

There are shelves containing baskets of books separated into themes, such as “Animals,” “Weather,” “My Family and Me,” “Friends,” “School,” “Famous People,” “Farm,” “ABC’s,” and “123’s.” Some of the books are also grouped by authors’ names, such as Eric Carle and Ezra Jack Keats, and there is a basket of books labeled “Old Favorite Books,” and a large tote bag labeled “Books by Us.” The tote contains books written and illustrated by the children, either independently or with a small group of peers. In addition, there are books sorted by level of difficulty. An area of the Literacy Center designated the Author’s Spot contains various kinds of paper (lined and unlined), premade miniature blank books, various kinds of writing implements, envelopes, sight-word lists, and stickers. There is an area set aside for minilessons.

Five sets of desks in the center of the classroom are labeled with the children’s names. These tables are also named with the vowels A, E, I, O, and U. Danielle uses this to help the children with letter–sound recognition. When Danielle calls groups together, the children are called by the letter name and sound on their desks. The letters change, until all 26 letters of the alphabet have been used during the year. A U-shaped table used for guided literacy instruction is located on one side of the room; its position allows Danielle to see all areas of the classroom. By this table is a cart that contains materials for guided literacy instruction. The cart’s drawers contain white slates, magnetic boards, magnetic letters, and sentence strips. There are materials for writing, such as different types of paper, Magic Markers, colored pencils, pens, scissors, highlighting tape, index cards, and leveled books for the guided reading lesson.

Danielle’s Literacy Center is clearly visible and child-accessible. She also has centers for art, math, science, and social studies. Charts, posters, poems, book displays, and children’s work around the room clearly convey the current theme of study, animals.

Classroom Management

Good classroom organization is the foundation of effective instruction. An organized, well-managed classroom will have established clear expectations and consequences. Danielle says, “If you want them to do it, you must teach them to do it,” and explains that she uses the first month of school to focus on themes such as “Manners,” “School Routines,” and “Cooperation.” A bulletin board called “A Bunch of Magnificent Manners” highlights positive statements about manners that occur in the room. Throughout the year, Danielle continually reinforces the positive behaviors she wants the children to use. By the second week of school, she finds that the children begin to become familiar with these expectations and are able to express them in their words and actions. Transitions

are a major component of the instructional day. When done efficiently, transitions can take only a few moments and help to set the stage for the next activity. Danielle uses a variety of strategies to get the children's attention, all of which are effective. In one strategy, she claps out a pattern and has the children clap it back, saying, "1, 2, 3, eyes on me"; in another strategy, she sings a series of directions to a familiar tune, such as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star."

Danielle has prepared the environment to support her instruction. All materials that students need are accessible. Furthermore, all materials are assigned "a home." Various containers with labels are used to organize materials the children use. In addition, Danielle arranges her room in a way that enables her to see all areas clearly, no matter where she is.

Danielle's careful planning of lessons and materials contributes to the success of this classroom. There is a place in Danielle's plan book to jot down notes concerning what works and what needs to be changed. A small shelf by Danielle's desk contains all materials that will be needed for the week's lessons.

To actively engage children who finish activities earlier than their peers, Danielle uses a system called "Pick a Pocket." Twelve pockets, each labeled with a specific literacy activity, are taped to the front of Danielle's desk. When children finish work before others, they can take an activity card, put it in one of the pockets, then do what the activity card suggests.

Types of Reading Experiences and Skills Development

Danielle uses multiple strategies to teach reading. She used shared reading experience on the day she was being observed. The big book *Mrs. Wishy-Washy* (Cowley, 1999) was being used and reflected the theme of the week—"Farm Animals." It was obvious from the start of the reading that the children had enjoyed this story in the past. The reading was filled with the excitement of the children's voices, actions to match some of the words, and Danielle tracked the print from left to right with a pointer as the children read. After reading, Danielle carried out a lesson about onsets and rhymes in the story. She used text from the story to highlight these initial consonants and phonogram endings. During that week, other shared reading experiences focused on vocabulary development, comprehension through retelling of the story using a felt board, identification of story elements (including setting, theme, episodes, and resolution), and choral reading of some parts of the story, thus emphasizing fluency.

