

## **Chapter 4 The Classroom**

The preceding chapter described the experiences of three individual students and their teacher as they used the Reading Program. The purpose of this chapter is to describe in much greater detail how this program is actually set up and implemented for all the children in the classroom. Chapter 5 provides specific information on how each separate component of the program is introduced to the students. This chapter is divided into ten sections. The first five sections look at Ms. X's classroom at five different times during the year. These times are:

- 1) September through October
- 2) November
- 3) February
- 4) April
- 5) End of the Year

The sixth through ninth sections of this chapter discuss the differences encountered when introducing this program at grade levels other than kindergarten. The tenth section discusses the managing of student behavior in the classroom:

- 6) First-Grade
- 7) Second-Grade
- 8) Upper Grades
- 9) The E.H. Classroom
- 10) Managing Student Behavior in the Classroom

### **September through October**

In kindergarten, a good part of the first few weeks of school is spent in acquainting children with school life itself. Children need to be taught such things as where the bathrooms are, what the school bells mean, where one hangs one's coat, (and in many cases, how does one put it on again at the end of the day), how are chairs to be picked up and moved from one place to another, who decides who sits where, and so on. All of those "getting used to school" problems delayed the time Ms. X felt comfortable presenting the Reading Program to her students.

In a first-grade classroom children already know about school. They are also a year older. The year's difference in age means that first-grade children will advance faster through any academic experiences, even if they had missed their kindergarten year altogether. Older children are able to learn faster. Even slower learners learn faster as they age.

As I describe the different periods in time in Ms. X's classroom, keep in mind that, while the rate at which children are able to absorb information will increase as they reach higher grade levels, the order of the presentation remains the same. Russell may have led the way, but Denise and Anthony were following his same path across the field.

Ms. X spent most of the school days in early September conducting the same activities with her new children as she had presented to all her past groups of kindergarten students. Ms. X had always made it a practice to read a story or at least part of a story to her students each day from the very beginning of the school year. In late September, when she was ready to begin reading *Dekodiphukan* to her class, her students were already quite used to sitting in front of her on her reading rug as she read aloud to them.

In Ms. X's first year of teaching kindergarten, she had frequently been annoyed with how much pushing and poking had taken place in her reading circle. Usually, only a handful of less mature children were the source of the problem, but they could make her reading time less pleasant for everyone. Eventually, Ms. X had decided to make sitting on the rug in front of her chair a special honor, rather than a right automatically conferred upon everyone.

At the start of her second year of teaching, Ms. X decided to have everyone stay at their tables as she read them their first story. The next day, before she started reading, she told her students that she was going to let the very best listeners come up and sit on the rug in front of her chair as she read. She told her class that a best listener was someone who could walk from his or her own place at the table to the rug without disturbing anyone else, sit down on the rug, and be very quiet while she was reading. Best listeners were also very good about not bothering their neighbors on the rug, so that everyone else on the rug would be able to listen to the story, too. Ms. X said it was perfectly okay if somebody wasn't a best listener, because good listeners could still hear the story from where they were already sitting. But, only the best listeners could come to the rug. She then asked anyone in class who thought they might be a best listener to raise their hands, and she would invite them to join her on the rug.

Ms. X had the students who raised their hands join her at the rug only two or three at a time, so she could compliment them individually on how well they came to the rug and sat down without bothering others. Those few students who couldn't resist poking or tapping friends as they walked to the rug, or running and sliding to a seat, or wrestling with people once they got there, were sent back to their tables. The students who had to be sent back to their tables were not given another chance to join the people on the rug that day, because they were not yet best listeners. The table-bound students were not told they were bad. They were only told they were not yet ready to join their classmates on the rug.

Ms. X found that when sitting on the rug was an honor that had to be earned, her reading times went much more smoothly. She found that the children who might formerly have been disruptive now had much more incentive to confine their restlessness to recess.

