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WHAT TO DO UNTIL THE READINESS WORKBOOKS ARRIVE!

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On a brisk October morning, Ms. Kind arrived at school early. "Are those readiness workbooks here, yet?" she asked Ms. Leeder, the principal. "Not yet," Ms. Leeder replied, "but they should be here any day now." "I hope so," responded Ms. Kind. "This morning I noticed how much the leaves have turned. The school year is moving right along. Since the school system's goal this year is to have all children ready to begin reading instruction by the time they complete kindergarten, and my children have such a long way to go, I had better get started soon." "Well, they're due in any day now," Ms. Leeder repeated as she walked out to greet the first busload of children.

Ms. Kind hurried to her kindergarten classroom and prepared for the morning's activities. As she was mixing paints and putting out clay, her mind was on the awesome responsibility of preparing all these kindergarteners for beginning reading instruction. Having taught second and third grades for several years, Ms. Kind recognized how crucial it was that first graders get off to a successful start in reading. She believed in the newly adopted school board policy that kindergarten should provide students with the essential reading readiness skills, and she had only two concerns about providing the necessary instruction. The first problem was her lack of knowledge about exactly what the essential readiness skills were and how to teach them. This problem would be solved if the readiness workbooks would just come as they were supposed to! The second problem was going to be harder to solve. When Ms. Kind taught second and third grades, she had always wondered about all the "playing" that went on in kindergarten. As she had walked past the kindergarten classroom and had seen the youngsters digging in sand and building with blocks, she had often wondered if these activities were not a waste of precious instructional time. Since then, however, Ms. Kind had taken several courses in early childhood education and, based on knowledge gained from these courses and observations of her own kindergarten class during the first six weeks of school, Ms. Kind now understood that the traditional kindergarten activities were crucial to the intellectual development of many children.

But where, she wondered that morning as the children rushed into the classroom, was she ever going to find the time to continue to provide these activities crucial for intellectual and

social development <u>and</u> provide her youngsters with a thorough reading readiness program? That problem, she decided, would just have to wait to be solved when the workbooks arrived.

For the next several weeks, Ms. Kind checked every day to see if the workbooks had arrived. Finally, she was told that they were back-ordered and should be there after Thanksgiving! Meanwhile, Ms. Kind knew from talking with teachers in other schools that their workbooks had arrived weeks before. When Christmas vacation began and still no readiness workbooks had appeared, Ms. Kind decided to take matters into her own hands. Armed with journal articles she had copied at the library and some current textbooks, she sat down one snowy afternoon after Christmas, determined to plan her own reading readiness program. Her list at the end of the afternoon included five major "knowings":

1. <u>Children must know what reading is for.</u>

Ms. Kind was amazed to discover that many children come to school without a clear understanding of how important reading ability is, not only in school but also, in life. Marie Clay (1976) had investigated correlates of successful beginning reading in New Zealand, and had identified two groups of "disadvantaged minority" children. One group, the Maoris, possessed better capabilities with English, the language of instruction. The other group, the Samoans, while possessing less English, progressed much more satisfactorily in reading and, in fact, were very similar to the rest of the students at the end of two years of instruction. In attempting to explain these unexpected results, Clay observed that the Samoan children seemed to know more at school entrance about reading and books. She had the following conversation with a Sunday School teacher:

Clay: "Do they see their parents reading at home?"
Teacher: "No, I am sure they don't because the parents do not read English well and they have written almost nothing in Samoan."
Clay: "Do they read the Bible?"
Teacher: "Oh yes, all the time, that is, almost every day."
Clay: "Do they read the Bible aloud to the family?"
Teacher: "Yes, that is very common. And my four-year-old Samoan children who come to Sunday School all want to write. The take the pencils and paper and write..."
Clay: "Where would these young children get the idea of writing messages?"
Teacher: "I don't know."
Clay: "Would the parents write letters to Western Samoa and read mail from home? I have seen the Nuieans on Boat Day selling their crafts in the market place to the tourists but at the same time reading their mail from New Zealand and frantically writing their answers so that the boat which stays only a few hours can take the letters back to New Zealand. Would the Samoans also value their letters to and from home?"
Teacher: "Yes, they would. I never thought of that but children would see high value placed on written messages."(p.341)

