

Preschool Themes Newsletter – November 2015

Hello Everyone,

Here we are once again at the end of another year. I am sure it felt like just the other day that you were welcoming the children to your class on the first day of the year. I am always amazed at how much progress and development takes place over a year and of course how much they all grow.

This will be the last newsletter for the year. I will resume the newsletter in January. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your support and for all the many positive comments I have received from so many of you. I am happy knowing that we share a passion and commitment for developing our little people.

This is a bumper newsletter as I have been at school a lot this past while and also just because I have so many fun ideas to share with you.

Christmas ideas

Please visit the pinterest boards for a whole lot of super fun ideas and activities to try out over the festive weeks leading up to the end of the year.

<https://www.pinterest.com/kstedall/christmas-school/>



I am passionate about Christmas as I belong to a group that puts on a two week Christmas Festival and all the funds we raise go to charity so you will see several personal Christmas boards. Enjoy them too.

Take some time to look at the different boards I have created including one for birthday charts

<https://www.pinterest.com/kstedall/birthday-charts/>

and classroom ideas for next year

<https://www.pinterest.com/kstedall/classroom-and-behavior-management/>

Art activities – some of my frustrations with teaching in NZ

I have had several times this past month that my creative lesson has not gone quite according to the plan in my head. One thing I always did when teaching in SA was to try out the creative activity myself or at least to think each step through very carefully. This is not always possible in NZ (too complicated to explain why here!) This process can either make or break your lesson. An example is the egg box bee construction I presented to the children. I had to complete the lesson in one day when it really needs two to three days for the end product to be nice. So of course after painting the egg box body with the yellow paint and then having to paint the black stripes straight away on wet paint was a disaster waiting to happen as the black paint ran into the wet yellow paint and I had a big mess! Of course if the paint had been allowed to dry it would be fine.

That was only one part of the lesson that wasn't going according to plan. But in the end the collage and construction looked very nice.

This also leads me to an aspect of teaching in New Zealand that absolutely frustrates me beyond words!!

Firstly there is no theme. I can live with that. But because there is no language discussion on the theme topic before moving to the creative activity, the children do not have the knowledge to make the creative activity successful. A perfect example of this was the wings of the bees.

When I asked the children to draw the veins on the wings of the bees they just drew pictures!! They had no knowledge of how the veins on the wings appeared. Some children did not



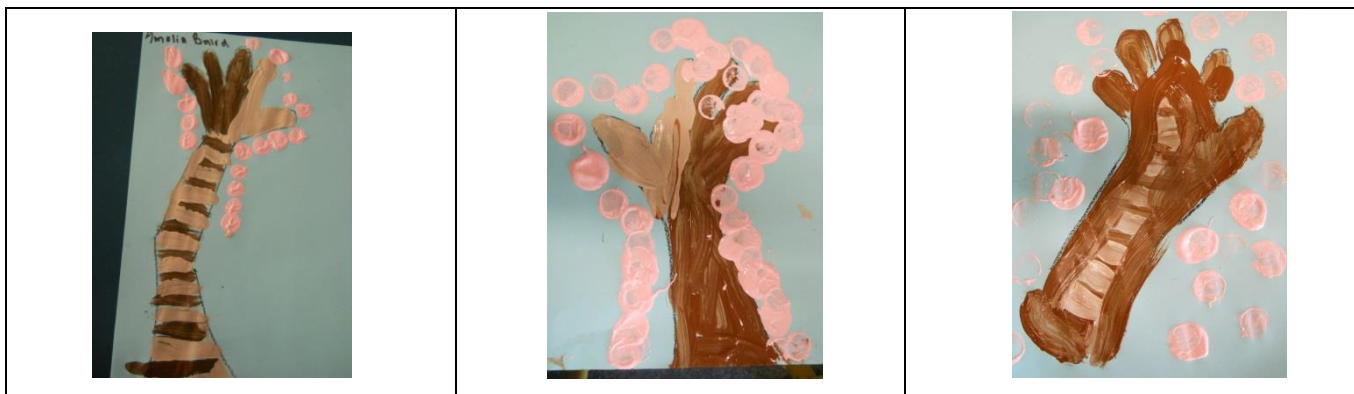
know about the colour of a bee. And to add to my frustration they use an open art area philosophy in NZ so you have children coming to the creative area over a period of time which means you either have to show them individually or let them see what the others are doing. In SA I liked being able to show the children what was expected of them at the main creative table before they commenced with the activity.

Developing school readiness through creative activities

Many people will feel differently to me about this and feel that the creative area should be just that – free creativity. I fully support opportunities for that or a special table for such like activities but for me the creative activity is one of the best times to develop some of the perceptual skills (readiness) needed for formal learning. It's an opportunity for the children to apply knowledge, follow instructions, remember a sequence of actions, plan, space the materials, develop small and large muscles, develop eye hand co-ordination, share, chatter, learn some maths concepts, persevere to complete the task and to feel a sense of pride and satisfaction with their art work.

BUT within the structure of the main creative activity you need to allow for the children to be creative and to implement their own ideas. We are not after perfect one of a kind photocopied art works.

Here are a few examples to demonstrate the above point. We all made blossom trees.



And while I am on a rave it is culturally unacceptable to use toilet rolls in the NZ classroom so I have to use alternative materials when I know a toilet roll will be perfect for the task. So I was not allowed to use toilet rolls for the bee body but had to resort to using 3 indents of an egg box. Have you ever tried to glue an egg box to paper- there is nothing for it to connect to the paper with!!! Unless you stuff it with some tissues first.

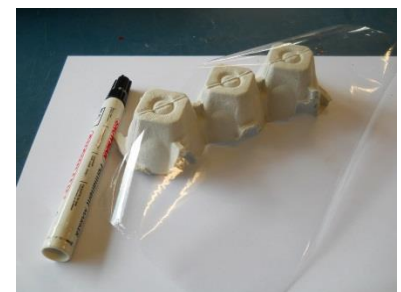
Opportunities

I must add that I have used many of my "flop" lessons to create new lessons so something positive does come from them. There is learning even in the flop lessons so don't let them worry you. As long as you do some self-reflection to make improvements for the next time or better still make immediate changes if you can.

Bees and flowers using egg boxes and paint

For this activity you need

- Toilet rolls although I used egg boxes
- Paint – yellow and black
- Paint - flower colours (or use wax crayons and draw the flowers) I added white to my paint so we had pastel colours
- Cellophane and black marking pens – permanent otherwise it rubs off or black wax crayon will be fine too
- Glue



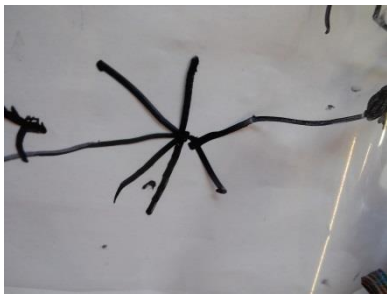
It's best to paint the egg box or toilet roll yellow first and allow it to dry. Also paint your flowers and leave to dry so when you paste the bee body it's not a mess. Draw the veins on the cellophane wings (rectangle works well) using a permanent black koki pen or a black wax crayon. Twist the wings in the centre Paste the wings to the body using glue or sticky tape. Paste the body to the flowers and then add the black stripes last of all using black paint and thin brushes. This activity is best suited to the older children. I have put in some photos of the art works made by some three year olds who came along well near the end of the time and were adamant they wanted to make a bee but I could not explain to them what to do. So we got pink and black bees and they were pleased with their efforts.



3 1/2 year old who came along at the end of the activity and was adamant to make her bee even though the time was up and most of the materials packed away

Tui is 4 1/2 but not as school ready as she should be.

Pictures instead of veins



These three examples show that although the children were all painting flowers the end products reflect each child's creativity.



Extension – drawing on cellophane

The children really enjoyed drawing on the cellophane with koki pens so the next day I put that out as a free drawing activity and turned the negative into a positive activity.



Free choice time – but the main creative activity is not optional in my classroom

I may be treading on toes here but I feel very strongly about this issue which is explained in this lesson. Technically indoor free choice time should be such that the children choose where they want to play between the indoor play areas. In NZ all day is free choice time so many children never come to the creative area and likewise many children never play outdoors. Both are a problem for me.

Mostly it's the children who really need to develop their skills in these areas that avoid the area. After all if you are not a good runner would you sign up for a marathon!!

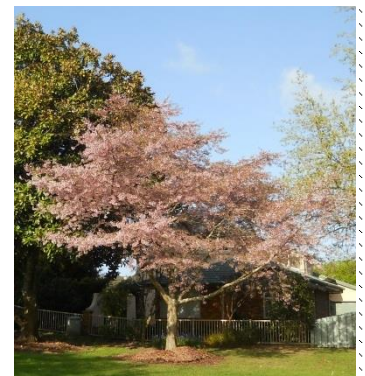
I feel that every child should do the main creative activity each day. There should be no choice in the matter. I even went as far as using a check list to ensure that every child did do the activity. I used to use labels to write their names on and I could see from the names left on the labels who still needed to come to the main table. In this way I was sure that every child was getting some practice at developing their skills. It is very easy to not notice who has or has not been to the main creative table as it's a busy time in the classroom.

It is also a wonderful opportunity to do some incidental observations.

In the next activity I had a few children come to the table that rarely do any creative activities and it clearly showed in their skills.