Shortly after the start of the school year, Ms. X began teaching her students how to work at and rotate through five preliminary learning stations she had set up for them. Ms. X wanted her children to be comfortable with the concepts of learning stations and regular rotation, so that when she began to read *Dekodiphukan* to her students, they would be ready to begin learning

about Picture Packets and worksheets as soon as they knew the first eight sounds. The five stations Ms. X chose to use were:

1. Library Books
2. Clay or Play Dough
3. Coloring with Crayons
4. Puzzles (and, eventually, Workjobs)
5. Lego Blocks and Tinker Toys

The materials that Ms. X selected for her five stations were those that she happened to have available in her classroom. Other materials would have been equally suitable. Apart from availability, the only criterion for selection was that each material had to be something the students could use without any assistance from Ms. X.

In advance of setting up the stations, Ms. X had placed the sets of materials that were to be used at the stations, each in its own separate area of the classroom. Then, one station at a time, Ms. X taught her students how to go to the selected storage area, gather the necessary materials and bring them to the appropriate learning station table.

To make moving the necessary materials to each station go as smoothly and as quickly as possible, Ms. X had placed the items that were to go to each station in their own separate cardboard box. The boxes, in turn, were placed on the side counter. Ms. X had labeled the sides of each box with a design or symbol and had hung the corresponding symbol over the station itself. This meant that when Ms. X was ready to begin the station time, selected children could quickly carry the appropriate box of materials to the matching station.

There were several advantages to using the cardboard boxes to house most of the station items. First, the boxes enabled the stations to be set up and cleaned up quickly by the children themselves. Second, the same box technique could also be employed once the Reading Program itself was begun, since all Ms. X would have to do would be to substitute reading materials for the materials already in the boxes. Third, as children reached higher levels of the Reading Program, all Ms. X would have to do would be to add the new materials to the boxes already going to the stations. Not all of the station materials would fit comfortably into this box plan, but then, no plan is perfect.

Once the process of setting up the stations was understood, Ms. X's goal was to make sure her students understood how to work at the stations for a fixed period of time and then move on to the next set of activities with a minimum of fuss. A parallel goal was to test the compatibility of the groupings she had made. Ms. X wanted to make sure from the very start that students who did not work well together worked as far apart as possible. Since these learning stations did not require her to teach anybody anything, at least not academically, she was free to observe how well or poorly her children interacted with one another and make adjustments accordingly.

There were several systems of group rotation that Ms. X could have used. The process she chose consisted of making a yarn necklace for each child. Each group was designated by a different color, and each child's group

membership was indicated by a yarn necklace in that group's color with his or her name attached to it.

The names were attached to the necklaces to help ensure that each child had on the correct color at learning station time. Ms. X had very carefully balanced the composition of each group, but she could not always remember exactly who was supposed to work with whom. Names attached to colored yarn necklaces helped Ms. X remember who was in which group. Names attached to the yarn also meant that necklaces found on the floor or on the counter or in the restroom or wherever, could be easily identified and returned to their rightful owners.

To accompany the yarn necklaces, Ms. X also made cones out of construction paper, one cone per group, with colors to match the yarn. The red necklaces were matched by a red cone, the blue necklaces by a blue cone, and so on. Illustration on page 152 not needed

The cones designated at which station the children with the matching color necklaces were to work. Once the learning station materials had been placed on the appropriate tables, Ms. X would place a cone on each table. The children then went to the station that was marked by their colored cone. At rotation time, Ms. X would ask the children to tidy up their station and get it ready for the next group. When the tidying up was complete, she would pick up each cone and move it to another station in the rotation cycle. The children then followed their cone to their new station.

Ms. X always rotated the cones in a clockwise direction, so she could make sure that each group passed through each station each day. Even though she could just as well have told each group to which station to move next, Ms. X preferred using the cones. As the year progressed and her students began operating at different levels of the Reading Program, they would also begin spreading their work out on the floor and moving away from the tables from which they selected their activities. The cones and the yarn necklaces would be Ms. X's way of telling just who was supposed to be working on what, regardless of how far away from their station the children might choose to move.