During the course of each day, Danielle allows her students independent reading time. She states, "This independent reading time is so valuable for the children and myself. It is a time for the children to practice

their developing reading strategies. More importantly, it is a time for them to foster their own love of reading.”

Another form of reading in which the class engages is a read-aloud. Before reading the book *Piggy Pie*, Danielle allowed the class a few moments to look at the cover. She asked the children to turn to a buddy and share what they thought the story would be about. After 1 minute of talk, Danielle asked a few children to share with the class their buddies’ predictions.

STUDENT 1: My buddy thinks it’s going to be about piggies who want to go out for pizza. But the witch is going to try to eat their pizza.

STUDENT 2: My buddy thinks it’s going to be about a witch who wants to make a pie, but none of the piggies will help. Like in *The Little Red Hen*.

STUDENT 3: Me and my buddy think it’s going to be about a witch who wants to eat all the pies the piggies make.

The children were visibly more excited about hearing the story, now that they had shared their predictions. Danielle read the story and used a number of character voices. She stopped at various points for predictions. Following the story, the children were asked to share their story reviews with the class. The lesson ended with Danielle asking the children to make connections between this story and other stories they had heard in the past.

Explicit skills development happens during guided literacy instruction. This instruction occurs in small groups, while other children are engaged in activities at the literacy or other learning centers. As she does with all other reading experiences, Danielle evokes a sense of excitement in the children as she makes the guided instruction highly interactive. The following excerpt is from the discussion that occurred before the book was read, to create enthusiasm and to build background meaning:

STUDENT 1: Lightning and thunder make me feel scared.

OTHER STUDENTS: Me too!

DANIELLE: What do you do when there’s thunder and lightning?

STUDENT 1: I go to my mommy or daddy.

DANIELLE: What do you and your mommy or daddy do while it’s storming out?

STUDENT 1: We read stories and play games.

STUDENT 2: Me and my mommy sing songs.

DANIELLE: What kinds of things do you do after a rainstorm?

STUDENT 3: Go out and play!

STUDENT 4: I make mud pies!

STUDENT 5: I jump in puddles!

STUDENT 6: I look for a rainbow!

DANIELLE: Wow! You do keep busy during and after rainstorms, and believe it or not, the lion in this story does some of the same things you do during and after a rainstorm. Let's take a picture walk through this book called *Johnny Lion's Rubber Boots*.

After the picture walk through *Johnny Lion's Rubber Boots* (Hurd, 2001), which was guided by picture cues, the group read the story together. Danielle followed up with a skills-based sound sort, in which the children discriminated between two initial consonant sounds heard in the story.

Types of Writing Experiences and Skills Development

The writing experiences in Danielle's classroom are as varied as the reading. The children begin each day with independent journal writing in their "Important to Me" Journals. Children at all stages of writing development write about things, people, or events that are important to them. Danielle uses this time to help the children individually; for example, she may reinforce the concept of leaving spaces between words in sentences or discuss how to create multiple sentences using periods rather than linking all thoughts with the word "and."

Danielle uses interactive writing many times throughout the day. As part of the morning meeting, she has the class create a daily news report. Children report news they think is important; for example, one morning a child reported, "I got a new baseball bat yesterday." The children record the news they share.

Danielle also has a Writing Workshop, in which she teaches a mini-lesson in a writing procedure. After the lesson, children are given time to write, using what they have been taught. Once the children are settled into their activity, Danielle calls a small group of students together for a guided writing session. Guided writing, another part of the Writing Workshop, provides direct, explicit instruction.

