



LOCAL TEACHERS

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excel!



EDNA GENTRY

Mrs. Edna Gentry, a second-grade teacher at St. Mary's School in Derby, is known for her love of children and amazing patience. She tells her students, "It's okay to make mistakes; that's how we learn. If you didn't make mistakes, you wouldn't need a teacher." To her, learning is a lifelong process.

For twenty-six years a cast iron, claw-foot bathtub has been a part of Mrs. Gentry's classroom. It is lined with cushions, pillows, and stuffed animals. When kids are done with their work, they can use the tub to read.

"Reading is the foundation to understanding all subjects," she said. "If you're not a very good reader you'll struggle with everything else."

Another unique method Gentry uses to help her students stay on task is peaceful background music. "It helps them relax and think better," she says.

Unfortunately, not all children succeed in every subject. "It breaks my heart when children don't experience success in the classroom. They all need to feel successful and accepted for the person that they are." Gentry believes that using sincere praise with children about their progress and ability is the best encouragement.

"Second graders are usually excited about learning," she says, which is why science is her favorite subject to teach. They do fun things like working on an animal unit. "The children do research using the computer and books in the library. They will create a diorama with shoeboxes using natural resources like sand, rocks, and sticks. Then they make an adult animal and a baby animal out of clay. Lastly, we'll take a trip to the zoo."

The children also learn from each other. Throughout the year they do explanatory writing assignments; they write a paragraph to explain something and bring props. Often, the principal enjoys attending these presentations.

KELLENE TRUBY

James Copeland, a fifth-grade student at the Independent School, is in Mrs. Kellene Truby's class. His mother, Karen, says, "Mrs. Truby is always positive and has high expectations for her students. She treats them like young adults and they tend to act the part because they know that she believes in them."

Mrs. Truby's class has a weekly newsletter that tells the students and their parent(s) the projects for the week. Positive statements such as, "If you believe it, you can achieve it," are also shared and discussed in class.

She teaches the touch, hear, and speak philosophy of reading by adding creative activities. A project last school year involved the students in a brainstorming session about unsolved mysteries of the world. They chose a partner and a subject like Stonehenge, the Bermuda Triangle, or Yeti. Then they collected evidence, suspect information, photographs, and descriptions for use in creating a presentation of world theories as well as their own opinion.

"This project utilized computer and library research, deductive reasoning, and theoretical thinking with a ton of cooperative learning," says Mrs. Truby. "We work together until everyone masters the concept. Students are asked to help each other, because everyone learns in a different way," she says.

Her favorite subjects are science and math.

"They go hand in hand," she says. "Doing experiments allows them to better understand a concept, like the 'rubber egg' experiment, which demonstrates the workings of a cell."

Students earn coupons for participation and going above and beyond. "I give them a baseline. If they want more, they have to prove they want the grade." She gets paid for doing her job and so do they. She tells them that she doesn't know everything. "I'm constantly learning, too. They need to know what's real," she says.

Sam, another one of her students, says, "She lets us have a lot of freedom and teaches us to be more independent."

Every year, the students create a "Survival Guide" for the next class. They share tips and insights like "Mrs. Truby loves animals" and "If you're afraid to make a mistake, you may never make a discovery." They describe the importance of each subject and different projects associated with them, along with recess rules and proper behavior.

Both of these excellent teachers enjoy teaching, and it shows through the cooperation and respect of their students. ●

~B.D. THARP

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