Ms. X had selected cones as the shape to use rather than cylinders, boxes, or some other form, because the cones stacked easily inside each other for storage. Ms. X could have made cylinders or boxes that fit inside of each other, but to achieve the proper fit, these shapes would have to be made in different sizes. She had found from her own experiences that her children made a fuss when one group had a box or a cylinder that was larger or smaller than another group. The cones were the only geometric shape she could think of, which was easy to make and which would allow a single size to stack one on top of another so nicely.

As Ms. X's students were learning to rotate from station to station, she usually allowed them to stay at each table for about seven to ten minutes. She knew that as they grew more used to school, they would be able to work longer, but for now, she didn't want them to become restless at the stations.

All of the activities Ms. X selected for her practice learning stations were

chosen because they required little or no teacher direction. Although these activities allowed Ms. X to concentrate her attention on teaching rotation and judging group compatibilities, they hadn't required any work on the part of the children. Making shapes with clay, or thumbing through a picture book, did not give her children any sense of having accomplished anything definite. Before Ms. X asked her students to begin using the Reading Program, she wanted the opportunity to teach them what she expected of them when it came to the work of learning.

To facilitate teaching her students how to work at learning, Ms. X decided to replace one of the five practice stations with selected Workjobs. Her least favorite station was the puzzle station, so her choice of which station to use for the introduction of Workjobs was easy. As one group at a time rotated through the new station, Ms. X showed them each Workjob in turn, allowed them to practice with it, and then introduced the next one.

The second day, Ms. X taught each successive group of students how to select a Workjob, use it, then clean it up and make another selection. The third day, Ms. X allowed each group to show her how well they had learned the procedure from the previous day.

Although Workjobs were introduced because Ms. X wanted to teach her students how to work at the learning stations, their introduction had another purpose as well. At this early point in the year, Ms. X had not yet formally identified students like Anthony as in need of special help. Even so, she already knew from experience the wide levels of ability to expect from her students. When it would become necessary for Anthony and others having difficulties to spend time developing missing skills through the use of Workjobs, their use now by all of the students in class would remove any stigma from their continued use later on.

Much of a child's ability to learn is a function of how that child perceives himself or herself as a learner. If a child feels that the materials with which he or she is to learn are reserved only for dummies, the materials lose their effectiveness. When, instead, these same materials have been given a degree of status, their full potential to assist the learning of the children who need them most can be comfortably realized.

When Ms. X used Workjobs to teach even the students like Russell, then the Anthonys in the room do not have to feel badly using these same Workjobs. It is far easier for a child to continue using a material or an activity that another child may already have finished, than it is to use a material that no one else in class has ever been asked to touch.

Ms. X introduced the Workjobs learning station in mid-September. By late September, she was ready to begin the Reading Program. Although she had some doubts about what she might expect from her students once they began using the program's activities, Ms. X was confident that, at least at this point in time, her students were in control and collectively ready to learn.

Ms. X gathered up her courage and began reading *Dekodiphukan* to her students. Although there were words in the story she knew her students would not understand, she did not stop for explanations. She preferred instead to let

the rhyme of the words and the fascination of the illustrations capture their attention. When she came across a sound in the story, Ms. X stopped to emphasize the sound and pinned to the bulletin board the Wall Sound Card that would be used to represent it, before continuing with her reading.

Ms. X usually read for about five or ten minutes each day. If there were sounds introduced that day's reading, she would wait until she had finished reading before having her students engage in any acting out of the sounds.

When her children knew, or had at least been exposed to, the first three or four sounds in the program, Ms. X used the Two-Sound Flipbook to begin teaching them to blend two-sound words. Equally as important as teaching her students to blend sounds into words was teaching them the vocabulary of words that they would soon be asked to blend on their own. Ms. X knew it would do no good for a child to blend two sounds together to form the word row if the child did not know what a row was. The Two-Sound Flipbook allowed Ms. X to introduce blending sounds into words and to make sure her students possessed the vocabulary to comprehend the meaning of the words she was asking them to blend.

