

Preschool Themes Newsletter – January 2018

Hello Everyone,

Happy New year to you all! I hope this year will be a wonderful year for you. You all do an amazing job working with our little people often under difficult work conditions. January is always a very busy time for any teacher so remember to be kind to yourself. One task at a time and it will all eventually get done. And never forget how important your job is. With the start of the New Year, resolutions seem to be made to be broken but this year I am determined to create more balance in my life. One way of doing this is to be organised. I have included an article with some useful ideas for getting organised. For me the more difficult part is staying organised as the year gets busy and one gets tired. Remember that you can't be a good teacher if your own "tank" is empty so make time to refresh yourself so you can give to others.



Assessing your classroom

Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.
Albert Einstein

We have the following quote on the wall in the staff tearoom at our school. Every time I read it I think about how true it is. I am an analytical type of person and often assess the classroom, the activities, the materials, the daily programme, lessons, the storage area, the outdoor area and even the way behaviour is managed. Self-reflection is a valuable activity as long as you make the necessary changes to make improvements.

An example I like to use is; if I have picked up the wax crayons off the floor for the 10th time that day, then something is not working. Do I have too many crayons out, is the activity or area not supervised enough, perhaps the materials are unsuitable for the age group, or the storage container is not ideal. Then I take steps to rectify the situation.

Behaviour management is another very good area to apply the above quote to. If you are nagging the same children day in and day out about the same things then it's time for a change of strategy and approach as what you are doing is obviously not working.

So make it your mission this year to adjust and rectify things that are not working at school. And carry it over to your home life too. Which leads me to the next article... being organised. An organised and prepared teacher has a calm and well run classroom. I found this useful article to share with you. Even if you can implement some of these ideas it will contribute to helping to having an organised, productive and calm year.

Organisation strategies

It is easy to fall into a trap of disorganisation, but getting out of it is much harder. Starting your teaching year organised can make you feel that you are in control when unexpected occurrences pop up during the year. Every year we all have an opportunity to start over. Some people refer to it as a New Year's resolution. Let's face it though; very few people get to December shouting "I DID IT!!" More often than not, we are quietly thinking "OK 2017, you and I just didn't quite click, I got busy, you got busy, we were never going to get along, let's call it quits".



If it takes less than five minutes to do, do it immediately. Your life will instantly become much more organized and productive.
THEPSYCHMIND.COM

Somehow, having a plan to start your year organised can bring about a sense of calm, and a belief that you can handle anything that this year is going to throw at you. Even if you make one or two small changes, this can have an effect on lowering your stress levels when things get busy. Perhaps you could make it a team challenge, that everybody takes steps to reorganise at least one aspect of their working life. Now the challenge is to just do it!

Feeling disorganised is not only detrimental to your work productivity, it can affect your emotional well-being, which in turn affects the way you work with children. Taking steps to begin your year with a plan to become more organised, will benefit you in multiple ways.

J. Glenn Ebersole shares the many ways being organised can improve both your personal and professional lives:

- you are able to be more focused on what you want to achieve
- you will be more productive
- you are more easily able to manage your time more effectively
- you will reduce your stress levels
- you will achieve more balance in your life
- you are able to prioritise your tasks
- you will have more energy and enthusiasm
- you will have freedom from chaos
- you will be able to set and achieve your goals more efficiently
- you are able to be more flexible and creative



Here are some simple yet effective strategies to employ that will support you to begin your year with some organisational systems in place.

- Get familiar with and use the calendar feature of your smartphone if you have one. You are able to set up alerts to notify you when you have meetings or events to attend, birthdays, or if you just need to remember to make a phone call. With Google calendar you can set up various calendars, one for work and one for personal. You can then collaborate and share calendars with your work a colleague, ensuring everybody is "on the same page". You are also able to sync your calendar across all of your devices, accessing it from both phone and pc. This will eliminate the need to have reminders in your physical diary, calendar and on post-it notes. Having multiple methods of reminding yourself of important dates can serve to create more "mind clutter", quite the opposite of what you are trying to achieve!
- Set up folders for each month of the year, both physically and digitally, to store letters, photos, files, templates and other documents that you may need to refer to at a later date. Having them organised by month ensures you are able to easily access them without wasting time searching.
- Don't hide important stuff – set up a priority folder. It is easy to cast aside the things you don't have time to attend to immediately, only to forget about them until it is too late. Setting up a priority folder will help you to keep the important things that need your attention, all in one place. They are then easily able to be accessed when you are free to attend to them.
- If you need to organise physical clutter and spaces, this can be a huge undertaking, which can be overwhelming and often ignored. A chaotic physical environment can create a chaotic mind. Consider breaking the task down into smaller and more manageable tasks. Having smaller mountains of chaos to deal with is far easier than tackling one that resembles Mount Everest! There are some really useful guides to assist you to declutter every aspect of your life. Use them!
- Linking back to step 1, fill your diary with the important dates and events you need to plan and prepare for. Consider backdating these events, with reminders that they are coming up in a week or a month. This will ensure that when the big date rolls around you can sail smoothly through it, having completed all of the prep work needed for it to be a success.
- Clear out your work locker, files, resource box, and work bag at the start of the year. This may sound like common sense, but there are some of us that keep every little thing that we had intended working on from the year before. Teachers are great at collecting all manner of things to use "one day" Somehow these things build up and have a habit of making us feel like the year is starting with unfinished business hanging over our heads. If you must keep these things, place them into a separate box to be dealt with at a later date. Trust me; you will feel much more on top of things when you don't have these things in plain sight.