As she thought about it, Ms. Kind realized that the children who didn't come from homes where reading and writing were everyday activities might not realize that you learn to read and write in school so that you can do it out in the world. Even children who come from homes where reading and writing do not occur (and it was hard for Ms. Kind to imagine homes in the 1980's where no reading and writing occur!) might not have recognized that reading and writing were going on. If a person is making supper, he or she is "cooking." The fact that the recipe in the cookbook is being read can easily go unnoticed. When one is making a shopping list, paying the bills or filling out an order blank, reading and writing are the hidden agendas. Ms. Kind vowed that, if nothing else, her kindergarteners would know some real-world reasons for learning to read and write.

2. Children must know what reading feels like and sounds like; that it must make sense and sound like English.

When she was a second/third-grade teacher, Ms. Kind had always been astonished by children who read sentences in ways which did not make any sense and then just went on reading. She had, in fact, developed the habit of correcting the child who read, "The man was a river" for the printed "The man saw a river" by asking: "The man was a river? How could that be? Could a man turn into a river? Something must be wrong. That didn't make any sense to me. Let's go back and read that sentence again." By consistently correcting the child by referring to the meaninglessness of certain oral reading errors and insisting that making sense was the bottom line of reading, Ms. Kind was usually able to help students eventually develop this internal feedback system. Now she realized by reading the articles and books of various experts that children do not come automatically equipped with this internal feedback system. The notion that reading has to sound right and make sense is probably developed through many early being-read-to experiences as well as by modelling. Some self-taught readers, in fact, reported that when they came to a word they didn't know, they "...think about what would go there" or "...just say what would sound right" (Taylor, 1977, 669). Ms. Kind thought about the recent advances in medicine and physical education involving the use of biofeedback. Patients who suffer from high blood pressure or other imbalances of internal body functions are sometimes taught to control these ordinarily involuntary processes by being given feedback, usually by a meter connected to them with electrodes, on how the functions change as they concentrate to modify them. It occurred to her that the internal feedback "meter" for readers is the feeling readers get regarding the sense and sound of what they read. If children can be persuaded to use this internal meter, they learn to control the otherwise involuntary eye movements and internal speech mechanisms so important to fluent reading with comprehension. Ms. Kind realized that it is this internal feedback meter which alerts good readers when their reading fails to sound right or make sense, and that it is this meter which compels them to reread to self-correct when their attention has been temporarily distracted from gaining meaning.

3. In order to read with comprehension, children must be able to listen with comprehension.

This knowing was no surprise to Ms. Kind. She had known for a long time that children could not read better than they could listen. She had always done a lot of listening comprehension activities with her second and third graders and was doing some as well with her kindergarteners. She often used every-pupil-response activities during or after the reading of a picture book to help focus the attention of every child on what was being listened to. She also held "conversation times" with small groups of children in order to help them learn to express their ideas in sentences. During these times, she never corrected the child's language patterns. Rather, she accepted the response as spoken and then repeated it in the language pattern more apt to be used in writing. If a child said, "My dog ain't got no tail," Ms. Kind responded "Your dog doesn't have a tail? What happened to it?" Phrase and short sentence responses made by the children were expanded by Ms. Kind as she accepted the child's responses with a syntactically more complex translation. The development of concepts and meaning vocabulary also accounted for a large chunk of the instructional time Ms. Kind had with her children. Finding that listening comprehension ability was essential for success in reading, Ms. Kind determined to redouble her efforts in that area.

4. Children who are successful in beginning reading know the conventions and jargon of print.

There are some things about reading and writing which are peculiar to print. We read and write starting in the top left-hand corner, go across a line, make a return sweep and go across the next line until we come to the bottom of the page. Left-hand pages are read before right-hand pages. That which can be said, can be written. That which can be written, can be read. In reading and writing, one must understand some terminology. To many beginning readers, a letter is something the mailman brings; words are something they use all the time but don't know as separate entities. (Ask the average five-year-old how many words there are in "Bill Brown wants an ice cream cone"!) And if they have any meaning at all for sentence, it may be because they heard it used by a judge on television.