Each day, Ms. X continued reading *Dekodiphukan* to her students. Each day, too, Ms. X continued to review the sounds learned and the words in the Two-Sound Flipbook. Although the time she allotted to the reading of *Dekodiphukan* remained relatively constant each day, the time needed to review the individual sounds and practice the blending was steadily expanding. Soon, Ms. X began alternating days between reviewing the sounds and blending the words. On the days for reviewing sounds, Ms. X also introduced the Sound Review Charts, so she could begin to assess which of her students were learning the sounds.

At the same time, Ms. X also began conducting an informal assessment of how well her students understood the process of blending sounds into words. This informal assessment consisted simply of watching how well individual students seemed to be doing in the whole-class lessons with the Two-Sound Flipbook.

Ms. X had intended to teach only eight sounds before using the individual assessment sheets from the Blackline Masters. However, she found she had presented about sixteen sounds before she thought to begin assessing her children one at a time. Her children were still working at their practice learning stations, so conducting the individual assessments wasn't a problem. All she had to do was call children over to her one at a time and have them read the sounds and words on their individual assessment sheets to her, as the rest of the class continued to rotate through the learning stations.

Even though her students knew at least sixteen sounds, Ms. X couldn't decide whether to assess them on just the first eight sounds and two-sound words, or all sixteen. She compromised by deciding to assess each child initially on the first eight. Children who did very well on eight, she continued to assess for the whole sixteen.

Ms. X had decided that she was willing to introduce the triangle or eight sound level of the Picture Packets into a learning station if a third to a half of

her class could blend some of the two-sound words on the individual assessment sheet. Since the groups were already set up to be heterogeneous, there would then be at least two or three children in each group who understood enough of what was happening to be able to provide a model for those around them.

Since Ms. X was going to introduce new activities only one station at a time, if everyone was completely confused, she could always stop using that activity for a while and let her students go back to the library books, crayons, or whatever else the reading component had replaced. Ms. X was not sure what to expect from either her students or the Reading Program once she began introducing the kit, but she knew at least that if it were a fiasco, she could always discontinue it.

Enough of Ms. X's students passed their individual assessments at the triangle level that Ms. X decided it was time to see if this program would really do what it was supposed to do. So the day after she completed the assessments, she substituted the Triangle Level Picture Packets for the clay and play dough learning station.

Ms. X knew that each of the five Reading Program stations were to be introduced one at a time. The first, or Picture Packet Station, would have to be operating smoothly for all of the learning groups before she would introduce the next station. Operating smoothly meant the children would know how to select an activity, work on it, clean it up, and select another one, all without the need of teacher intervention or assistance. Operating smoothly did not mean that each child necessarily understood the work he or she was doing. Understanding would come later. What was important now was that each child or each group of children learned the procedure for learning.

### **Picture Packet Station**

At the Picture Packet Station, Ms. X wanted her students to know the following procedures:

- 1) How to find the word packet to go along with the Picture Packet.
- 2) How to take the words and pictures out of their respective packets.
- 3) How to read the words and match them with the pictures.
- 4) How to put the pictures and the words back in the correct packets.
- 5) How to select a new Picture Packet and the corresponding packet of words and repeat the cycle.

In addition to these basic procedures for working with the packets, Ms. X also wanted her students to know:

- 1) How to work with another student; each taking half the words to be read and assisting each other in matching words to pictures.
- 2) How to ask a fellow student (and not the teacher) the sound represented by a sound picture, or any other question that might arise related to the reading.

Asking a fellow student for help was a procedure that Ms. X viewed as vital to the effective running of her classroom. Ms. X's goal for every learning

station was that each station should operate independently from the teacher. It was not important that every child blend sounds correctly every minute. It was important that Ms. X be free. With this freedom would come the corresponding ability to help whomever she felt needed help. If she were to provide effective assistance to children who needed it when they needed it, then she must be in control of her own time in the classroom. Her control would be lost if the structure of the lessons permitted a student's need for attention to dictate whom she must help and when this help must be given.

Ms. X's list of requirements for a smoothly running learning station did not include any mention of how well the children would be able to read. Learning how to read would take place, but initially, such learning was only of secondary importance. Of primary importance was establishing an environment that would ensure that this learning could take place.