Spring blossom trees using hands and cork printing

I know spring is long over for you in SA but it only comes to NZ in October. All the trees around us were in full bloom so I thought it a good opportunity to make spring blossom trees. This lesson would be just as effective if you used it to make summer trees using half corks for leaves or cutting leaves and pasting them instead of creating blossoms. If you did it for autumn the children could paste real leaves (summer too)



I particularly want to point out some assessment issues from this lesson.

I will paste a few pictures to explain this activity. I did have 3 1/2 years to 5 year olds doing this activity which also shows how it can be done with a variety of age groups.



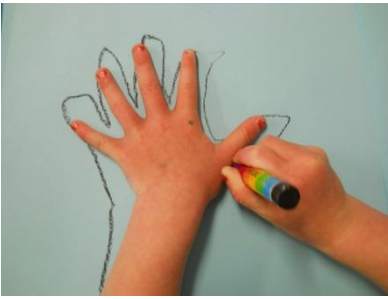
The children laid their hand and forearm on the paper and traced around it using a black crayon to create the tree trunk. I had to help some children but most managed on their own. It's good team work for them to help each other with this part of the lesson.



The children painted the tree trunk using a few different tones of brown (I added white and some black paint to the brown paint)
The blossoms were printed using pink paint and corks.

I used A3 blue paper but I think it would be fine on A4 white paper too. This activity proved to be very popular and I had some children make three trees.





I placed the paint on the left side of the child so she was required to cross her midline while printing. This is a very important skill for being able to write across a page

Note: No corks then use milk lids or fingers

Assessment of creative work

The child on the left is younger than the child on the right. While I don't advocate for comparing learners you do need to have something as a baseline to work with and it's clear to me that Jayden has some potential learning problems. Mya on the far right is only 3 years old and this is end product is normal for her age.





This child has already gone to school so she is 6 years old. I know she has learning problems from observing her while at our preschool. If you compare the two end products it says a lot about her skills. She has a vision problem but mom doesn't enforce her to wear her spectacles!

This child is 4 years old. I gave her no help what so ever

He is 4 years old but does very little art. As you can see he has turned his page upside down

This brings me back to my earlier point! Would these pictures have been a better representation of a blossom tree if they had looked at a tree, seen the blossoms and had some discussion about where blossoms are found etc? From my teaching experience I know the answer is yes. It would have been a great experiment to get the children to do this activity, then do a mat time with tree and blossom observations and knowledge and then to repeat the activity. Obviously that is not going to happen.

Extension on this idea

I had some big pieces of felt like fabric I was given. We got the children to paint the felt using the brown paint which I then cut into a tree trunk and tree branches and attached them to the window. The children stood on chairs and hand printed the blossoms on the tree. I rather liked the end product and the children had fun.



Printing and construction to make a clown/party hat

This was another activity that did not quite go according to plan. The items we were printing with were much too big for the size of the paper, but in the end the end product was good.

I cut up a pool noodle which I bought at a charity shop. It cuts nicely with a sharp kitchen knife. I cut some of the shapes into smaller shapes. The hat was also a cone shape so plenty of incidental maths learning happened in this lesson. The hat is made from half a circle.

The children printed the half circle with the shapes and once dried I stapled the paper into a cone shape, punched some holes and added some string.

Notes:

- Some children used the pool noodle shapes to paint with instead of printing. This is not really an issue unless you specifically want them to see the shapes.
- The pool noodle shapes were too big for the small half circles. It work better with other printing items such as Lego or lids or use bigger paper
- Place the paint on flat lids. I used 2 litre ice cream lids
- It's time consuming putting the hats together. The hats must be dry to do this
- It would be better to use the pool noodles on large sheets of newspaper
- Hats are best made from light weight card rather than paper



<p>Smearing the paint instead of printing</p>	<p>The end product</p>	<p>We had all made our hats so I set out larger paper for the children to enjoy printing. This is suitable for the younger children.</p>

Free drawing- Isla drew a giraffe



A few other ideas



Some boys were making poor choices in their outdoor play so they were sent inside to the play dough table to calm down. Placing match sticks to create a cage around the dinosaur kept the boys happily occupied and out of mischief. I tried putting the matchsticks on the left side so they could practice some midline crossing but he could not cope and I watched with interest as he picked up the matchstick in his left hand and passed it to his right hand before placing it in the playdough. He shows several other learning problems.

Game – who's hiding under the blanket?

The children love this game. All the children sit in a circle and close their eyes. One child is chosen by the teacher to hide under the blanket. The children in the circle ask the child under the blanket questions to try and identify who the person is. We had some amusing questions such as do you have a bike, do you have lawn mower... but we guided them back to ask questions such as are you a boy, a girl, 3 years old, etc.



Group fence painting for the toddlers

The teacher secured a board to the fence and attached sheets of paper for the children to do free painting.



Happy teaching and hang in there. It's nearly the end of the year.

Regards
Karin