Provocations

Provocations, what exactly are they?

- An invitation to learning.
- An activity that provokes thought.
- An interest that elicits a particular response.

Provocations in the early years are activities and ideas that encourage the students to deepen their learning and renew their sense of wonder. This post is the first in a series where I will share my favorite provocation setups for each of the academic domains. Math, Literacy, Art, Science, Engineering, Writing, and Morning Meeting.

Gathering Materials for a Provocation

The set up for a provocation does not have to be labor-intensive or break the bank. As a result, teachers will typically have 90% of the needed materials for an amazing learning experience. Follow the children’s interests, and if it seems to be something you do not readily have on hand reach out to parents. Many times they will have items that can help on the journey.
Using items already on hand to create a math provocation for measuring and weighing seashells.

A few years ago I had a student so interested in trains that others began questioning details about how trains worked. I had a few items for a quality provocation, but not enough. I reached out to the student’s parents and they came through two days later with a huge box. Filled with books, trains, photographs, and a real working model. They allowed us to borrow the items for as long as we needed, and my young student was proud of the way he could explain all of the parts to his peers. He quickly became the resident expert and taught us about all things mechanical.
This was a child-led provocation. It came about when a few students needed a table to build their block structure. They were struggling with balancing the blocks on the carpet. They took the blocks to a corner of the playdoh table and the rest is history.

Setting Up a Provocation

The idea behind a provocation is to attract the children, offer beautiful authentic materials and deepen their level of understanding. There are photographs floating around the internet that are of beautifully set up provocations. However, only looking at the provocation from an adult view can sometimes set us up for disaster or unrealistic expectations. It can be disheartening to see all of your carefully thought out plans destroyed in seconds or completely ignored.
When beauty is the only thought given to provocations the results will be less than stellar. Successful provocations are child-centered and accessible to the students. Set realistic expectations as well. Sometimes provocations do not go over as well as the educator believes they should have. It’s ok. Save your items and try again later. Don’t spend so much time dwelling on the lack of interest that you forget the real reason for the set-up in the first place.
This came about after we received a new class pet. The children were very interested in the magenta color of the Betta Fish. We tried to recreate the color using a variety of paints we had on hand.

I use the Young Investigators book to help me keep the students in mind while designing long term projects, made up of smaller provocations. Plus the Loose Parts series for inspiration. You can click directly on the photos (affiliate links) to learn more about the books.
Why are Provocations Necessary?

Part of a natural classroom environment is to design a space where students can feel comfortable when they branch out in their learning. Provocations help them touch on a multitude of subjects and help them delve deeper into the world of learning. Every Wednesday for the next few weeks come back and see what special ideas I have for you.

As an Amazon Associate, some of the links in this post will earn me a small commission, at no additional cost to you.

ms. tina

Children’s Learning

Children’s learning can be challenging to document, especially when the program fully embraces child-centered activities versus seat work. Children’s learning adventures should evolve with the students and families in the program. I have gone from a letter of the week style teaching. Where we focus on one single concept at a time. One letter, one number, one shape, etc. To whole language plans. Where we focus on sounds and breaking down what we hear, rather than individual letters. One thing that stays consistent is the need for
observing and then documenting the learning. I am currently embracing a balanced literacy program, where I have a healthy combination of all teaching styles.

Children’s Learning Styles

At the beginning of my teaching journey, many parents wanted a year-long alphabet book. I was to keep these treasured pages all year in a filing cabinet. Never to be seen again by the children. And sent home on the last day of school. It was considered a yearbook of sorts.

- We painted with Jell-o on the letter J (what a sticky mess).
- Added Cheerios to the letter C (and brought in the mice)
- Teachers saved eggshells all year so we could crush them and glue them onto our pages (hello salmonella)
- And my favorite (insert eye roll)- students cut pictures out of old magazines (from the 1970s, before I was born) to add to our F is for a family page. But first, teachers spent weeks scouring the magazine artifacts removing inappropriate ads. SMH.

Every child went home with the same ABC book. You guys, seriously, the EXACT SAME BOOK.

In some cases, the teachers even moved parts around so the craft ‘looked like something’. {PSA} Please~ if this is still happening in your classroom – stop. One of the most detrimental things we can do as educators; telling the child,
inadvertently or not, that their idea doesn’t LOOK the way we think it should. This single activity halts creativity and stifles the learning process. INSTEAD: encourage students to “tell you about it”. Then record their words, through written documentation and voice recordings.