Useful link for child development

Here is a very useful link to a very good article on Early Childhood Development: Curriculum Guidelines Grade 000 To Grade 3

The main purpose of this document is to provide a national reference to assist in facilitating consistency in terms of expectations and curriculum covered in Grade 000 to Grade 3. It is intended as a guide for ISASA schools but can be used by any educational institution. These curriculum guidelines have been drawn up using extensive research into best practice both locally and internationally. However, they do not provide an exhaustive list of everything that a child should know or be able to do by the end of the Foundation Phase of learning but is a very good guide line.



<http://www.isasa.org/download/ecd-curriculum-guidelines-2015/?wpdmdl=3685>

Preschool themes teaching order

I am often asked if there is a specific order that the preschool themes should be used. The preschool themes manuals are designed such that you select the themes relevant to your children and your school. While there is no specific order I like to start the year off with me and my body, my family and my home. This means you start off with what the children know and move outwards to the lesser known and wider environment. Some teachers like to include the 5 senses directly after me and my body which is fine too. I like to balance the themes over the terms so I would place the "animal" themes over the terms e.g. pets, zoo animals, wild animals, farm animals, water animals, reptiles and dinosaurs will be spread over the terms. I like to place the seasons in each term when the seasons can be experienced and any holidays or celebrations too. Some schools prefer to use a broader theme such as "the wider community" and then use any themes that fit into the heading. Others prefer to keep all the animals in one term but I personally find that becomes tedious and boring for the children and the teacher.



If the school has a limited budget then each group can be doing a different theme so the books can be shared between the teachers.

The themes in the preschool manuals start on a Monday but there is no reason why you can't start a new theme on a Wednesday as an example. For some schools this may be more suitable as it takes some of the Fridays and the weekend.

The themes are designed for one week of lessons, but they can be extended to two weeks if necessary.

The themes are intended as a guideline and work well when the teacher adds some of her own input and ideas.

I have created Pinterest boards for all the different themes to give you more ideas. You don't have to join Pinterest to access them but it would certainly save you time if you did make your own boards to refer to.

<https://www.pinterest.nz/kstedall/>

Art activities



These two pictures are white chalk drawings done on black paper



If you don't have black paper use coloured chalk on white paper. Wet chalk draws easier on white paper



My face koki pen drawing on a precut or predrawn circle. This face was pasted to a paper packet to make a puppet



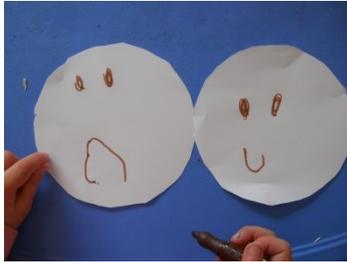
Drawing myself with crayons or koki pens, cut out and use for story telling or telling the group about themselves



Paper chain people with crayon details



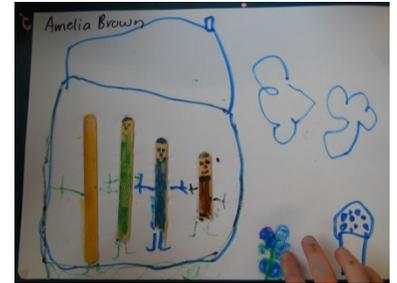
Paper plate puppet face using collage and cut and paste



Sad and happy faces using a cardboard circle and crayons. These can be used at mat time to tell everyone what makes them happy or sad



Wooden sucker sticks cut to different sizes and coloured to represent their family. Encourage them to add their pets



Extending the activity to include drawing their home



Drawing faces using sawdust shavings for the hair



Painting my face on a paper plate



Collage my home using coloured paper shapes



Play dough faces. Sad and happy faces



Some children may need a circle to get started or offer them a paper plate to create the face on



Play dough birthday cakes

Printing and drawing on plastic plates

Plastic plate painting and printing

This is a fun activity to do that suits a variety of drawing levels from scribbling to clear drawings as they all make good prints. It works best when the plate is just covered with paint versus blobs of excess paint and if there is insufficient paint then you don't get a clear print. I encouraged the children to cover the plate base only with a good amount of paint and to then create a flat surface by brushing the paint in stripes from left to right so there is a smooth surface to draw on. It's not critical to the end result but it does improve the print. This activity lends itself to many themes by altering the colour of the paint and what you ask the children to draw.