5. Children who are successful in beginning reading can visually discriminate letters and words.

As Ms. Kind was reading about visual discrimination, she discovered that it is currently believed that most young people can see likenesses and differences in objects and shapes but that they cannot always match like letters and words. This makes sense, she thought, because they have had much experience with ojects and have not had much practice in discriminating letters and words. Furthermore, letters and words are different from objects in that the way a letter or word is oriented makes a difference. Ms. Kind thought about her two-year-old niece, Katrine, who knew what a chair was. One day, Katrine came to visit. A dining room chair was turned upside down while the glue for a

loose rung dried. Katrine entered the room, pointed to the chair, and said "What's that?" "Why, you know what that is, Katrine," Ms. Kind said. "It's a chair. I just had it turned upside down while the glue dried. You remember it had a loose rung in back. Now it is dry so we can put it back up." All during the afternoon, when Ms. Kind was out of the room, Katrine would turn the chair over and then attempt (usually unsuccessfully) to turn it up again.

As Ms. Kind thought about Katrine's "What's that?" reaction to the overturned chair and her continued need to turn it this way and that way, Ms. Kind realized that children do not come into the world knowing that it doesn't matter which way you turn something, it stays the same thing. They learn this important concept by manipulations such as those performed by Katrine on the chair. By the time most children come to school, they know it doesn't matter what order things are in or how you turn them, they stay the same things. Then - they meet letters and words. Suddenly, order and position do matter. As Ms. Kind thought about providing her children with visual discriminations of letter and word practice, she realized that she would have to make it clear to them that with letters and words, unlike objects, when they are turned around they are no longer the same.

As Ms. Kind finished her list of essential reading readiness knowings, she realized that there were a number of things she believed were important to success in beginning raeading which were not on her list. Didn't all children need to know some letter-sound associations before beginning to read and wasn't the ability to name the letters of the alphabet the best indicator of success in beginning reading? A little more reading revealed that while learning letter-sound associations is important to reading success, it is only prerequisite to reading success if the approach to beginning reading starts by having the children decode words. If the approach to beginning reading is one in which the children learn some sight words and then are taught inductively the sounds represented by the letters in their known words, letter-sound association knowledge can be taught along with beginning reading rather than required before reading instruction begins.

The letter-name information she found was frankly shocking. She found that the ability to name letters was indeed the best predictor of success in beginning reading and that traditionally much time and effort has been expended to teach all kindergarteners their letter names. In many cases, beginning reading instruction has been postponed until a child could name all upper and lower case letters. What Ms. Kind discovered, however, was that letter-name knowledge was an indicator of a lot of experience with reading and writing. Children who came to school able to name all the letter of the alphabet also had many of the other important readiness knowings. Just teaching the letter names without building these other knowings would not result in a child's being successful in beginning reading. Letter-name knowledge, however, is important since teachers and instructional materials use the letter names as an integral part of beginning reading instruction. Children who don't know the letter names

are apt to be confused about what tasks they are asked to do. Ms. Kind decided that she would try to teach all the children the names of the letters but would remember that, as with letter-sound associations, children could begin reading and learn some of the letter names as they went along and that the five knowings she had compiled must be developed in the children before or during this instruction.

By the time Ms. Kind had finished all her reading and thinking, it was dark outside and her boy was demanding refreshment with which to replenish all the energy she had expended that afternoon. As she was making a turkey sandwich, she vowed to take another afternoon and plan how she was going to accomplish what she now knew had to be done. As with most vacations, however, time passed quickly and Ms. Kind found herself returning to school with her list of five knowings but without a definite plan for teaching them.

