

Sarah Loeb, USA

I am coming from Brooklyn, New York. There I worked in a progressive middle school in Kindergarten to Third Grade classrooms. I recently received my masters degree in education and was enjoying my life in Brooklyn but was longing for a change. When I connected with an alumnus from my masters program about her experience in Auroville and at the Aikiyam School, I knew I had to come and be a part of this community. It is hard to believe that my time working in the Aikiyam School is over. The teachers here have welcomed me wholeheartedly and the children have been so loving and engaged in all of the work I have done with them. It has been a joyful, active, and deeply gratifying experience to be a part of the staff at Aikiyam. I have supported teachers in the Kindergarten to third grade with lesson planning, curriculum development, and English literacy. I helped teachers think of creative ways of teaching and support them in any areas they need such as classroom management, accommodating students, and making sense of the CBSE requirements. I have also enjoyed working in the library with Vincent. There, I have organized the English books into categories so that teachers and students can find and use books more easily. Finally, I have done work on closely observing children using the Prospect Descriptive Review Process to better understand the needs of children. Sharing the review with the teachers was meant to encourage more close observations of children in the future.

Aikiyam is a place where I was able to follow my own passions of supporting teachers and bringing different curriculum ideas to the table. I was welcomed to bring my strengths and interests and see where it could go. Amongst one of the exciting things I have worked with teachers on is what we call "Choice Time." During this time children can choose their activity. Teachers preplan the station options and make sure to have varied materials. This choice time can include puzzles, bookmaking, story reflections, science experiments, stitching, painting, and much more. Based on the children's interests, teachers and I tailored the choices to suit each group. During the water study in the second grade, we created a Choice Time of water themed stations. They experimented with sound and water, measurement, clay and water, temperature, bubbles, and artistic reflection. The teachers and I have had such fun working together to create these stations for children as we have noticed they are engaged and learning so intensively during these kinds of lessons. Furthermore, this kind of teaching allows for closer observation of children and opens a window into the child, their interests, and how they are learning.

I have also enjoyed the opportunity to work with students and teachers on reading groups and talking about story. Each morning I worked with a class by reading books in small groups with children. This direct engagement in English stories has been a wonderful way to develop comprehension and spoken English. Teachers have been very interested in incorporating this kind of reading in their daily routines and it has been a goal of mine to make the library more accessible to teachers and students so that they can more easily find books of interest to them and bring them into their classrooms. I have loved working at Aikiyam as it has been a place for me to learn and grow in my practice as a teacher. I am so grateful to have met these wonderful people and collaborate with teachers who are so open and interested in new things. The connections I have made here will last a lifetime and I am incredibly thankful to have been invited to be a part of this beautiful community. It has been a true pleasure.