### **Worksheet Station**

Once Ms. X was content with how smoothly the Picture Packet Station was running, she phased out the Lego/Tinker Toy Station and substituted worksheets instead. Her goals for a smoothly running Worksheet Station were that her students would know the following procedures:

- 1) How to select an appropriately coded worksheet.
- 2) How to secure the cap for their marking pen to the end of the marking pen, so the cap would not be misplaced.
- 3) How to read the worksheet and underline an answer.
- 4) How to erase their work. Later on, they would be asked to let someone check their efforts before erasing them, but for now, doing and then erasing would be enough.
- 5) How to return the worksheet, select another, and repeat the cycle.

The practice of asking one's fellow students for help, that had been employed at the Picture Packets Station, was carried over to the Worksheet Station, as well. Asking one's friends for assistance is a common element in all the reading activities at every level throughout the school year. The students would soon learn that the only time they could expect Ms. X to answer a question would be when they had asked everyone else around them first, and no one knew the answer. Even then, the first thing Ms. X would do would be to ask the whole class if anyone knew the answer to the questioner's query. Only if no one else knew the answer would Ms. X give the questioner her response.

Learning how to operate at the Worksheet Station did not take as long as had learning the Picture Packet procedures. Many of the things Ms. X had taught her students about the Picture Packets applied to the Worksheet Station, as well. The triangles on the worksheets meant the same thing as the triangles on the Picture Packets, and the words the students were trying to read for the packets were the same words that were on the worksheets. The worksheets were easier to do because there were not as many words for each activity and because it was easier to erase the worksheet and put it back than it was to put all the words and pictures back in the right packets.

## **Stamping Station**

When her students had mastered the Worksheet Station, Ms. X replaced the coloring with crayons station with the stamping activities. Although the Stamping Worksheets were the same size as, and used the same two-sound words as the worksheets to which her students had just previously been introduced, the two kinds of worksheets were really not the same at all. The new worksheets involved the use of rubber stamps.

Ms. X knew very well that the stamps would be something her children would find more fascinating than the Stamping Worksheets themselves. Although Ms. X knew her students would be tempted to spend their time just playing with the stamps, she decided not to allow this playing to go on during the learning station time. She wanted her students to be very diligent about concentrating on the learning tasks at hand at each of the Stations. If she let the Stamping Station become a Play Station, she felt the quality of work produced at the other stations might suffer as a result. Since Ms. X had already set up a period of time each day that she called "activity time", in which children could choose anything in the classroom they wanted to do, she decided to allow the playing with the stamps to take place during activity time, instead. As she introduced the stamping activities to her students, she made it very clear that any playing with the stamps would have to wait until activity time. At the learning station, the stamps were only to be used for the worksheet or the free stamping assignments Ms. X would give to the groups.

Each full stamp set contained forty-five stamps - forty-four sound stamps and a silent letter stamp. However, Ms. X did not put out all of the stamps at once. Since her students were operating at the triangle level, she put only the first eight stamps in the trays. Trays that contained only eight stamps made it easier for her students both to find the stamps they needed and return the once-used stamps to their appropriate slots in the trays. Ms. X's goals for a smooth-running Stamping Station were that her students would know the following procedures:

- 1) How to select a worksheet.
- 2) How to remove and return a stamp to and from its correct position in a stamp tray.
- 3) How to touch the stamp to the stamp pad and then touch the stamp to the appropriate space on the worksheet. "Touch and touch" was to be used, because the natural tendency of her students would be to bang the stamp down on the pad and then bang it down on the worksheet.
- 4) How to erase the worksheet.
- 5) How to return the worksheet, select another, and repeat the cycle.
- 6) How to clean up the station in preparation for allowing the next group to rotate through. In particular, how to make sure all the stamps were back in the correct order in the correct trays, and how to close the stamp pads.

As was true for the previous learning stations, students at the Stamping Station were responsible for directing their questions to one another. In Ms. X's class, her students were coming to learn that she was only the Court of Last Resort. For almost anything they wanted to know, they had only to ask each other.