As her kindergarteners burst into the classroom, Ms. Kind was amazed to notice how little they were. "When you work with them every day," she thought, "they look sort of normal size. But when you haven't seen them in a while, you see them as the tiny people they really are." Every child had brought something he or she had gotten over the holidays. They spent a long time in a circle sharing and talking about the summer and what each had brought. Then, Ms. Kind had an idea. "Wouldn't you like to write a story telling what everyone got?" she suggested. The children were enthusiastic and Ms. Kind assigned them to four groups of six or seven children each so that she could write the stories with them in small groups. She then let all but one group of children choose a center in which to work for the first 25 minutes. With the group of children who stayed with her, she wrote on chart paper each child's sentence telling what he or she had gotten. Her chart looked like this:

I got a football. (Carol)

I got a spider man. (Bill)

I got a Sesame Street book. (Joshua)

I got a tape recorder. (Cathy)

I got a Candyland game. (Burt)

I got a lunch box. (Sam)

Once the chart was written and read by Ms. Kind and chorally by the group, several children wanted to read the chart. They all knew that each sentence began with: I got a, and they all knew their own gifts. But, most did not know each other's gift. Ms. Kind solved the problem of each child wanting to read the whole story by having each one stand and hold up the object as the reader was reading that sentence. Even Burt, who was a "young" kindergartener in every way, was able to read the whole story as each child popped up, proudly holding his or her object while Burt read their sentences.

Using this procedure, Ms. Kind met with each group (two before lunch and two after) and helped them write a chart. She

then hung the charts by the door and explained to the class that the charts would tell anyone who came to visit their classroom what each child had gotten over the holidays.

That afternoon, Ms. Kind sat down and looked at her list of five essential readiness knowings. She was amazed to realize that in doing the charts with the children, a natural outgrowth of their morning sharing time, she had begun to accomplish some of her readiness objectives. Hanging the charts by the door so that visitors could find out what the different children had received helped the children to realize that writing and reading provide information and consequently began to meet the goal that children would know what reading was for.

Because they were involved in giving their sentences, watching them being written, reading them and listening to others read them, they were gaining an internal sense of what reading feels like. Ms. Kind had guided their hands as they were reading and she could see that they were gaining experience with the convention that reading is done from left to right and top to bottom. While Ms. Kind hadn't drawn attention to the concepts of letter, word and sentence nor provided practice in visual discrimination, she realized that she could use the dictated story as a vehicle for this learning. On the following day, she did just that.

First she met with each group and reread the story. She had asked each child to bring his or her gift back to school and so, once again, she had each one stand and display his or her object as that sentence was being read. In this way, all the children were able to read the whole story successfully. When everyone who chose to had a chance to read the story, Ms. Kind took out some sentence strips. "Now," she explained, "I am going to write each of your sentences. But I am not necessarily going to write Carol's sentence first because Carol's sentence is at the top or Sam's sentence last because his is at the bottom. (Ms. Kind emphasized the underlined words because they are part of the terminology children must learn if they are to be successful in beginning reading.) She then wrote I and asked the group whose sentence she was writing. When all hands flew up, Ms. Kind drew their attention to the chart and to the fact that all of the sentences began with the word I. The children concluded that you couldn't tell whose sentence it would be from just the first word, I.

When Ms. Kind, after writing got, asked whose sentence it was, only half the hands went up. The children were led to observe that since all sentences had got as the second word, you still couldn't tell. No hands were raised when Ms. Kind wrote a, but the children were eagerly watching for the next word. This word, they had figured out, would determine whose sentence was being written. In this manner, each child's sentence was written. As Ms. Kind was writing the last three sentences, she guided the children in to seeing that they might be able to tell by the first letter of the fourth word whose sentence it would be. When all the sentences were written on sentence strips, Ms. Kind cut each child's sentence into words and had the child "Put them

in order to make them say your sentence." She circulated, giving praise and assistance as they completed this visual discrimination and left-right orientation activity.

That afternoon, as Ms. Kind sat down with her list, she was delighted to see that she had indeed helped her children to become acquainted with the jargon of reading, and that she had given them some practice in left-right orientation and word matching. Since she had read the children several of the new books they had gotten for holiday gifts, she had also helped improve their listening comprehension. With one of the books which was familiar to all the children, The Three Billy Goats, Ms. Kind had intentionally made some reading errors which didn't sound right or make sense. The children were quick to point out these errors to her. Ms. Kind realized that she could use this strategy to help her children become aware that when reading, if it didn't sound right and make sense, something was wrong and you had better look again at what you read.

