

## Preschool Theme Newsletter – February 2014

Hello Everyone,

Welcome back to the start of another year and welcome to all the new subscribers. I hope you are all settling in and ready to start another year. I wish you all a fantastic year.

Here's how to aim for a stress free year! I love this quote on this cup. It's so very true. No one else knows if your lesson doesn't go according to plan except you, so don't stress about it. Good teaching is all about making changes as you go and watching the way the children respond so relax this year and take the time to enjoy the children. You win some lessons and you lose some!

My year started with the arrival of a darling grandson Xavier. I have three daughters and a granddaughter so it's very exciting to have a boy join the family. It's been quite a change to think cars and blue instead of pink and faeries.



### New theme – Sea and the beach

**At last I have completed the sea and beach theme.** It is on the web site [www.preschoolthemes.co.za](http://www.preschoolthemes.co.za) and available from Ilette. (See info above) It's a very broad theme so I focussed on the beach and sea and under the sea and what is on the sea so a little on water transport. It's a great theme to slot in after summer school holidays. Here are some of the creative activities you will find in the book.



The children created a wave background using thick ready mixed paint and plastic combs cut from plastic milk bottles. The spread a good layer of paint over the paper and dragged the combs through the paint to create wave patterns. I had a variety of combs but the wavy or square edged one worked the best.

We did not wait for the paint to dry before pasting our fish shapes to the water. They stuck nicely but I would



suggest you add a bit of glue to the paint. I cut some oval shapes from coloured paper and different sized triangles for the fins and tails. You can add crayons for the children to decorate the fish but this is best done before they are pasted to a wet background (the paper goes soggy and tears when they draw on it). These were done with a range of ages from 3 ½ to almost five years old. I often get asked how to change the activities for the different age groups and this is a

great example of how each age group will do it at a different level. Some of the older children wanted to cut their own fish or modify what I had cut. Some of the younger children didn't really create fish. When I do this with only the younger children I cut the tail and fin together as one shape.

**Assessment:** When you assess this activity your observations can tell you a lot about special issues, who is excessive, who can see part and whole and who followed instructions.

### Sensory basket



Place some shells in a basket. The children choose what they would like to do with the shells. We call this open-ended play. This can be placed on the theme table or next to it, on a nature table, in the fantasy area, play dough table, outdoors, block play sand or water play area and they can be used for art activities. The big shell below is ideal for painting



## Pinterest boards – Valentine's Day, birthday charts and classroom management



As you all know I am a big fan of Pinterest. Please have a look at the boards if you have not done so already. I have been pinning some awesome ideas for Valentine's Day under Colour red

<http://www.pinterest.com/kstedall/colour-red/>, and under valentines – school

<http://www.pinterest.com/kstedall/valentines-school/>

There are also some great activities under me and my body, my family and my home.

I also have general boards for things like classroom management, birthday charts, block play, outdoor play and then special boards for Grade R and toddlers.

<http://www.pinterest.com/kstedall/>

This is the general link to all my boards



Please skip over all my Christmas pins. You must all think I am Christmas crazy, (which I am...) but I belong to a group who puts on a two week Christmas festival with twelve themed trees each year to raise money for charity. This year I did a 'kitchen tree' and made all my decorations related to food and the kitchen. Here is a pic of my cork wreath. We raise about R450, 000.00 rand in two weeks from the sale of craft we make.

**If you would like an email with some of the Valentine's art idea send me a mail and I will forward it to you. ([rodandkarin@xtra.co.nz](mailto:rodandkarin@xtra.co.nz)) or Facebook**

## Themes for the 2-3 year olds

I am hoping to write a set of themes specifically for this age group. With the new NELDS outcomes due to be released this year I thought it would be a good time to do this. I will keep you updated with the progress of these themes. Because you do less with the younger age group – they need much more time for free play and routines- I am thinking that I may put 4 themes together into one book. So watch this space...If you would like to make any suggestions I welcome all input.



## Classroom management

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

As every experienced teacher will tell you, the boundaries you set at the beginning of the year can either make or break your year. I prefer to call them boundaries rather than rules. All classrooms have rules which are much the same, but the children will test the rules and you. They need to know from day 1 that there are consequences to their actions and you will follow through. Don't get me wrong – you don't have to be a wicked witch or sergeant major – it can be done very nicely but firmly. Consistency should be your constant goal all year. Children thrive with discipline, fairness and clear boundaries and they will love you more for them.

