

The following are notes for a keynote delivered by Sally Anderson at Vermont's Kindergarten Conference (for Kindergarten teachers) in May 2007.

Using Picture books to Integrate Math, Science, Social Studies and Literacy Learning in the Classroom

It requires a very unusual mind to understand an analysis of the obvious. So said Alfred North Whitehead.

We know that *kindergarten children* are constantly absorbing and processing information. In fact, I read that: *Kindergarteners brains are "highly sensitive to educational intervention."* And *we know that 4-6 year olds have nearly double the number of synapses in some brain areas than adults have.*

We know that children who have been read to, who have had many, many on-going complex conversations with adults, have an increased chance of success in learning to read, and I'd say overall academic success.

We also know that *through* experiences with books and hands-on activities, children develop ideas about who they are as individuals and about the world around them.

This morning I'm going to focus on:

1. **Using picture books** to help children practice and meet standards and Grade Expectations
2. Ways that **learning in one subject area affects learning in other subjects.** There's no such thing as "Just doing social studies." Won't you also be talking together? Discussing new vocabulary? Playacting? Writing? Comparing? Counting? Making graphs and charts? Exploring the world around you? Having fun?
3. The importance of **ongoing, open-ended discussions in which every child participates.**
4. **That practicing and meeting standards** can be and should be filled with laughter and joy.

Words and their definitions:

Fun: pleasure, amusement, enjoy

Play: To occupy oneself in amusement, sport or other recreation.

To take part in an enjoyable activity for the sake of amusement

Synonyms: amusement, delight, diversion, entertainment, frolic, joking, pleasure, relaxation

WORK, on the other hand, is the antonym of play and fun.

However, the **definition** of **work** is

Physical or mental activity directed toward the accomplishment of something

And the **synonyms?** Drudge, obligation, servitude, stress, struggle, exertion, chore

To paraphrase Mark Twain: *Work and play are words used to describe the same thing under different conditions.*

And in education we have often made an arbitrary distinction between learning and fun: recess is fun.....BUT math is work. Child-directed activities are play...BUT teacher-directed activities are work.

And how about our own attitudes? *OK children, it's time to settle down and get to WORK.*

No more fooling around, this is serious business.

And what does the principal say? *Seems to me there's too much fun in this classroom, when do you ever work?*

And I know no one here looks like this, but the frown, the intensity, the pressure, the stress, the WORK.... Hey, we're not PAID to have fun! Isn't that what you all are thinking right now?

And how about education standards (Grade Expectations)? *Great Expectations* (as I call them)? Even in the professional literature, the pressure of standards is often related to the lack of fun and play in the classroom.

I think we all KNOW that we can learn and have fun at the same time.

We all recognize that our attitudes toward learning, how we see ourselves, how confident and competent we feel...these all affect our ability to learn.

We also know that learning requires an interactive balance of gaining facts and skills and making the information one's own.

Most people **are not motivated to learn through negative criticisms.**

Instilling self-confidence in young children is the single most important task of teachers and parents. And to feel self-confident children must feel competent. And competence is based on *doing*, on being able to *do something*

Picture books and all content areas: Everyone likes a good story. (Tell some personal story here, the audience quiets down, then point this out.)

So I've selected my books – read them before reading them to children, right? – remember the obvious?

Setting the context/assessing children’s knowledge: A conversation about some aspect or aspects of the book to help children understand the story, characters, vocabulary. A *What We Know* chart which you can add to after reading the book and as you continue explorations and investigations around the book.

If it’s the first time reading the book to your class, try to read the book straight through without interruptions so that children have a better chance of paying attention to the storyline, the book’s narrative.

This is very important when reading to children. The listener needs to be involved in the action, the characters’ motivations, the mysteries and surprises of the book.

I know, I know—you’re asking yourselves: what about asking questions? Having children make predictions? (Talk here about your own reading/interruptions...the anecdote about if someone stopped you at the end of each page of *Jane Eyre*, how could you enjoy the story or keep track of what was happening? Act this out)

And if your interested in the GE RK:13 Making predictions about what might come next, use non-fiction. Talk about Steve Jenkins and his successful non-fiction books. Read all his books, help children become members of a literate community, make predictions!

Reading the same book many times, in different contexts. Emphasize this importance.

Talking about the book: use open-ended questions, every child participates.

Officer Buckle and Gloria by Peggy Rathmann

I selected this book because for me it’s one of the funniest books ever written. You know the story....with rules such as: “Never stand on a swivel chair” and the illustration shows the principal standing on a swivel chair.

Then Gloria begins to act out the rules: “Never leave a thumbtack where you might sit on it.”

Rules: safety, classroom, homer, playground (compare and contrast; sort, same and different; *This is Our House*, *Horace*, *Morris but Mostly Delores*, which can lead to conversations about friendships — *Chester’s Way*, *Jamaica and Brianna*. All four books lead to conversations and activities about conflict resolution, which lead back to police officers and *Officer Buckle and Gloria*.