Over the next several weeks, Ms. Kind found numerous opportunities to develop the essential readiness knowings as she worked with her children in traditional kindergarten activities. Before baking No Mess (???) Valentine Cookies, Ms. Kind and the children read the recipe together and did word matching activities. Ms. Kind used this opportunity to discuss with the children things you have to read in order to do. For homework, each child was to interview parents and/or neighbors and find out what they read to do their jobs at home or at work. The children were to bring samples of this reading material, if possible, to school. To Ms. Kind's delight, she soon had a bulletin board full of menus, package labels, bus routes, train schedules, invoices, and other real-world reading materials. There was no doubt that each and every one of her students would see reading as a "real world" essential.

As an outgrowth of a simple paper bag puppet-making activity she did with the children, Ms. Kind made Mr. Blooper, a puppet who always made bloopers when he read. The children begged for Mr. Blooper to read books and eagerly pointed out to him that his bloopers "can't be what it says, that doesn't sound right. You made a blooper. Read it again so that it makes sense." Thanks to Mr. Blooper, Ms. Kind's children all know that making sense is the bottom line of reading.

To help the students further internalize this sense that reading must feel and sound right, Ms. Kind did several things. First, she initiated a brief period (five minutes) of sustained silent "reading" every day during which each student chose a picture book or a wordless picture book and "read" it. Ms. Kind also read a book during this time. While such periods were in progress, Ms. Kind often had guests come by to sit with the group and model reading. These guests included parents, first- and second-grade teachers, older children, and the principal. Second, she taught comprehension lessons using wordless picture books. In these lessons, she always gave the children one purpose for "reading" and then let them look at a few pages in the book while she held it. Then, with the book closed, she asked them to answer

a question or perform a verbal task which was directly based on the purpose for "reading" she had given them. She would write down exactly what each child said on chart paper, just like a language experience lesson. When she had several statements written, she would open the book back up and ask the students to decide which statements were right and how to change the ones that weren't. Third, she had children follow along in a short book while listening to the record or tape once or twice a day until they could "read" it fluently with the recording. Each time she would listen to someone read, she would say, "There, now you're beginning to sound like a good reader. Doesn't that feel good?"

Teaching listening comprehension had always been a strength of Ms. Kind's and she did a fine job with this as the year went on. One discovery which disturbed her was that many of her children were unfamiliar with the supposedly familiar, classic stories for children. She solved this problem by reading these stories to the children and taping the story as she read it. (The children were to clap their hands as she turned the page. This became the audible "turn page" signal on the tape.) The children would listen to the story in small groups several times so that they were very familiar with it. When all the children were familiar with the story, Ms. Kind would lead them to list major events, sequence events, discuss characters and then act out the stories. The children loved doing these story dramatizations and Ms. Kind found that they listened better and remembered more when they had the lure of being able to act out the parts as a purpose and motivator.

Ms. Kind found that, after dictating and reading many language experience charts like the one they did after the Christmas Holidays, all of her children proceeded automatically to read print from left-to-right and top-to-bottom and were clear about the meaning of such terms as letter, word, sentence, top, bottom, first, last, etc. After much experience with matching words and letters from these stories, they had good visual discrimination of letters and words and had learned many of the letter names.

One day in April, after Ms. Kind had forgotten their very existence, the readiness workbooks arrived with some apology about a warehouse fire. Ms. Leeder brought them to her classroom and, after commiserating with Ms. Kind for having to "struggle along" almost the entire year without them, urged Ms. Kind to "do what you can in the few short weeks remaining."

Ms. Kind was about to explain to Ms. Leeder that she had, in fact, gotten along quite well without the books, but Ms. Leeder went rushing off to "man the busses." Ms. Kind then opened a workbook and perused its contents. She found page after page of lessons designed to teach letter names and sounds. She also found that the readiness workbook taught a number of sight words. Little space was given to the more basic and global readiness knowings she had been teaching. Ms. Kind realized that what she had been teaching required that children be in the presence of reading and writing and could not be neatly packaged in workbook

format. "It's an ill wind that blows no good," she thought. "That warehouse fire gave me time to get them ready for readiness."

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