

Kindergarten Update - January 29, 2010

In this week's newsletter, I am addressing differentiation. When we have a wide range of learners, learning styles, and abilities in the classroom, I am constantly developing my lessons in a way that meets the needs of the individual learners. In literacy, for example, my reading groups are differentiated by ability, depending on the reading level at which the children are currently performing. This is a flexible arrangement; as children progress, I shuffle the groups to keep the challenge at a "just right" level for each child. I want each child in a group to feel like they are making progress; that the books are not too easy (so they will be bored), or too hard (so they will be frustrated). In math, I mix up the groups in different ways. Sometimes I group by ability, so that the children who are doing higher math operations are challenged together, and the ones who need more support in basic skills are grouped together. I also sometimes put mixed-ability groups together, because I like to encourage the children who are a little ahead to help their friends. Teaching a skill to a friend is a good way to reinforce it, and it helps them to think about the process. Example: a child rolls a 5 and a 6 on two dice, and says the total is 11. When asked how he arrived at that, often the child will say "I just knew it." But it's a bit more challenging when I ask, "HOW did you know it?" The child then has to think about the combinations, and tell me something like: "I know that 6 plus 6 is 12, so 5 is one less than 6, so 11 is one less than 12." Or, "I can use 5 fingers plus 5 fingers, which is 10, plus one more finger is 11." Sometimes the differentiation comes in the way we ask children to think about what they are doing. Keeping the curriculum challenging and interesting for all children, no matter what their learning style, is something teachers do every day.

Speaking of teachers, I have been out of the classroom a few times this month, observing other Kindergarten teachers at the other elementary schools. Ms. Jay granted me this professional development opportunity, and it has been inspiring! Teachers get their best ideas from other teachers, and I have picked up some good ones from my colleagues. My favorite so far is "The Tools of Good Readers" chant. We have sung this all week, so ask your child to sing it for you! I can thank Bethany Weart of Loring School for that gem. I am hoping other teachers will also have a chance to observe their colleagues; it benefits both the students and the teachers.

(Continued on other side)

SUPPLIES: Since we don't have any birthdays in February, could the June and July birthday children bring in the following supplies? 1 roll quality paper towels, 1 container baby wipes, 1 container disinfectant wipes, 1 box Kleenex, and 1 container of hand sanitizer. Thank you so much!

And thank you to all who took the time to complete the midyear parent survey. I appreciated all the great feedback, and the helpful comments.

It has been a regular week, full of reading, writing, math, science, and cooperative & engaging play times. The children continue to impress me with their artistry, engineering skills, and curiosity. If you are going to Movie Night tonight, have fun, and have a great weekend!

Ellie Garvey