Documenting literacy

As my pedagogical understanding grew I was able to turn the activity around. Back when Pinterest was first a thing you would find activities that were CUTE, but definitely not age-appropriate or child-centered. We were falling back on “craftivities”. I wanted something more for my students. After researching, I found the Reggio Approach. Fascination and intrigue ensued. I knew that my own style of teaching needed a major overhaul if it was going to work.
Child-Led Learning

I brought in authentic learning materials. Allowed the children to decide exactly what they would do each day. And I let them choose if they would save or even bring an item home. Allowing the children’s learning to actually be their choice, I was the facilitator. This was met with great resistance, FROM THE PARENTS. I realized that if I was going to make this work I would have to show moms and dads and grandmas and grandpas that their precious treasures were actually learning things in my classroom.

I knew the students could count to 100 and sound out words with beginning sounds. They could rhyme and segment phonemes. As well as create and verbalize what happens during chemical reactions. They could balance non-traditional items, engineer intricate towers and make compassionate connections with others. But the parents could no longer SEE the fruits of the
child’s labor. And ultimately what they were paying for.

Remember tuition is the business, but without happy parents, the business does not survive. So I needed to make some exceptions and create family-friendly activities. Enter the Reggio Approach once again. I decided that in order to stay true to my teaching philosophy I needed documentation that the children were in fact busy, and learning, each day.

Children’s Learning Experience

The original ABC book was only a small piece of our day. And yet we placed this huge importance on it. What about the students who could count to 100 but not necessarily know the first letter of their name. Or the students who sat and read stories to other students, the Gecko, and the stuffies? What
about the students who did all of their learning in the outdoor classroom? Balance, engineering, chemistry, math, and literacy? Where was the documentation for all of these concepts? Consequently, I needed to make some changes and FAST!

*WHEN WE KNOW BETTER WE DO BETTER.*

I began documenting the learning through pictures. Hanging them on the walls, sending them home, and making the end of the year memory books. Children’s learning styles were all covered using this hands-on style of documentation. Now, this is a much larger undertaking than the original ABC books. But the outcome is much more meaningful. I had a group of students work together to make the famous Horseshoe Bend of the Grand Canyon. They made it in the sandbox and worked on it for 2 weeks straight. I took photos, wrote down their words, extended the learning through technology and books. Eventually, I compiled the documentation into a dollar store photo album. Parents tell me their students STILL look through those photos.
Make the learning visible to parents, admin, and visitors.

Learning Displays

A group of students loved the art center, so we went ahead and created an alphabet display to hang IN THE CLASSROOM. We researched and brainstormed all the words they knew (with some adult help, they are 4-year-olds after all). We added some related items to their display, in most cases, and in others, they just colored or painted the letter. Then they were in charge of showing the rest of the class the letters they made. This resulted in the whole class heading to the letter display when we talked about a new letter or word and trying to find the sounds.

I videoed my students singing and signing the alphabet. I used videos to showcase language and social development. Most importantly I then DISPLAYED the children’s learning throughout the classroom. I grabbed a digital photo frame and uploaded photos once per week. Looking through the photos and
recalling the learning drew children to the area. Parents were able to watch the photo display during drop off and pick up. It gave them concrete examples of what their child was learning and sparked conversations with their students. We created ABC displays at the children’s level. And then continued to reference those displays all year long. No more full filing cabinets that the children never saw the inside of until June.

**Make Learning Connections**

In trying to satisfy child-led learning and help parents find a suitable compromise I found myself. As a result, I found what calls me to education- the connections. The connections between students and teachers. The connections between families and the classroom. And the connections between learning and early education. I challenge you to document learning in a more meaningful way this year. Start small. Make changes that you can keep up with. Actually, involve the students. Show off what your littles are accomplishing each day. And BONUS points from me if nothing looks the same.

Looking for more inspiration? Want to create a classroom sanctuary of your own? Sign up below to receive your FREE Master Guide to a Natural Classroom.
I'm ready to become a Natural Classroom Specialist...

Discovery Workshop

Helping children develop future-ready skills through a discovery workshop is a key component in early education. Do you believe that preparing students for the future is our most important job as classroom teachers? Are you looking for a way to help your early learners develop those future-ready skills?

Today my friend Jackie, from Roots and Wings Kindergarten, is going to share how and why she teaches using a Discovery Workshop model. These workshops are similar to how I teach my young students.

Read on...

Look no further than your traditional choice time (well, maaaaybe just a little further)! You see, when you take choice time and wrap a workshop model around it, you have an instructional framework that supports teaching and those important soft skills.
What are Soft Skills?

So what do I mean by teaching future-ready, soft skills (also known as 21st-century skills)? These are the skills that often get overlooked in the face of academics. They are a combination of social and communication skills as well as character traits. And coincidentally, many of them begin with the letter C.

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Character
- Citizenship
We can talk about them all we want. Even read stories about characters that exhibit them. But creating a classroom environment with time and space for “living” them goes a whole lot further!

