

Create in Kindergarten - A Child's Garden of Experts

Our kindergarten community is most empowering when children see themselves as teachers and learners, all caring and sharing together. **We consciously and systematically help every child to identify strengths they have that they can use to help others.** These strengths - from shoe-tying to hand-jiving - are frequently acknowledged publicly in the class. The child who can help start a favorite class song on key or keep a steady beat in hand-jiving makes as important of a contribution to the classroom community as the early reader and writer. Children can develop "expertise" in many areas, from knowledge of how to perform routine tasks like feeding the goldfish or knowing how to gently hold the bunny, to specific literacy and math skills. **A classroom that values multiple intelligences or "avenues for learning" will naturally develop more "experts".**

In the book *Kid Writing: A Systematic Approach to Phonics, Journals, and Writing Workshop*, by Eileen Feldgus, Ed.D. and Isabell Cardonick, M.Ed., children's writing and art is honored on the **Kid Writing Wall of Fame** with a caption that identifies each writer's strengths:

- Joshua is an expert at using lower-case letters.
- Marissa is famous for putting periods in all the right places.

Developing a classroom of experts who can help each other frees the teacher to meet more individual student needs.

- When we teach high-frequency ("by heart") words through movement, rhythm, sign language and song, we **develop many "spelling experts"**. Children who do not have strong early visual memory skills can be successful with auditory spelling songs like *L-O-V-E Spells Love* or our rhythmic *t-h-e* spelling chants. Teachers can ask children during interactive writing or journal writing, "Who is already an expert at the word 'the'?" Or "Who is the 'King of ing'?"
- Sometimes we may not discover a child's unique skills unless we **ask families "What special things does your child do well? What does your child really love to do?"** One child with a deaf parent became the expert at teaching *The ABC Phonics: Sing, Sign, and Read!* by Nellie Edge to others. After reading and discussing the book *Crow Boy* by Taro Yoshima (Chibi could write in Chinese and imitate the voices of crows), children may identify new strengths to value in each other.
- **Invite the children in small groups to share tea** and talk about what they are really good at. Tea parties allow you to introduce chamomile tea (and Peter Rabbit), peppermint tea and real china teacups.



Every child needs to feel valued and to view themselves as an important contributor to the learning community.