

Dear Ms. F.

I am delighted that you are contemplating the use of the Baratta-Lorton Reading Program at your school. I am always happy to share concerning it's use in my classroom.

Five years ago I piloted this unique program in our school system. My kindergarten class generated a lot of interest in the community and around the state. Numerous people came, and still come, to see children involved in active learning.

Since every child, regardless of academic background, was successful, our school system added more units. It is now used in all kindergarten classes, many first grade classes, and in special classes. It has even been successful with hearing-impaired children. In my nineteen years of teaching experience, I have never known of any other approach which meets the developmental needs of every child.

The Baratta-Lorton program is unique for several reasons. First, the underlying philosophy assumes that every child can and will learn when given activities which help the child experience success. Self-confidence is readily evident as children work at their own pace beginning with concrete level activities prior to the introduction to abstract print.

The children are grouped for station activities by compatibility and not by academic ability so that cooperative learning, sharing, and responsibility for others is encouraged. Since all the activities at any one station are similar in format with the level of difficulty being the primary difference, ability grouping is not necessary. Children who need help ask for peer help before asking for teacher help. So, children are able to make individual progress while building a positive rapport with others. In my classroom, discipline problems are rare. Every child is on task.

While working at stations, children are actively working at tasks. Many tasks involve problem-solving. Some picture packets are recycled, for example, at higher difficulty levels and require higher levels of thinking skills. Children become aware of homonyms, synonyms, and experience new vocabulary through the activities.

All children experience success and progress. Even children who are already beginning readers when entering my classroom become better readers as they learn to decode new words. So many of those beginning readers simply have fantastic visual memories but few decoding skills.

In addition, the teacher's role is significantly different. I spend more time facilitating the stations and assessing individual progress. Our environment is pressure-free, yet children make more progress than I've ever experienced. Learning is contagious when reading and writing are purposeful and enjoyable. I feel I am teaching to the needs of children. I am not merely teaching a curriculum and I am not a text-book technician.

The program provides a framework for whole-language activities in my classroom. Once a child is a reader, my role is to provide a variety of reading materials; many opportunities for creative writing which generates more classroom reading materials as work is "published"; and, to introduce other reading or writing skills, including punctuation, as they are needed.

Basically, my role is to immerse children into a print-rich environment. Baratta-Lorton activities comprise about one and one-half hours daily. Our day is integrated through themes and includes many expressive activities. Stamping and writing materials are available throughout the day. Of course, our day also includes manipulative number experiences; Some large learning centers. I've found that the stamps provide me with an open-ended communication tool which replaces the need for so many symbol-charts.

I do hope you will observe this program in a classroom. If you do, I'm sure you will be thrilled by the sight of eager, enthusiastic children who are enjoying themselves while learning the power of communication.

Thank you for the opportunity to share. I hope I have answered some of your questions. Please feel free to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Martha C.