**How Can I Use the Workshop Model?**

So let’s break down that workshop model and see how it can be used to foster these skills. The components include a mini-lesson, status of the class, work time/conferring, and share time and look something like this:
Mini-Lesson (5-10 minutes)

This is a brief lesson around one teaching point that supports your children as they work in centers. For example, you might use it to introduce a new set of blocks, demonstrate a clean-up procedure, model the skill of observation, or role-play how to negotiate ideas with a friend.

Status of the Class (5 minutes)

This quick check-in routine helps you document children’s interests and friendships and record who is working where. You might also use it to help children make a plan for their work.

Work Time/Conferring (30-45 minutes)

This is the heart of the workshop where your children go off to work at a chosen Discovery Center and are given the freedom to select materials and decide what to do with them. They will naturally collaborate with peers to build a block structure, communicate their ideas through a piece of art or think critically while solving a puzzle.

At the same time, you will confer with children and facilitate their work as appropriate.

Share Time (5-10 minutes)
The workshop ends with a brief sharing period where selected children showcase work and behaviors that reinforce the mini-lesson, highlight a particular future-ready skill, or tie-in with an ongoing curricular goal.

What Does it Take to Launch a Discovery Workshop?

Discovery Workshop-Start-Up tips:

- Set up 4-5 Discovery Centers such as blocks, science, art, math, and storytelling or dramatic play.
• Choose a few ongoing center invitations that will always be available, open-ended, and highly engaging.
• Brainstorm a list of mini-lessons that will support children in working in these centers.
• Make a plan for opening and introducing the centers to children.
• Finally, document the workshop through notes, photos, and videos and continue to build from there.

Why Should I Try it?

Not only will Discovery Workshop help you prepare your kiddos for the future, but it also provides opportunities for you to know your children better by observing their interests and friendships.
Work time can also be used to meet with a small group or individuals for research or project work.

And...the engagement factor is super high as children build a sense of agency and develop a growth mindset.

*If you are looking for more ideas and support, I’ve created a **free start-up guide** that breaks down the approach a bit further and includes printable planning sheets for recording the status of the class and brainstorming mini-lessons.*

You can find me at Roots & Wings on the [blog](#), on [Instagram](#), or [Facebook](#) where I love to share photos of what a Discovery Workshop looks like in my own classroom. Please feel free to reach out with your questions as I’d love to hear from you!
Behavior Management

Behavior management is the single most asked question on pretty much any teacher blog, website or forum. Behavior management for PreK, behavior management strategies for teachers, and behavior management systems and plans are terms teachers search, every day. Everyone wants to know the magic recipe for behavior management, keeping challenging behaviors at a minimum and ultimately creating a classroom worthy of social media highlights. The truth is we work with children—without a doubt, they can be unpredictable, and downright human. As educators, it is our responsibility to meet the students where they are, and help them manage their emotions, behaviors, and feelings.

A natural classroom environment is my Number 1 behavior management technique. I will let you in on a little secret, I haven’t had to use more than redirection in the 6 years since I transitioned to a neutral space. Honestly- the environment, authentic teaching/learning, and modeling are all highlighted in my classroom. As a result, the students (4 and 5-year-olds), are better suited to self-regulate and utilize the materials appropriately. We use glass jars for our writing manipulatives, real wood rounds for building, and metal buckets for storage.

I spend the first few weeks teaching the students how to care for our environment, and then the rest of the year with gentle reminders. I have only had 3 jars accidentally break in 6
years. Use the accidents as teachable moments; spend the time carefully cleaning up the area and find ways (with student help) to keep it from happening again.

Behavior Management Plan

Begin the year with purposeful design. What does purposeful design look like? It allows the room itself to become part of the learning day. Each item brought in has a purpose, from the décor on the walls to the seating and workspaces. In a natural classroom not only are overhead lights turned off but natural light is let in through open doors and window blinds. Where artificial light must be used, keep it minimal; bring in lamps and softer lighting choices. In my classroom, I turn off half of the overhead lights. I have a lamp in the reading nook and string lights in the block center. Just this simple technique brings the volume down almost immediately. I challenge you to try it. As soon as you notice the volume creeping up turn off half the lights and listen for the change.
This also goes for classroom color choice and wall décor. Is it purposeful? Is it used to enhance learning? Can it be displayed and/or stored in a more meaningful way? This was a huge concept for some of my teachers to get over. The color/number/ABC line was always displayed. Plus name tags on a door, name tags on tables, name tags on cubby spaces, name tags near the calendar wall. OH, the calendar wall—whew-numbers, days of the week, today-tomorrow yesterday signs, months of the year, seasons, birthdays, helper charts, line leaders, attendance charts, plus so much more!

Behavior Management Strategies

To clarify, ask yourself, do I use all of these items for educational purposes, or is it merely wallpaper? Do I really use the color chart to TEACH colors? Or do I actually teach colors in authentic ways by pointing out colors as we see them in the environment? In short, if you answered yes to authentic learning TAKE THEM DOWN! If you really feel the need to have
these charts and wallpaper items put them in a binder and leave them in the library area. Without a doubt, the students will get more out of being able to physically handle them each day!