During this guided writing session, Danielle works with four children who are using only the initial and/or the final letter of a word when doing free, independent writing. Using the word "turkey," because the theme being discussed has to do with farm animals, Danielle takes a rubber band and stretched it out slowly, as she says the word "turkey," thus providing

both physical and verbal segmentation of the word. She then hands out rubber bands to the four children and asks them to stretch out the rubber band and say the word “turkey” as she has just done. As the children say the word in a stretched out fashion, Danielle records it on chart paper. She follows up by asking them to stretch the word out three more times, until all of the sounds are represented on the chart paper. The group repeats the exercise with the word “chicken.”

As usual, Danielle closes her Writing Workshop with the Author’s Chair activity. Four children are given the opportunity to share some of their free writing.

Cross-Curricular Connections

All curriculum areas are tied together through thematic instruction in Danielle’s classroom. She began a thematic unit about the “Farm Animals,” with a book called *Mrs. Wishy-Washy* (Cowley, 1999). In the book, different animals get a bath. With 23 different picture storybooks about the farm and farm animals, Danielle created a reading and math activity. After looking through a book, children were asked to record the types of animals and the number of times each appeared. Danielle created a recording sheet that lists animals in the books with labels. On a line provided, the children were to write the names of the animals appearing in the book and the number times each appeared. The activity could be repeated by switching books and doing it again.

Social studies was brought into the theme with the use of a nonfiction book entitled *The Milk Makers* (Gibbons, 1987). After the read-aloud, the class engaged in interactive writing and generated a large flowchart that highlighted the farm-to-table milk-producing process. The book also engaged the class in discussions focusing on other items that come from the farm.

Teachable Moments

During one daily newswriting session, a student in Danielle’s class stated, “Look! The little word *ball* is in the big word *baseball*.” This simple statement made another child realize that the little word *base* was also in the word *baseball*. Danielle took advantage of this teachable moment as follows:

DANIELLE: Great observation! Look at this. Ryan, come up and highlight the word *base* for us. (*The child used highlighting tape on the word.*) Now, Sophie, you highlight the word *ball*. (*This child used a different-colored highlighting tape.*) We know *baseball* is one word, because there

is no space in between the two little words. A word that has two little words in it is called a “compound word.” Let me use my hands to show you how this works. I’m going to say the word *base* to one hand, and then I’m going to say the word *ball* to the other. When I move my hands together, placing one on top of the other, I get one word—a compound word—*baseball*. Can you think of other compound words?

STUDENT 1: *Football*. *Foot* is one word and *ball* is the other. Watch. (*The child uses his hands, just as Danielle did.*)

DANIELLE: You’ve got it! Anyone else?

STUDENT 2: *Butterfly!*

For the remainder of the day, students pointed out compound words both in writing and in Danielle’s speech. For Danielle, this teachable moment helped to reinforce how powerful the reading strategy of finding little words inside of bigger words can be, and it also opened the door to a brand new concept of compound words.

One of Danielle’s favorite teachable moments is as follows:

During a thematic unit on “Sea Creatures,” the class enjoyed a read-aloud about a blue whale. In the book, the author stated that a blue whale could average 100 feet long. Michael wanted to know how long 100 feet would be. Some students thought it would be the size of the classroom; others thought it would be as tall as the school. Danielle recalls:

“It was the perfect cross-curricular, teachable moment. We gathered up all of our rulers and yardsticks, and we went outside to the blacktop. We reviewed how a ruler is 1 foot long and that it would take 100 rulers to show us 100 feet. Then, we discovered that a yardstick is equivalent to three rulers. One ruler and yardstick at a time, we laid them out on the blacktop. When we ran out of measuring tools, we decided that we could mark the beginning of the line with chalk and begin placing the rulers at the other end. When we finally reached 100 feet, the children began to cheer. They asked if they could use sidewalk chalk to draw around the rulers and make it look like a real blue whale. The teachable moment turned into a priceless cross-curricular lesson.”

The Daily Schedule and a Typical Day in Kindergarten

When Danielle plans her day she is always concerned that the content, materials, and time spent for activities are all age-appropriate. The following is a schedule of her day: