedback at the conclusion of their presentation because it further allowed us to learn from one another and improve on our teaching techniques.

The Red Earth facilitators were very good at creating a setting that was conducive to learning and they ensure that this is mirrored in each of their sponsored schools. For example, the teachers were all situated in groups with a team name displayed on an empty plastic water bottle situated on their table. Then when someone answered a question correctly, completed an activity particularly well, or was helping another member of their group the entire group would receive a point. The points were made of cardboard and were cut into a small circle shape that would then be placed in the group's plastic water bottle. After each lesson the facilitators would then count all of the points for each group and display this on the chalkboard to demonstrate which groups were performing well.

By using a point system it enforces and encourages positive behaviour of students. If a group member behaves poorly during a lesson then the whole group loses a point. Therefore, the group members ensure that everyone within their team behaves well. However, if it was the same child behaving poorly each time the teacher would guide and counsel the pupil to end their disruptive behaviour. Through practicing these methods it eliminates teachers and class monitors using the cane as a means of discipline.



Furthermore, by grouping students of varying levels of ability together as well as having a mix of boys and girls in each group, unless of course it is a single sex school, this allows the students to learn from one another. It also helps increase their literacy abilities because they are able to share answers, sound out letters, and read sentences together, which strengthens their confidence and teaches them the importance of teamwork and helping one another.

One of the main concerns of putting students in groups was the teacher's fear of being unable to regain control of the classroom if the students were working on a group assignment within each of their groups. However, Red Earth has the teachers say 1,2,3 eyes on me and then the students respond 1,2, eyes on you and I

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have observed this in various classrooms and it works really well with regaining the students attention after a group exercise. I greatly enjoyed the first day of the teacher training workshop and found myself really looking forward to day two.

The second day of the Red Earth workshop focused on the importance of reading and how to make it an enjoyable experience for the students and to emphasise having a lesson each day where the primary focus is on reading and building the students' ability to comprehend a story. Red Earth gave each of the schools a basket of books with roughly 25 books that the primary 3 and primary 4 teachers will utilise when teaching their literacy lessons. From the basket of books each teacher selected one book and created a lesson plan, which they will teach to their students the following week. It was nice to see a variety of activities present within each of the participant's lesson plans.



Some of the teachers decided to use sequencing and created sentences pertaining to the main themes of the story and will have their students identify in which order the events happened to ensure that they were able to follow along with the story. Creating character profiles was another popular activity, which consists of writing the characters name at the top of a piece of paper and then the students can draw what the character looks like and write the characters features, personality, and their likes and dislikes. Furthermore, reading a story with varying voices and actions was another method in their lesson plans, which keeps the pupils engaged in the story. Another option was to have the children role play the story after listening to it. All of these activities assist in nurturing a love of reading and were demonstrated by the facilitators during the training workshop.

I greatly enjoyed my time spent attending the Red Earth workshops and it was a wonderful opportunity to then spend the following day at the all girls school seeing the lessons taught in the Red Earth workshop being implemented effectively in the classrooms. Peter and I attended the primary 1,2, and 3 literacy lessons and observed the activities and techniques being used by the teachers. The teachers used a variety of methods to teach the letters and sounds consisting of demonstrating how to read and write the letters, having the students read and write the letters, and then making words with the letters and matching the words with pictures drawn on the chalkboard.

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One of the teachers was teaching the parts of the plant and actually brought in a plant that was found on the school grounds and demonstrated the various parts and subsequently had the students do the same afterwards. I really liked that she used a plant that the students know and see everyday on the school grounds to help them familiarise themselves with the parts of the plant. Furthermore, in all of the lower level primary classrooms all of the students were organised in groups and had a team name with the teacher tallying their points for good behaviour and participation on the chalkboard. Each teacher also had a strong command of the classroom and used the 1,2,3 eyes on me method to regain the students attention after completing a group exercise.

It was truly fantastic to be able to see some of the techniques we learned in the workshop being implemented in the classrooms. Furthermore, seeing the success that the teachers are having at the all girls school gives me great hope in Link implementing a similar style of teaching and practice within their primary schools. Next week, Peter and I are visiting the Link schools in Hoima and Buliisa along with other Link staff to reassess how the schools are performing after the Link teacher training workshop that was held in Hoima a few weeks ago. The Link staff will assist and support the teachers in creating a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. This includes putting the pupils desks into groups, giving the students groups team names, and introducing the system of points for participation and good behaviour within the classroom.