Choose décor that is **visually calming**: single colors, neutral tones, a muted palette. Be intentional with your teaching- if you have an ABC or number line up on the wall be sure they are at a height where students can actually refer to them. Mine has to be kind of high because of where the windows are, so I bring down the ones we are focusing on and then replace them as we move down the wall. This year I am working toward printing them on transparencies so I can actually put them on the windows themselves.

**Behavior Management Training**

I have read countless books about calendar time, letter of the week, and authentic/intentional teaching. I encourage you to read some of my **favorites** before you embark on an outdated, but, traditional learning time! Really think about the behaviors you are seeing. Then decide if the **behaviors need to be managed** or are the issues the way we are teaching concepts? The classroom design was extremely humbling for me. It took some serious self-reflection to realize that just by changing a few of my own outdated practices- I was actually creating a better learning experience for myself and my children.
Let the Environment Speak

Think about what has worked (or hasn’t) for both you and your students in the past and incorporate items/make changes as necessary. For instance, the library space was housed underneath a loft area in one classroom. Instead of using the library the students would drag all of the dramatic play items into the area and play house-EVERYDAY! However, I can be a slow learner. (haha) I waited six months and many stress-filled days before I went with it and moved the dramatic play area under the loft. Days were no longer spent reminding students the library was a quiet area, and the kitchen items belonged on the other shelf. The new library area was actually more utilized (it was slightly bigger) and closer to my Leopard Gecko. The children would sit and read to Luca every morning!

The newest trend is to create a CALM DOWN corner to manage classroom behavior. I want to let you in on a little secret- I don’t have a calm down corner- SSSHHH! I do not have a need for
one. Undoubtedly, my natural environment allows students to regulate behaviors everywhere in the room. We have live plants that help clean the air, classroom pets that encourage quiet reflection, and space on the shelves for breathing room. When you look at my shelves you might think I am lacking in manipulatives and learning materials. Actually, I have too many things, all hiding out of sight. I change the items on the students’ shelves regularly. This keeps the interest high, and behaviors at a minimum, plus it keeps students from becoming overstimulated - both visually and physically.

Behavior Management Ideas

In one program I had a director that was always concerned about the correct use of items. It bothered her if the students used play food as stacking materials and vice versa. When we changed to a natural classroom environment it alleviated the issue immediately. Now instead of having plastic materials that had one single purpose, we use loose...
parts that can become anything. Basically, wood rounds become cucumbers, cookies, money, food, items to stack, and counters. This alleviates the stress for adults and allows students to become even more creative.

If you still have reservations surrounding loose parts, classroom materials or the way students are handling items it is time to have an internal, personal conversation. Are the items really being used inappropriately? Is the behavior in the classroom uncontrolled? Is it your own bias and anxiety, or is something truly unsafe? If the students are being unsafe (and this is really dependent on the adult as well) take some time to address the expectations with your students. It is equally important to spend the first few weeks going over center management. Discuss classroom behavior expectations with the children. Have the students help come up with acceptable rules for items and centers. Model appropriate use of materials, and then remind them often of their rules.
Behavior Management In The Classroom

I do not usually put a limit on the number of children in a center- because I think so much learning happens cooperatively. However, if the center is small, discuss with the children how many they would like to see using the materials. If the center becomes too full I will redirect any students who are not actively participating. Usually, this is by giving them a helpful job that supports the center they were in. For example- Johnny, could you get some paper and rulers so you can measure and draw the design you are thinking about? This helps Johnny participate, gives him purpose, and helps deepen the learning because now you can discuss what design elements are needed. Engaging reluctant students is a solid behavior management technique.
Embrace the Learning

I know so many teachers that say things like I don’t have time, there are too many expectations, and this wouldn’t work with MY group. This self-doubt and negative talk will continue to breed negativity- So I am here to give you permission to STOP! Make small changes and see how it turns the days around. Use some paint for plastics and change all of your buckets to a single neutral color. Turn off some overhead lighting. Pull back the window shades, add some plants, and finally TAKE THE TIME. Intentional classroom design is a behavior management strategy that works.

Time frames are an expectation many educators cannot get around. I understand, we have to be at recess/lunch/computers on time. If we were deep in learning centers I do not expect things to be cleaned up while we leave for the next part of our day. My students know that they can return to an activity, and this has helped many students transition in a genuine way. At the end of the day, on Wednesdays, I allow the block center to stay IN PROGRESS until the next day. We put up a sign and the students can return to their work the next day. Wednesdays, because the janitorial staff does not come in (it’s a district-wide meeting day).

