

Preschool Themes Newsletter – August 2014

Hello Everyone,

Brr it's been freezing this month and oh so wet and windy. At least we are past mid-winter and it has to improve from here on. I hope you all had a good rest over the break. We had so many children either away or ill at school (and equally as many teachers ill) resulting in only 14 children being at school. This was fantastic and allowed me plenty of opportunities to try out some of the more special small group activities I struggle to do if I have to supervise a bigger group. So I promised you a bonanza newsletter this month and you have it. Enjoy trying out some of the ideas. We had loads of fun doing them.



New Zealand citizenship

As some of you know, I am now living in New Zealand. We obtained our official citizenship last month. School did a special mat time for me and the children helped to make me a special hat to wear for my mat time. They even drew some Kiwi birds which is the NZ national bird. It provided an opportunity to discuss what being a citizen is and to look at the world globe to see where South Africa is. The children all sang the National Anthem for me. It was made extra special to have my daughter visiting me that day and she joined me at mat time at school. Including family is a very big and essential focus in preschools in New Zealand. Since I am a part time teacher I work across all the age groups so the whole centre was invited to join in this special celebration. BUT I am still a South African at heart and my heart will always be with uplifting preschool education in South Africa.



As you may notice we all wear a "uniform" to school. Initially I was not keen on this idea, but it's great to know what to wear to school each day and it certainly identifies who the staff members are. It also saves your own clothes from getting stained and marked. I even have pants I only wear to school otherwise everything gets covered in paint and food dye which doesn't always wash out. We have golf shirts with the schools logo on them. We have a choice of 3 colours and we can wear anything else with the shirt as long as it's respectful and professional i.e. no suggestive clothing etc. In winter we pop on a polo neck under the shirt to keep warm and we also have a fleece jacket for outdoor wear. We all have a name badge with our name and a picture of our choice. Mine is a cat as I love cats. This clothing is supplied at no cost to us as one of the perks. If they become scruffy we just exchange them for clean new ones. How do you feel about a uniform? Do any of you have any comments on this? Just for your interest all the staff has the same hot lunch that is served to the children and we get a mid-morning snack with our tea breaks. Quite spoiled!



New theme manual

The new theme 'under the ground' is still under construction. Family time took over.... I was sent this awesome creative activity by Brenda Gaille which she has kindly allowed me to share with you.

This is an example of a creative work we did with our grade 00. We painted the back ground for the mole and when that was dry we painted the mole. For the part under the ground I drew the tunnels, the children painted inside the tunnels using a light brown paint and around

the tunnels we sponge painted using a dark brown paint. The children then coloured and cut out the bunny. For the ants we used finger prints and for the worms we painted squiggles. We found old calendars that were larger than an A3. This exercise took us the whole week but the children coped well and enjoyed this activity.

Teachable moments

Teachable moments are moments or opportunities in the school or environment that occur without planning and provide an ideal opportunity for some learning e.g my citizenship. We have a huge on-ramp bridge being built right outside school for a new highway bypass that is being built. It's a bit sad actually as we were a semi-rural school until they decided to build this road. But nothing we can do about it so we are making the best of the many learning opportunities it is presenting to the children. We took the children out to observe the big dumper trucks loading and unloading soil and to draw what they see. We had clip boards and took some big white boards for the children to lean on. I then extended the opportunity by setting out shapes to collage the trucks.

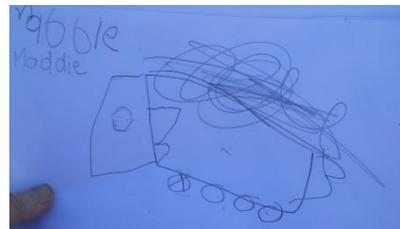
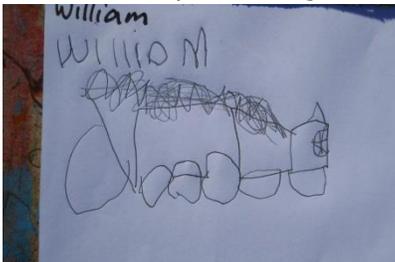


My frustration about teaching in NZ is that they do not do formal themes with the children. If this was done in SA the teacher would/should have had a detailed discussion in the language mat time about the trucks, the shapes they see, the position of the wheels to the

truck and the cab to the dumper section, counted the wheels, noted where the driver sits, where the sand is etc and hopefully looked at some pictures and a play dumper truck **BEFORE** taking the children out to observe the trucks and then draw them. A discussion also provides opportunity for integration across other learning areas and for the learning to be relevant to their environment. But this does not happen so the children were just asked to draw what they see.



Trucks and road building extended into the children's play in the sand area. These pictures are done by children about to go to school and are quite good, BUT I was sitting with them and discussing the trucks. Unfortunately I did not get more of the other 'scribbles'.



Collage trucks using coloured paper shapes and sand



You will need:

- Coloured paper shapes - rectangles and circles
- Glue and paper
- Sandpit sand
- Wax crayons

The children arranged the shapes into a truck and pasted them. I gave each child a small lid of sand and they collaged the sand onto the truck. Extra details such as the driver and surrounds were added using wax crayons.



Notes:

- Large sheets of paper work best
- Strictly control the sand! Give the children a small container of sand and have a large flat container to collect the excess sand.
- Encourage the children to use a lot of glue to paste the sand.
- Preferably no scissors unless you change the lesson for the older learners so that they cut their own shapes.
- Younger learners will cut all your shapes into small pieces.
- I prefer not to add painting to this activity as the children end up painting all over the paper and shapes.

Art ideas



Glad wrap painting

You will need:

- Paper – it doesn't have to be black but it should be smallish
- Thick paint preferably in colours that mix to create a new colour
- Paint brushes
- Glad wrap
- Optional – stapler



The children dropped/painted blobs of paint onto the paper close to each other. I covered the paper with glad wrap and then they gently used their fingers and hands to blend the colours together. It is a strange texture which the children really enjoyed.

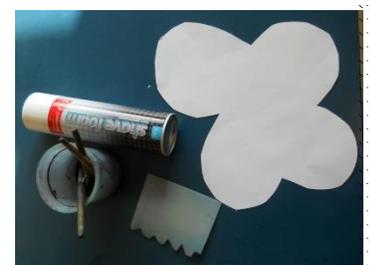
Notes:

- It is best to use slightly firmer paper to hold the weight of the paint and the glad wrap. Black paper worked really well for colour contrast and weight
- The glad wrap needs to be quite a bit larger than the paper. I turned it over and folded it over the edge before the children squished the paint. You can staple this in place, but I found it stuck to itself.
- This needs to be a small group activity
- Some children struggled to paint thick blobs of paint - they just kind of painted instead of doing blobs. You need blobs otherwise there is no paint to squish.



Shaving cream marbled painting

I loved the process and the end effect of this process art activity. This is definitely a small group activity as you need to supervise all the time. There are a few things I learnt while doing this which will make it easier for you. You really do need to use thick slightly glossy paper like posters are printed on. I cut the paper into shapes. You can cut shapes after the painting has dried which may actually be easier. We squirted some shaving cream onto the table, added some big splashes of diluted food colouring or food dye using a thick paint brush, swirled the colours with our fingers and then put the paper gently face down. The children rubbed the paper into the shaving cream. It needs to be well rubbed otherwise you end up with areas that do not have shaving cream on them, so it's actually a little more than gentle! I helped them with this part to make sure all the edges and the centre were



covered. It's enough when the shaving cream is pushed out to the sides of the paper. Gently lift the paper off the shaving cream, place it onto a clean area with the shaving cream facing up. Using a piece of plastic cut from a milk bottle, the children gently scrape off and removed the excess shaving cream leaving behind a beautiful marbled effect.

Some things I would change: Probably easier to lift off a small piece of paper that has not been cut into a shape as it curls and is tricky to put down safely to clean off the excess shaving cream. The shape of the flowers and butterflies curled a lot hence the reason for saying cut shapes when it's dry. I used a paint brush to swirl the colours towards the end as it was cleaner. I also put more dark coloured food colouring onto the shaving cream and this gave a nicer end product. And swirl less. You need a towel handy to wipe messy hands.



At the end I let the children 'enjoy' the remaining shaving cream. It's a great 'clean, messy play activity as it washes off really easily especially for the toddlers. And they love the smell and texture.

This example of the heart was the revised method and you can see the colours are more vibrant and I think nicer. I suggest no more than 4 colours and yellow is very effective.

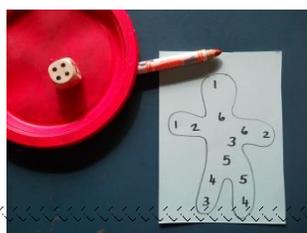


Counting activity



With all the rainy days, we have had to come up with fun and new ideas to keep the children busy indoors. I drew these number people cards quickly with two numbers of each number, but ended up adding in more as they wanted to continue playing once their cards were filled. I like to use a plate for throwing the dice as this keeps it contained and stops the children being silly throwing the dice all over the place. Silly children were removed from the game and asked to play elsewhere. This quickly reminded the children to be cooperative! To begin with the children were asked to identify the numbers so I was sure they knew what the numerals stood for. Each child had a turn to throw the dice and count the dots. Then all the children in the group looked for the corresponding number on their person and

either coloured it or circled it. The next child had a turn and so we continued until all the numbers were covered. Some children fell behind with covering their numbers as they were distracted but we just went ahead. I debated using counters to cover the numbers, but they move too easily and get bumped so there is always a drama going on about that. They were so quick to draw and you could keep a master to photocopy more if you needed some. Another option is to put the person paper into a plastic sleeve and use water soluble pens to cover the numbers which can be wiped off once completed. The game can be played again (even independently or in small groups in the educational toy area). Children love playing with a dice and doing what seems like big school work.



I contemplated turning this into a 'race' by having each child cover the number on the dice they threw, but it takes way too long and the children get bored and distracted waiting for their turn. By allowing them to all colour the same number on the dice, they all remained focussed – well mostly that is.....

Interesting article

I have added this interesting article on the starting age of school. Once again a reminder to keep your programmes play based and not to rush into worksheets etc. In New Zealand the children go to a new entrants class when they turn five and move to year 1 when they are school ready BUT this is at a primary school so it's formal from 5 years !!

Regards
Karin



Earlier this month the "Too Much, Too Soon" campaign made headlines with a letter calling for a change to the start age for formal learning in schools. Here, one of the signatories, Cambridge researcher David Whitebread, from the [Faculty of Education](#), explains why children may need more time to develop before their formal education begins in earnest.

In the interests of children's academic achievements and their emotional well-being, the UK government should take this evidence seriously

David Whitebread

In England children now start formal schooling, and the formal teaching of literacy and numeracy at the age of four. A recent letter signed by around 130 early childhood education experts, including myself, published in the Daily Telegraph (11 Sept 2013) advocated an extension of informal, play-based pre-school provision and a delay to the start of formal 'schooling' in England from the current effective start until the age of seven (in line with a number of other European countries who currently have higher levels of academic achievement and child well-being).

This is a brief review of the relevant [research evidence](#) which overwhelmingly supports a later start to formal education. This evidence relates to the contribution of [playful experiences](#) to children's development as learners, and the consequences of starting formal learning at the age of four to five years of age

There are several strands of evidence which all point towards the importance of play in young children's development, and the value of an extended period of playful learning before the start of formal schooling. These arise from anthropological, psychological, neuroscientific and educational studies. Anthropological studies of children's play in extant hunter-gatherer societies, and evolutionary psychology studies of play in the young of other mammalian species, have identified play as an adaptation which evolved in early human social groups. It enabled humans to become powerful learners and problem-solvers. Neuroscientific studies have shown that playful activity leads to synaptic growth, particularly in the frontal cortex, the part of the brain responsible for all the uniquely human higher mental functions.

In my own area of experimental and developmental psychology, studies have also consistently demonstrated the superior learning and motivation arising from playful, as opposed to instructional, approaches to learning in children. Pretence play supports children's early development of symbolic representational skills, including those of literacy, more powerfully than direct instruction. Physical, constructional and social play supports children in developing their skills of intellectual and emotional 'self-regulation', skills which have been shown to be crucial in early learning and development. **Perhaps most worrying, a number of studies have documented the loss of play opportunities for children over the second half of the 20th century and demonstrated a clear link with increased indicators of stress and mental health problems.**

Within educational research, a number of longitudinal studies have demonstrated superior academic, motivational and well-being outcomes for children who had attended child-initiated, play-based pre-school programmes. One particular study of 3,000 children across England, funded by the Department for Education themselves, showed that an extended period of high quality, play-based pre-school education was of particular advantage to children from disadvantaged households.

Studies have compared groups of children in New Zealand who started formal literacy lessons at ages 5 and 7. Their results show that the early introduction of formal learning approaches to literacy does not improve children's reading development, and may be damaging. By the age of 11 there was no difference in reading ability level between the two groups, but the children who started at 5 developed less positive attitudes to reading, and showed poorer text comprehension than those children who had started later. In a separate study of reading achievement in 15 year olds across 55 countries, researchers showed that there was no significant association between reading achievement and school entry age.

This body of evidence raises important and serious questions concerning the direction of travel of early childhood education policy currently in England. In the interests of children's academic achievements and their emotional well-being, the UK government should take this evidence seriously.



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- See more at: <http://www.cam.ac.uk/research/discussion/school-starting-age-the-evidence#sthash.JFnid9dy.dSIiefS.dpuf>