### **Book Station**

The fourth reading station to take the place of a practice learning station was the Book Station. This changeover involved the least amount of effort of any of the stations, since all Ms. X had to do was add the Two-Sound Reading Books to the range of library books already at the station. She debated whether or not to remove the other library books, so that her students might concentrate their attention on the two-sound books. Her decision was to leave both kinds of books at the station. She then gradually phased out some of the traditional library books as more and more of the program's higher levels of reading books were gradually made available to the station.

The goals Ms. X had for a smoothly running Book Station had already been established and accomplished when she first introduced the station for the class's library books. She had already made sure her students knew the following procedures:

- 1) How to make a book selection.
- 2) How to turn pages of a book gently.
- 3) How to return the book and make another selection.

The only additional teaching she did for her students now was to show them how to read the word on one page and then think about what picture they might expect to see on the next page before actually turning the page.

Ms. X still had one new station left to introduce, but she decided to delay the teaching of handwriting until she had completely finished with *Dekodiphukan* and the introduction of all forty-four sounds. If she had been a first-grade teacher, Ms. X might have felt pressured to introduce handwriting at the same time as she was introducing the other Reading Program activities, so anyone visiting her classroom could observe her children busily learning how to print letters. Since she was in kindergarten, however, she felt no immediate rush to expose her children to writing letters. In Ms. X's previous years as a kindergarten teacher, the only thing her children had ever learned to write had been their names. She had no way of knowing how much more was in store for her children this year.

By about the end of October, Ms. X's classroom had mastered the use of all of the learning stations except the yet-to-be-introduced Handwriting Station. The reading period had now settled into a comfortable routine consisting of three basic sections:

- 1) The reading of *Dekodiphukan* by Ms. X.
- 2) Either the review of new sounds and sounds already learned or the whole-class lessons with the Two-Sound Flipbook.
- 3) The rotation of the learning groups through the five stations.

The reading of *Dekodiphukan* would eventually be replaced by the daily storybook reading time that *Dekodiphukan*, itself, had temporarily replaced. The Two and later Three-Sound Flipbooks would eventually be replaced by the writing of a succession of teacher-directed, class participation, experience stories. The five stations themselves, however, were destined to remain much the same throughout the balance of the year.

Although Ms. X would occasionally have to review the procedures for working at a particular station with a learning group, she was now free to teach or to help whomever she wished. She was free to become acquainted with each of her children in turn, and to come to know, also, what each child knew and didn't know.

Ms. X's freedom was based on how well she had trained each group to operate without her assistance. This training would only be effective, however, if she could break her natural habit of answering any question put to her. Instead, she had to make herself ask the questioner if he or she had remembered to ask the other members of the group first. "What's this sound?" or, "Where do I put this back?" or, "What do I do next?" were all questions Ms. X had to learn to refer back to the class. It was not easy for her to unlearn her own pattern of answering her children's questions, but the freedom gained by not having to respond to a steady stream of questions was worth the difficulty she had in saying, "Who in your group do you think might know the answer?"

Children of all ages, and adults as well, have been conditioned to look to the authority for the answer. The assumption that others know more than we do subtly discourages us from thinking for ourselves. If it is only the expert or, in this case, the teacher who knows the answer, then answers become something that it is beyond our own humble ability to comprehend or to reason out. When, instead, the answers are to be found among our peers, answers become much more capable of being figured out on our own.

Initially, Ms. X used her newfound freedom to move around the classroom, making sure the learning groups ran well without her. Her students quickly learned to ask each other whatever they wanted to know. Some children were a little annoyed at first because Ms. X would not give them answers. These students were of the opinion that teachers were supposed to give answers. However, they soon forgot what teachers were supposed to do and got on with their own learning instead.

As Ms. X grew more confident that each group could carry on its business without her, she began spending her time during the reading period working with specific children whom she felt needed her assistance. Ms. X found that her freedom to circulate around the room watching whomever she might choose to watch, made her very much aware of who needed help and who seemed ready to move on to a new level. She still made occasional use of the individual assessment sheets to keep track of the progress of each student, but she found now, that she usually already knew what the assessment would show her. The actual assessment had become only a formalization of her own classroom observations.