Behavior Management Specialist

Do my students know this is why I chose that specific day- NOPE. But guess what, I am a Rockstar because I allow them to leave their creations up overnight! I ask the students which creation we should leave standing, we vote, and then they help
put up signs and caution tape. When we give students the ability to make some decisions regarding their learning they begin to develop a sense of ownership. This, in turn, allows them to self-regulate and the classroom becomes a place where everyone gets along. I use the words family, a lot! We are a TK family, we work together as a family and we have family meetings each morning.

Small changes friends— that is all I ask. Obviously, I want the natural classroom to bring you peace, tranquility and a newfound love of behavior management.

I'm ready to become a Natural Classroom Specialist...

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Digital Teachers

Digital teachers are those wanting to incorporate technology into their day. This play-based teacher has decided to become a digital teacher, at least in my own life! Don’t worry, all of my classroom activities are still based on what is right for my students; hands-on, real world, play-based, experiences. I simply realized I can no longer share knowledge and experience with other educators strictly through pen and paper. It is more efficiently done as a digital teacher.

I know I am probably late to the game! But have always felt that play-based pedagogy and digital learning did not mix. My
current program is in an accreditation year, and technology has a very prominent place in the self-assessment process. It took the assessment to realize I can continue to provide hands-on experiences in a natural environment for my students. And use technology to streamline my own planning and sharing of information.

DIGITAL PLANNER FOR TEACHERS

There were a few deciding factors for my digital switch. First, my entire school uses a digital planner. It was apparent that I would need to move in that direction this year too. It became too time-consuming to write my plans in a paper planner. Then record them in Google Docs, then email them to administration. Instead, I now use the same planner the whole school uses. And with one-click share my plans, make changes from year to year, month to month, and day to day.
Second, I realized that there are many great apps available for assessment and information sharing between families and colleagues. I have already been using photo documentation to record my students’ growth for the last five or so years. The issue has always been finding a free site to print those photos to share with parents. Or at least one affordable enough that I could print and share the photos with parents each year. I still have a camera roll full of student pictures and spend hours deleting so I can clean up my photo storage. Going digital allows me to share photos in real time. Create storyboards for parents. And use app storage rather than my own data storage.
Deciding to share tips, tricks, and plans with other educators also created a need to create a stable digital platform to reach others. It all started with an online course that transformed, not only my resources but my life. I met an amazing group of educators from all over the world. I was introduced to new ways of teaching and gained hundreds of new friends. It probably seems strange to say that my new friend count is in the hundreds. But this online community feels like just that. A family that supports and encourages one another through the digital age.

Please stop in and listen to Kayse, if you have not already had a chance to do so. She is a light in this world, radiating positivity daily. I am genuinely inspired by her message!
The next step of this journey was a digital planner for daily life. And gain all the knowledge about GoodNotes. A few weeks ago I attended a conference out of town. When I almost lost my laptop to a coffee mishap (from the person next to me) I began researching my options. I no longer want to take my laptop to unprotected places. Choosing a tablet that will allow me to use a waterproof case, with a stylus that allows for handwritten (and text) notes. The majority of planner options I found are written for GoodNotes. I cannot wait to streamline the multiple notebooks I currently tote around.

Realizing earlier this year that life-long learning is
something I take very seriously. I have always challenged myself to reach new heights, learn new skills and fill my brain with knowledge. Returning to higher education later in life, helped me understand the compelling need to continue to learn ‘all the things’.

DIGITAL SKILLS FOR TEACHERS

The largest undertaking in my digital transformation was learning to use and create a website, from scratch, through Bluehost and WordPress. What a labor of love! Multiple late night’s later: Youtube tutorials for how to use the site, change and customize themes, and just generally understand widgets; I am excited to continue to customize my own site, putting my stamp on my brand.

Becoming a digital teacher is filling my desire to learn new skills. Keep up with the times. And find a way to intentionally incorporate my true passion of play-based learning with the digital world.
I want The Master Guide to a Natural Classroom

Visit Ms. Tina at Teach The TK Way to find out about nature based classrooms.

As an affiliate some of the links you use will earn me a small commission at no additional cost to you.

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6 Benefits of School Gardens

Today I am excited to share with you a special GUEST POST all about SCHOOL GARDENS by my friend Dawn from Cultivating Exceptional Minds. Keep reading to hear her thoughts on school gardens...