You will need:

- Plastic plates – disposable ones (not paper)
- Paint – ready mixed works well
- Paint brushes
- Earbuds or sticks (or fingers)
- Paper

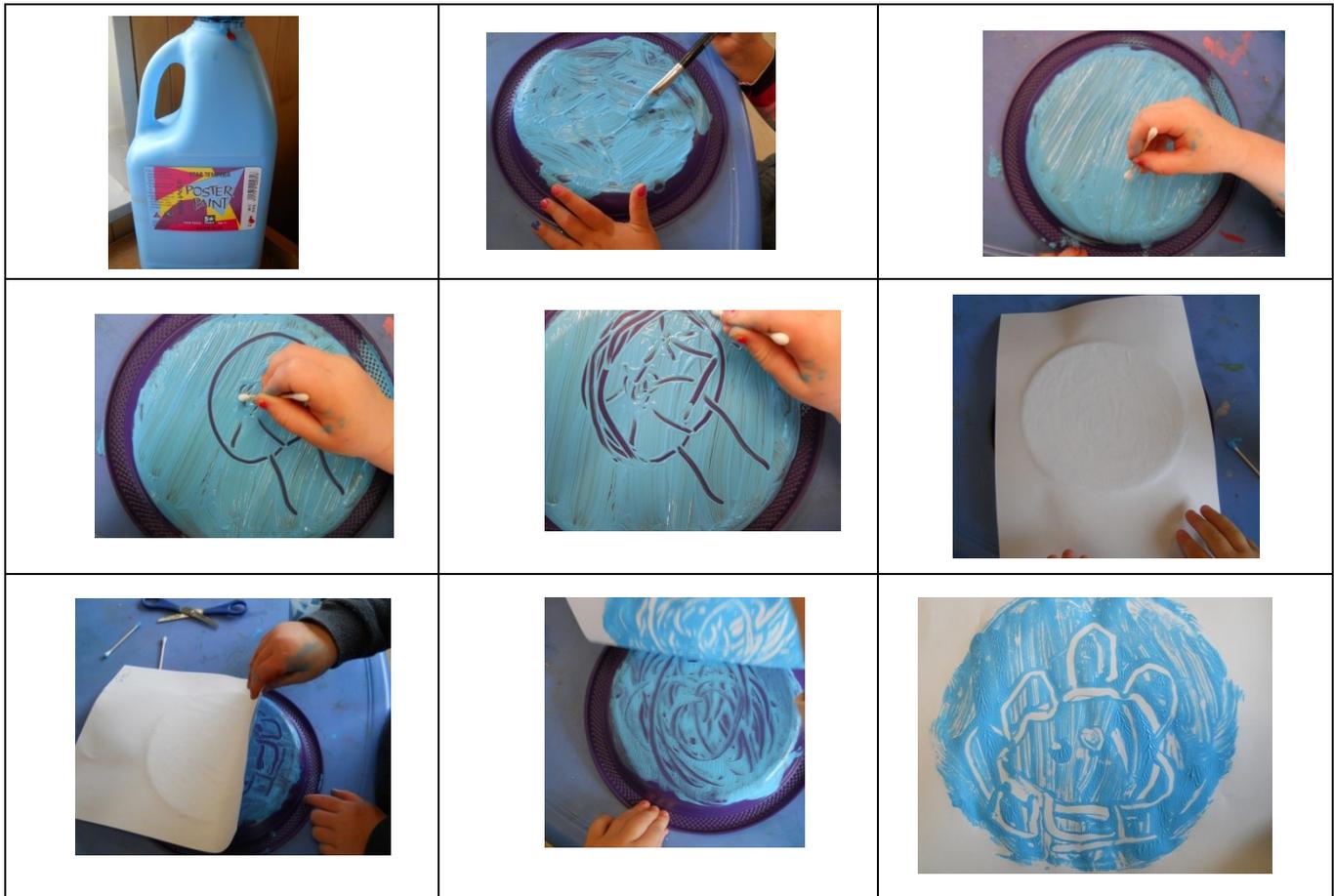


Method:

The children paint the bottom of the plastic plate so it's well covered. They then paint over the paint from side to side to create a smooth well covered area. Using an earbud or stick (or finger!) the children draw a picture. Once the picture is complete, the child carefully places a piece of paper onto the drawing and gently rubs the paper to pick up a print. The child carefully lifts off the paper to reveal a print of their drawing.

To make another picture paint the plate again and draw a new picture

Note: No plastic plates? Use the bottom of a polystyrene tray or a 2 litre milk bottle on its side with the label removed. My plastic plates were purple but any colour is fine.



Happy teaching
Regards
Karin