Teach children to use words when they need something instead of actions and screeching (my pet hate), to use good manners and to be kind to each other. I have posted a very interesting and useful article on helping children to share. There is often a lot of debate about whether you should 'force' children to share. Personally I don't think you always have to share everything. Do you as an adult share everything?

If you are struggling with classroom management issues and discipline or you have some children with particularly challenging behaviour speak to your principal or colleagues. It is not a reflection on your teaching skills and they may have some good suggestions worth trying.

Over my time at school we have had our fair share of some very challenging children's behaviour. We were pretty desperate at one stage with one child's aggressive outburst to little or no provocation and very low frustration levels and called in some professional help.

She suggested we 'shadow' the child which is not always possible but a teacher needs to be close by and watching them **all** the time. This means you can intervene before the other child gets hurt or bitten, and you can redirect the aggressive child before they become too frustrated. If they do hurt the other child or whatever the problem is, you firmly tell them it's not okay too.... , take their hand and make them walk 'behind' you while you go about whatever you need to do. No talking to them, no eye contact, no responding to their complaints or pleas to be released etc. Make it boring. Then after a minute or so – depends on the age of the child- you tell them they can go but they need to use gentle hands and give them a hug so they know they are still loved and it's the behaviour you don't approve of. This may need to be repeated several times a day but it's the one thing we find really works well to limit the behaviour. It's a very good method for children who bite others! You will also need another person around to support and comfort the hurt or bitten child.

**The biggest error we make as teachers and parents is to talk too much to the child and over explain why you are not happy with the behaviour. Angry and upset children cannot and won't listen!**

### Some ideas for you

#### Paper plate faces using collage materials and painting

In New Zealand the school I am at has an open art area for the children to spend time in each day and be creative. I placed some paper plates in the area and suggested we make some faces. This was some of the end results. The left and middle one is done by a girls of 5years who went to school shortly after and the right one is done by a boy who is about 4 ½. While we discourage comparing children, it does have a place in giving you a general idea of whether the child is more or less at the correct level.



#### Free drawing

The value of free drawing should never be underestimated. It is absolutely essential that all age groups of children are given many opportunities to draw freely using a wide variety of materials and vary the experience by changing the papers, the colour and the shape. Many school readiness and writing skills are developed spontaneously through free drawing.

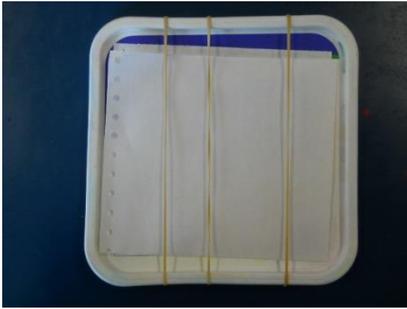
In this picture Heidi who is 4 drew her house which is a double storey. This is a perfect example of emergent writing. Should you be concerned about the reversals and the incorrect letter sequence of her name? Since Heidi is only 4 and quite an immature 4 year old, it is still acceptable. For this to be a concern you will need to see it many times and still be present when she is 6. Looking at her drawing I would say she is well on target with the drawing stage for her age and her drawing is quite detailed with good pencil grip so I would not worry too much. Give her opportunities to trace over her name (written correctly by teacher)



**Assessment:** This should be noted in your weekly observations so you can see a pattern or frequency. If you can take a photo of it and put it on file or file the art work for references – not everyone but perhaps one a month.

#### Elastic band painting

I saw this idea on Pinterest and was keen to give it a go. I stretched elastic bands over plastic ice cream lids. The children carefully painted the elastic bands and then gently pulled them so the paint splattered. I then turned the paper around so we got stripes going in the opposite direction. It was quite effective but the children had trouble only painting the elastic bands and not the paper too. The boys particularly enjoyed this activity. Use two colours of paint that blend to make a new. Nice wide elastics work well and it wasn't as messy as I expected. Use the fried paper to cut into a shape or add it as collage paper to the art area.



### Group tree

The teachers made the tree trunk and the children coloured the leaves over the week. The teacher cut out the leaf shapes for the children.



### FAIRY TALE STORYTELLING BASKET



### A story telling basket

<http://theimaginationtree.com/2013/05/fairytales-storytelling-basket.html>

I love this idea on so many levels. You can use them for your own story telling, in the book area and fantasy area for the children to tell stories to each other and to the group and for lots of perceptual games such as memory game



etc. They can also be used for counting and sorting. I am sure you can come up with a dozen more ways to use them. Collect and make them over time and make basket time a special activity.