Ever thought about starting a garden but didn’t know the benefits of a school garden for your kids? There are many benefits of school gardens for teachers and students. Some of the benefits of school gardens include students learning about planting and gardening. In this post, we will discuss the 6 benefits of school gardens.
SCHOOL GARDENS BENEFIT ALL TEACHING SUBJECTS

One benefit of a school garden is the fact that all teaching subjects can be taught outside. Whatever subject you teach you can do it in the garden! Math lessons:

- arrays of multiplication
- lines and angles
- counting
- word problems

Therefore, the options are endless. Activities in reading include sequencing, background knowledge, building vocabulary writing prompts, even gardening for preschool. No matter the grade level, the lesson can be taught outside.
BENEFIT #2: HANDS-ON LEARNING

Hands-on learning is another benefit of school gardens. Kids reinforce skills that are taught in the classroom by repetition. Similarly, active learning allows helps students solve problems and find solutions independently. In addition to planting and gardening, students can complete activities in the garden to assess understanding.
SCHOOL GARDENS PROMOTE REAL LIFE APPLICATION

Also, another benefit of school gardens is the real-life application. Kids, no matter their age, can broaden their vocabulary, follow directions and learn about seasons without realizing they are learning. Therefore, the possibilities are truly endless.
BENEFIT #4: SENSORY NEEDS

Meeting students sensory needs is another benefit of school gardens. Some examples include: water and sand tables, or using gloves for the dirt, students needs can be met and also explores. Below are sensory opportunities that can be found in a school garden includes:

- bubbles station
- water beads
- sand tables
- water tables
- chalkboards
- wooden blocks.

Of course, gardening for preschoolers and students with special needs is very important to meet developmental and social milestones.
SCHOOL GARDENS BENEFIT A CHANGE OF SCENERY

Students behavior improves when moving around instead of being desk-bound. It is the next benefit of a school garden. Furthermore, a change of scenery allows kids (and teachers, including me) to stay engaged and involved. The four walls of the classroom need a break sometimes, right?
Finally, the benefit of school gardens promote independence but also ownership for students. Students will be responsible to help keep plants alive.

These are just a few benefits of a school garden. Above all, kids of all ages enjoy being outside and learning. Use this
knowledge to your advantage. These are a few activities that can be done outside to get started!

Send me the GUIDE to Natural Classrooms

Dawn has been a special education teacher for 10 years. She has taught preschool through fifth grade in various settings such as inclusion, resource, homebound and self-contained. Dawn has an Ed Specialist degree in Early Childhood Special Education but is also certified in general education too. She was the District V Teacher of the Year in 2017 for Alabama. She has also presented at district and state-wide conferences about her garden and other special education topics. On the weekends in the spring, she is a volunteer coach for the Miracle League baseball program in her town. She is married and has one son (age 2). When not teaching, Dawn enjoys being at the beach, reading and working on her teacher created materials/blog.

Visit Ms. Tina at Teach The TK Way to find out about nature based classrooms.
#1 Secret to Turning Your Teacher Side Hustle into a Profitable Business

Turning my Teacher Side Hustle into a Business

Along with advanced degrees, and professional development opportunities, I have taken on numerous teacher side hustles every year. You know the one; where you purchase some kind of a kit as a money making opportunity. However, it isn’t long before it’s castoff to the dark corners of your closet. I participated in too many of those types of side jobs for teachers over the years. Including becoming a shampoo rep, candle peddler, home décor specialist, 30 minute meal mom, and produce partner to name a few. Each of those original side hustles had 1 thing in common, I was working hard, for someone else. As a result, peddling wares was earning me pennies on the dollar only to help make someone else rich. Starting a teacher side hustle that would become MY business became a priority.
The #1 secret to turning my teacher side hustle into a business was to download the FREE workbook.

**Best Online Side Jobs for Teachers**

I started researching any online side jobs for teachers where I could use my expertise and have more time with my children, and still cover grad school loans. While literally searching for the **best online side jobs for teachers**, almost every search came back with a link, video, or blog post about TPT (Teachers Pay Teachers) and **selling my teaching resources online**. Deciding it would be easy to have an online side hustle, I gave it a whirl. I already knew how to use PowerPoint (or so I thought). I knew how to research standards, find cute clipart and got excited going down the fancy font rabbit hole. And since I was already creating many things for my classroom, I thought I had finally hit the mother-lode.
This teacher side hustle was totally up my alley, and was much more relevant than candle peddler—RIGHT? Because let’s be real, who has time to burn 8-pound candles when you are in a classroom all day?! I thought my newfound teacher side hustle would be EASY. *Buy some cute clip art *post resources *wait for the money to roll in. Being the information junky I am, I began to research my new side job, and let me tell you I got scared, overwhelmed and stuck.

The course that changed my side hustle, my resources, my thought process, and my life!

Educating Myself on the Online Side Hustle

Most of my searches turned up crazy acronyms like TOU, LTKW, and SEO. I started having nightmares about saving PDF’s,
creating editable items, branding, marketing, teacherpreneurs, edupreneurs, and business strategists. As a result, I realized that although I had much more to learn about this online business, I was not ready to give up on my new side hustle opportunity. It was then that I basically attended an online side hustle school of sorts, and that is when I found my girl Kayse.

#1 Secret for turning my teacher side hustle into a profitable business- Kayse Morris.

