

# Confessions of a Kindergarten Teacher

Weeks Four and Five

By Trish Prentice

It is the fourth and fifth weeks of school and we're busy people! Read to Self and Word Work have become routine while we add Work on Writing to our rotations. Now we are up to three rotations! We've learned how to book shop and share our journals with the class. Daily 5 is alive and well in the Prentice Puppy classroom!

Here are some highlights...

## **Prentice Pleasure Reading Program:**

The students are beginning to take books home to read with their parents. Here is our schedule.

Monday-Poetry notebooks go home for the evening

Tuesday-Students check out a book from their reading suitcase

Wednesday-Library Day

Thursday-Another book is checked out from their reading suitcase

The children are excited to get their new reading folders and tuck the book inside. Each parent records which book their child brings home, then I have a record throughout the year of the books they've selected.

## **Writing:**

Since we began writing in our journal, I've noticed some children are writing about the same thing day after day...after day. I have a future Waste Management Technician who has drawn a garbage truck for every single entry. I decided we needed a discussion on "things to write about". I made a chart with the children of various ideas from animals to friends, parties, favorites, vacations and many more. I added a quick picture icon to help the non-readers. This poster can be a reference tool for the children. Update: Next day, garbage man drew a dump truck! Now that's progress.

We made our Work on Writing I-Chart. Today the students now have three choices and three rotations. We're getting closer to having everything up and running! I was worried that the students wouldn't be able to maintain stamina with their writing, but the opposite was the issue. Most children said, "I'm not done yet" when I rang the chimes.

The best part of journal writing is journal sharing! After each rotation, the Work on Writing friends sit in the share chair and talk about their drawing and/or story. My job in this process is to "notice" and celebrate what the children are doing correctly. The students' work leads the instruction, and they learn from each other's examples. The bottom line is, the children motivate and support each other.

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## **Book Shopping:**

It's finally time for the children to begin to book shop. I try to keep it simple, but it's always a little confusing at the beginning of the year. First, I instruct the students to look through their reading suitcases and make two piles, a "keep pile" and a "trade pile". "Keep" books go back in their suitcase, "trade" books get returned to their matching box or table.

New books! I love having the students choose books they are interested in, but I've learned to provide limits. For example, I put leveled readers on my tables and nudge the children to visit their best-fit table. I also have themed book boxes throughout the room filled with picture books that, for the most part, are above their reading levels. For their first shopping experience they may choose three books from the leveled table and three books from the picture book boxes. Next week, we'll jump up to five or six books from each group. This way I know that students will have a nice variety to use during Daily 5.

As I suspected, after book shopping, Read to Self was the most popular choice during check-in. That's good! The bottom line is, I want children to be excited to read their books.

Here's a fun email I received from a Mom:

Tonight at the dinner table, we were going around saying the worst part of our day and the best part. James said that the worst part of his day was that I forgot his towel for rest time. Oops! He said the best part of his day was shopping for books! :)

A few more book shopping ideas:

It all began with the thought that I don't yet know what kind of books each child loves. Then I thought the children might not even know what kind of books they love. Hmmmm.

Idea 1: I made a quick grid with a box for each child in my class. I wrote their names in the boxes in the order that their reading suitcases are located on the shelf. Then I took several minutes and quickly searched each suitcase. I made a note of any topics that had multiples. I looked for children who picked out non-fiction over fiction. After several times of tracking, maybe I'll see some trends. I'll also be able to monitor if students are picking appropriate leveled books too.

Idea Two: Before book shopping, I paired the students and had them talk about the books they read last week. I suggested they could even trade some books with each other. I told the students that not only did I want them to discover what kind of books they like, but their partner too! I know I won't have time to do this weekly, but maybe every now and then. Here's a bit of advice...model this with another student first, then children can get the idea of the lingo and what you're really trying to accomplish.

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## **Word Work:**

The more I practice Daily 5, the more I find that my lesson plans are quite fluid from day to day. It seems that what happens today drives what I want to accomplish tomorrow. For example, I checked in with my friends who had not known any high frequency words the first week. I wanted to find out if any of the newly added word wall words were sticking? About half those children are doing great, but several others are not. Now I've got my first strategy group. Let's slow down and concentrate on one word at time for them.

Next day I came up with an idea. I wrote one word, "the", on a heart shaped sticky note. I made one for each friend who needed some extra practice. I stuck the sticky note on their folder of words. I told them I wanted them to concentrate on that one word. Their job was to build "the" with each tool. I said I would come back every day and ask them to read it for me. So far, it's working.

I decided I needed to up the ante for the students who already know the sight words. I'm finally seeing that they are including the words in their writing, so it's time to add another challenge. I made a list of thematic words that went with our social studies unit. I challenged these particular students to write sentences using the thematic words and the heart words together. Here are some sentence examples from our health unit. "Be healthy." And, "Do get sleep."

## **Strategies:**

Good news! Last week I introduced Connect to the Story with an accompanying hand motion. (Move fists together until they touch.) Today, as I was holding up our read aloud, one of my little firecracker friends shouted out, "We need to...you know" and then she made the action with her hands and said, "talk". She couldn't remember the name of the strategy but she did remember what to do and repeating the action seemed to help her get the word out. Love it, love it, love it!

Cross Check, Double Check! The children are crazy about this new strategy. They enjoy listening to me make little mistakes as I read and then shouting "It doesn't make sense." What would I do without their help! 😊

We practiced our new strategy, Play with Rhyming Words, by giving the thumbs-ups when we heard a pair. We read *The Seven Silly Eaters* since it went well with our nutrition unit that week. I contend you can reinforce almost any strategy with almost any picture book. Sometimes it's a fun challenge to make the connections!

The students have been hounding me to introduce a strategy in the Expanding Vocabulary section. (Now that's cool!) We didn't have one in that column yet. But now we do, the word "awesome". That sums it all up.

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## **Ben Update:**

My Daily 5 partner Cheryl, has a son Ben, who is a Kindergartner in my class. This boy has become a word detective! He is noticing words all around him. While playing a video game he mentioned to his Mom, "Hey, here is the word 'to'. Do you know there is another way to spell it... 'too'?" Mrs. Prentice told us that." Another day, he brought a book to his Mom and said, "Will you help me with this? I really need to learn these words." That's a boy with a sense of urgency! He's a zoomer!

## **Community:**

How long does it take to form a class community? Certainly the answer varies depending on the particular children. But for me, it takes about four weeks. Of course, some children you bond with instantly, but it's not really about one or two, it's about a group identity. By now, we've had lots of laughs, made a few mistakes and fixed them, read about seventy books, eaten together, discovered consequences, made beautiful pictures, sang together, exercised and rested together. We've started to take chances and reveal who we really are. We've learned some new ways to handle problems and get along. We're happy to see each other in the morning and a little sad to wave goodbye in the afternoon. Now instead of being "my new class," they are just "my class." I'm always relieved to reach this point. There's always a shadow of doubt that I won't be able to love this group like I did last year. But now I know...I can and I do.

So as my reflections come to a close, here's my wish for you and your class. May you find pure joy in sharing the love of reading and writing with your students. Relish each success a child makes; there will be many. Try not to take the disappointments personally; there will be some of these too. Believe in Daily 5 and CAFÉ, it's worth the effort. Find a teaching buddy and share your thoughts. Always remember that you are part of a community of educators. We may not know each other's names, but we walk the same road together with determination and strength. On those high days, we celebrate together in spirit. In those low moments, know that you have a community who believes in you and your purpose. Have a magnificent year my friend.