Each time we make a set of rules you’ll want to vote to include or exclude rules based on fair and not fair or another criteria children might select for voting.

Careers/Jobs: Interviewing/visiting local business, workers (field trip) *Saturday at the New You*, *Mama, I’ll Give You the World*, *Albert’s Alphabet*.

RESEARCH

Mapping the neighborhood, classroom, school, street (*Jonathan and His Mommy, Where Are You Going Manyoni?, The Big Trip, My Map Book*). Making maps you'll be talking about near, far, next to etc. studying maps of your town, or area. Looking globes and other maps. You might even begin a basic conversation about measurement.

Tools of the Trade (collecting and sorting) You'll make sets, recognize and name attributes

Set up a store/restaurant (wants/needs, consumers/producers) *Big Jimmy's Kung Pau Chinese Take Out* is a good book to use.

What can children do to make the community cleaner, more attractive, happier? **Identify a problem**, make a plan, try the plan, if this doesn't work make a new plan. *Albert's Alphabet, Lottie's New Beach Towel*)

The Big Trip. (Transportation), Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus, (which you will have to act out). Opportunity for graphing: How We Get to School. Remember about graphing: use the same units, able to read by just looking at it.

Behaviors: *Don't Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus*:

Friendship: What it means to be a friend: Brainstorm list, read books to add to the list. Discussions about inclusion and exclusion. *Chester's Way* (Henkes), *The Other Side* (Woodson). Prejudice.

Other Cultures: Some of the books we talked about when we made maps plus *I Lost My Tooth in Africa*. Which also lead to **RESEARCH** projects about families/celebrations, etc.

Measurement: Actual Size: standard and non-standard measurement: Measure by hands, measure by tongues. Make a chart: longest, shortest, tallest. Collect data. **Research** the animal or habitats, other regions. Are any of these animals found in Vermont? How can we **RESEARCH** and find out about Vermont animal life?

Counting, adding and subtracting: Part, part, whole. Number sentences with objects, counting animal feet

Building structures (back to the mapping/neighborhood): *3 Little Javelins, 3 Pigs*

So, did any learning take place in all we just talked about?

Reading: Recognizing rhymes, key parts of a book, using strategies to unlock meaning of words, identifying synonyms and antonyms, understanding basic concepts such as over, under, after, behind, making connections between self and text, and text to world, identifying characters in a story, actually, it looked to me as though every read aloud experience would allow children opportunities to practice and refine all the skills.

History and Social Studies: Inquiry question: How, why? Research questions (What might we see at...), conducting research and displaying information or role playing, etc., communicating their ideas, map making our school, classroom, the walk to the police station, etc., cooperation, rules, buyer/seller, needs and wants, other cultures, identifying feelings that might end in conflict

Health: identify safety rules, rules to prevent spread of germs, healthy choices

Science: Process skills of science (“*Just like a scientist*”), sorting, properties of matter (tools of trades) could move off this into rock sorting *If You Find a Rock, Rocks in His Head*

Sometimes we have to work at it, but who says it can’t be fun?

Summary

So, what have we been reminded of this morning?

Being intentional in our work and having FUN. We can laugh and learn at the same time.

The **importance of using books in many different ways** and reading and talking about the same book many, many times.

That **reading and talking together help children** experience and learn about content and help develop social skills and concepts as well as language and literacy skills and depending on the conversations and the extending activities, how they develop science, math skills and concepts as well.

That **learning in one domain affects learning in other domains.** There’s no such thing as “Just doing social studies.” Won’t you also be talking together? Discussing new vocabulary? Playacting? Writing? Comparing? Counting? Making graphs and charts? Exploring the world around you? Having fun.

How essential it is to have **ongoing, open-ended conversations** with children

We can meet the same standards of GE through a variety of explorations in different subject areas.

And conversations and books?

Broad and deep language development is the product of frequent exposure to varied and complex language. None of us can endlessly imitate speech. We run out of ideas or just plain get sick of it.

But if books are added...we can talk about new and different experiences, experiences we’ve all shared through stories. And use these stories as we model behaviors and we have new and rich vocabulary to express our ideas.

All of these ideas, combined with careful observation and documentation of the children in your care and regular communication with families about their children's activities provide children with the Learning Foundations they need—not just for school success but for life.

Now please do not misunderstand me. Just by doing all of this once, do we think every child will demonstrate competency in every task I've mentioned? NO.

However, over the course of a year, every child will have had learning experiences full of joy and laughter, had the opportunity to build self-esteem, see him or herself as a learner and know, from these experiences, that learning is FUN.

You are the people who are building the foundations that are critical for children's reading and academic success and social and emotional development.

Intentional teaching does indeed transform, change, and revolutionize our thinking, talking and behaviors.

The work you do transforms, changes and revolutionizes the lives of young children.

Keep on having fun in your work.

Thank you.