#1 SECRET: Kayse Morris

Kayse took me by the virtual hand and taught me all the things in plain teacher speak. She showed me the importance of following TOU, understanding LTKW’s, and how to apply SEO. She taught me why branding is important, and things about
PowerPoint that are life-changing. However, most importantly, Kayse taught me it hasn’t all been done before, how to set my side hustle apart from others and be the best version of ME. She taught me all of this while helping me build my teacher side hustle into a full-fledged business model. I thought that my online side job would allow me to spend quality time with my babies, making a few extra dollars. Instead, Kayse gave me the confidence and tools needed to change my conviction and start thinking about the reality of an online side hustle as a career choice.

Transforming My Resources, My Thoughts, My Life...

Kayse’s course, Transform Your Resources, transformed my life. Kayse is a former teacher, turned business marketer and go-getter, and she was able to teach me how to apply the lessons from her course in a concrete way. When I enrolled in the course, in November of 2018, I literally had no TPT store, no Instagram following, no Facebook page, and not a single piece of clipart that I could use for commercial use (it was all cute though). But through her differentiated lessons, I found myself, my voice and my brand. Her course taught me how to create while envisioning greatness, and in just a few short weeks I started my store, created my own logo and website, and have created and uploaded 40+ products.
Kayse taught me why branding is necessary for a successful side hustle business.

Developing my Brand

Yes, you read that correctly, **weeks**, not months or even years, but 7 short weeks!! Kayse always talks about the start of her journey and only wanting to pay a few small bills. Actually, that’s where I saw myself only 4 short months ago- with dreams that were too small, too vague, and without real direction. Learning to create, market, and blog the correct way with Kayse’s direction and support, I have surpassed my original dreams. Now I get to envision bigger and better things for my teacher side hustle in 2019 and beyond.
This is the Last Side Hustle I will Ever Need

Now, when I look back on what is to surely be my LAST teacher side hustle ever, I realize it all started with one simple download. A 10 step workbook that changed the way I thought about my teacher side hustle; effectively changing the landscape of my future. Kayse’s FREE workbook set the stage for my teacher side hustle becoming a profitable business within a few short months. And, the original download is also what set me on my journey toward becoming a CEO teacher.

My teacher side hustle, turned profitable business, has offered amazing opportunities.
Becoming a Teacherpreneur

If you have been hesitant; questioning whether you have what it takes this course is for YOU. And if you are confident and ready for the next level, this course is for YOU. If you want to stay in the classroom and create on the side, this course is for YOU. If you want to make 6 figures a year, this course is for YOU. When you decide to grow to the next level with your teacher side hustle, joining Kayse on the journey will be the #1 secret to success. The course offers a multitude of perks; coaching, EPIC freebies, a private FB community. Now I am able to network with like-minded teachers, all wanting to grow their side hustle too. The DAILY positivity in Kayse’s group is unparalleled and contagious. As a result, I feel that I have found my tribe!

Investing in myself, and my side hustle, was exactly the positive push I needed to realize my dreams. If you are wondering how to pay those extra bills, or just want some fun money; I trust Transform Your Resources is the answer. I believe Kayse is THE girl for helping you grow your teacher side hustle to a whole new level.
Just ONE of the MANY perks of the Transform your Resources course.

Would you like the Master Guide to Natural Classrooms? Grab your FREE copy here!

Teaching Literacy The TK Way

Literacy in and around my TK classroom has evolved over the years. Way back when I first started teaching literacy the
norm was to focus on a single letter each week to gain phonemic awareness skills. The snack, crafts, activities, and dramatic play all revolved around this single letter. Our literacy focus was on a list of TK vocabulary words based on a specific letter. That list of words got shorter and shorter as we drew close to the end of the ABC line. Literacy in the TK classroom was a self-contained academic concept that was taught in a closely monitored bubble.

Language and Literacy Can Be Confusing For Early Learners

It became more and more difficult each year to explain why the letter X was actually in the middle of words, and the Q sound is never without its friend letter U. Explaining that an eyeball started with E, not I, and that frog was an F, but the photo was a blend of PH. As a result of this confusing time, I began to research more ways to teach the letters and sounds. I found phonics programs that have animals that went with each letter and its sound.
I found TK literacy programs that focused teaching on how the letters were constructed. Plus literacy programs that encouraged learning only sight words and others that focused strictly on teaching phonics. All of this research led me to a combined approach of the whole language. Rather than focusing on sounds and letters as a single individual piece, I began to teach literacy the way my TK students learn. We focus on letters, plus their sounds, and some sight words, every day!

Enhancing Literacy Awareness in TK

I use many programs and tactics each year, some include ASL hand motions, and others include youtube videos specifically designed for literacy work, letters and sound songs. I make literacy name charts at the beginning of every year, and we refer to them daily. Our name chart work sounds like this...Oh look, Tina has 4 letters in her name. She starts with capital T, and has a lowercase i, n, and a. Who else has an A in their name? Does it make the same sound as in Tina’s name? How many A’s can we count in all of the names? This is how I discuss
letters and sounds, using real word examples, so my students become invested in the work.