If you would like a specific topic to be included in the newsletters let me know. If you need help with anything I am more than happy to try and advise you or tell you where you can get help. Join the Facebook page [www.facebook.com/preschoolthemes](http://www.facebook.com/preschoolthemes) as there are lots of useful ideas posted there too and feel free to ask questions and share on the page. Thank you to everyone who has joined. There are almost 400 new members in the first year. WOW!

Have fun and happy teaching. All the best for 2014.

Regards Karin

<http://notjustcute.com/2014/01/13/nine-words-to-end-fights-over-toys/>

## **"Can I have a turn when you're done please?"**

### **"Use your words."**

It's a popular phrase adults say when kids are acting out. And kids **do** need to learn how to effectively communicate verbally in order to move away from communicating behaviourally. But in order to **use** their words, they have to **have** the words.

We have to be intentional in teaching our children the social scripts they need to navigate the social tides of life. By teaching kids a few simple phrases, they quickly recognize them as you coach them through regular opportunities for problem solving, and soon they feel comfortable enough with them to use them independently.

If I had to pick one phrase that I have seen make the most difference for kids in social situations, it would be these nine words:

### **"Can I have a turn when you're done please?"**

Doesn't *seem* magical, does it?

But here's why I've seen it bring about amazing results in the middle of typical childhood squabbles.

Sharing and turn taking are things we value as adults, but they are extremely vague concept for kids. Most of the time, kids really only understand how they work when it comes to making sure they get **their** turns! Through their developmental lens, many pre-schoolers adhere to the philosophy that "What's your is mine and what's mine is mine." This is why "He's not sharing!" or "She took my toy!" is such a frequent complaint at preschools and play dates.

Often, our response is to force sharing. (Or at least the appearance of sharing!) We set timers or pry something from their clenched little fists, in an effort to restore order. But as I've taught in my [eBooks and ecourse](#), this approach robs kids of critical problem solving practice and opportunities to develop their own social skills. We may value peace and order as adults, but kids need a manageable amount of conflict and chaos to give them meaningful social skill practice.

Given their own tools and scripts as well as adequate opportunities to practice, kids will not only gain the skills they need to be socially competent, but they'll also increase their confidence in their own ability to solve their own problems.

*(The combined result means less whining and tattling for you to listen to!)*

### **When we coach a child through the process of asking, "Can I have a turn when you're done please?" we communicate several key points that ease the process for both kids involved.**

- 1. I want a turn.** This empowers the child who is asking. It helps the child to know it's OK to communicate your needs and wants to others, and that you can and should do that clearly and politely.
- 2. You get to finish.** The magic ingredient in this phrase is "when you're done". It communicates to the child in possession of the object that no one is trying to take it away or force them to "share". It lets them feel a sense of control, which almost always has the result of softening the child's white knuckled grip. *Without* these three extra words, children only hear that they are losing something— that someone is taking something away from them. *With* those three words, consideration is given to the child with the object. Instead of losing an object, they are gaining an element of control.

I have watched time and again as two children have fought passionately over an object, then had an intervening adult introduce this nine word phrase. More times than not the child who is in possession of the object is done within a matter of minutes (or even seconds!) — but only when they get to do it on their terms. **The fight wasn't about who had the object as much as it was about who had the power.**

### **What about when the child doesn't hand it over so quickly?**

Sometimes you can coach children through this phrase and simply follow up with, "So Ben, when you're done, find Sky and make sure she gets the next turn, OK?" and that is that. The two seamlessly make the switch-a-roo on their own moments later.

Sometimes you coach them through the dialogue and the child in possession says, "I'll never be done!" There are a few things you could do here, depending on the situation and the temperaments of the kids involved. You can keep things light and simply say, "Well, there are so many fun things to do here, I doubt you'll want to play with that **F O R E V E R!** So when you decide you're done, just make sure you give it to Sky so that she can be next." For other kids you might need to say, "Well, I know some kids like to use timers to decide when their turns are over. Do you two want to try that? Ben, how much more time do you think you need?" If the two agree on a reasonable number, great! Help the children set a timer, and give it to one of them, so that they can be in charge. ([This is my all-time, absolute, favourite timer for kids, by the way.](#) It makes the fuzzy concept of time much more concrete! *\*affiliate link*) If they don't come up with a reasonable number ("14 hours!"), you may have to give a few suggestions and let them choose from those. After scaffolding your kids or your class through a few of these interactions, soon you'll find them using the phrase on their own a lot more, and asking you to play referees a lot less!