We clap syllables and stomp parts of a word each day. We use ASL hand motions for the ABC’s to physically talk about how the beginning sound is the same or different. I will say a word and show the ASL letter for the beginning sound on one hand. Then I say another word and hold up its ASL beginning sound on my other hand. Then I ask my students if they are the same, or different.

**Friends**— using this visual has been GENIUS! Once they understand the game, the students take turns coming to the front of the circle and holding up their ASL beginning sound for a word I call out. Then we all decide if the sounds are the same or different.
Incorporating Whole Language in TK

Once we have a fairly decent grasp of letters and sounds, usually around October (instead of May, like in the days of teaching the letter of the week), I begin talking about words. Then I will add discussions about sentences, paragraphs, and punctuation as the year progresses. Putting together a whole language program, one that utilizes Write the Room strategies, and phonemic awareness each day has increased my students’ recordable literacy knowledge.
Our entire room is covered in letters and words and I point those out daily. We have letters on blocks, names, and numbers everywhere, even words on walls.

ms. tina

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I'm ready to become a Natural Classroom Specialist...
Leaving The Nest Offered New Opportunities...

When I was first presented with an opportunity to leave the comfort of my safety net (my previous school) I was skeptical. I constantly questioned why I would want to leave the space I had helped to grow into a nature based program. A place where the faculty became my sisters and the families I served became my extended family. Eventually I realized all the opportunities that had presented themselves along the journey were happening for a reason. I took a leap of faith and jumped into a new exciting period of learning and growth for myself.

Longer Commute Times For The Win

Some may have said my extended commute was going to be a detriment to my choice. However, I found that I now have time to listen to educational podcasts, reflect on my days, weeks, and long term plans. Pray for my students each morning, and even just soak up the quiet needed to energize my day. The commute has become a welcome component of my day and offers some reflective opportunities. I have even begun to use an audio recorder in my car for all of the new ideas, so I can get my ideas out while I drive.
I was concerned that I would not be able to keep up with changing my classroom themes and preparing my room for upcoming learning opportunities. In my old program, I was about 10 minutes from home. The habit of just “stopping in for a minute” almost everyday of a vacation, became one I needed to break. I could even be found in my classroom most evenings after my own children’s sports activities. A few minutes always turned into an hour or two, and I began to feel as if I never left.

However, I find now, two years in to my 30 minute commute, that I am more intentional with my time at school. I am able to leave my room prepared and ready for each day. My planning time has become more streamlined and productive. I am able to feel refreshed each morning, and have become a better version of myself, for my students.
I am able to focus on my family, and relish the time we have together before my children are all off to college and lives of their own. When I worked in the same town I lived in, I rarely took time for just me and my family. I was either at school thinking about my students, at the grocery store thinking about my students (because I had just seen them) or thinking about my students during sports activities (because they played on the same teams as my own children). Please don’t misunderstand, I love ALL of my students, whether I live in town with them or not. It just got easier to focus on my own babies and relish in our special time.
All this to say, if you feel like you are being pushed to do more, change your norm, or even just need a new view, it may be time to look deep and make the change. I believe in you, I believe that what works for you may not work for someone else. Stay true to your feelings and follow your dreams. Sometimes a change of scenery is all we need to become the best versions of ourselves.

Meet Ms. Tina

Hello Friends, My name is Tina and I am a wife, mother,
teacher, believer, curriculum creator and mentor. I have 4 amazing children who are almost all grown adults, and a fantastic husband who supported my desire to return to higher education. I am a children’s book junky and Starbucks lover, who is not a fan of actual coffee, but will drink Chai tea all day, every day, for my caffeine fix.

I have been teaching TK aged students for 23+ years, much longer than TK has actually been a “thing” in my state. I received my M.Ed from Concordia University, all while raising active children and working full time as a TK teacher and director of a parent cooperative program. My specialization is curriculum instruction for early education, and each of my degrees (M.Ed, BA and AA) were all acquired with an early education component.

I am passionate about bible journaling and sharing my faith with my students and fellow educators, as well as natural classroom environments. I became an Outdoor Classroom Specialist in 2015, created a certified butterfly garden and outdoor classroom in my previous program. I am a bee and honey ambassador and have been encouraging other educators to incorporate nature and flexible seating in their classrooms ever since. I limit the amount of plastic in our space, turn off half the overhead lights every day, incorporate lamps and natural lighting, and limit the number of worksheets used in my program. Each of these intentional choices has allowed me to change the trajectory of my teaching, and modify behavior management using only positive redirection.

I hope you find our journey together inspirational and informative.