So You’re Teaching Second Grade…

An Introduction to the Social, Physical, and Cognitive Development of Second Graders

Teaching second grade is a wonderful and exciting experience that includes observing, listening, and watching children. Not only does the mathematics build on what students have already learned and experienced in earlier grades, but it also continues to set the foundation for all later learning. The most important factor to the successful growth of seven- and eight-year-old children is being able to recognize specific characteristics of a child’s development. Knowing and understanding these characteristics can help a teacher implement effective practices in teaching the what, why, and how to a child.

Social Development
To meet the varying abilities and needs of students, math concepts can be taught through innovative ways with literature, music, and tools that are meaningful to the child. Even though students at this age may prefer to work by themselves and appreciate quiet time to work alone, they do like to work with partners, especially playing games and using puzzles.

Likewise, developing the ability to work in groups comes from sharing and taking turns, trusting, and communication through listening and discussion. Children of this age may also dislike being singled out, even for praise. They do tend to worry, are self-critical, and may express a lack of confidence. Throughout the school year, the teacher should provide many opportunities for children of this age level to develop a positive concept of self and a sense of responsibility, as well as to build relationships with others.

Physical Development
Sometimes second graders have trouble copying from the board because they exhibit myopic tendencies and concentrate on the details in their visual field (Wood, 1994). Even though they often work with a three-fingered pencil grasp that results in small printing, drawing, and number work, their written work does tend to be neat. They do display good understanding of right and left directionality, and they have abilities to focus a bit more and to concentrate on tasks that require more than 15 minutes.

Second Graders at a Glance
✓ The classroom is usually quieter than first grade, but transition times for students can be noisy.
✓ Most second graders like to know the day’s schedule and have adequate time to finish tasks.
✓ Students are easily motivated and like to be challenged.
✓ Students are by nature curious and interested in discovering how things work.
✓ Students should use a hands-on approach to learning foundational concepts.
What Second Graders Should Know

To prepare students for an appropriate and engaging level of rigor in math, most core curriculums outline the following content standards.

Number Sense and Operations
An important feature of number sense for second graders is understanding the base-ten place value system through 1,000s, including comparing and ordering whole numbers using the comparative symbols. Students continue work with basic addition and subtraction facts, as well as problems involving money.

By the end of second grade, students understand and use the inverse relationships between addition and subtraction to solve problems flexibly, efficiently, and accurately (to automaticity). In finding sums and differences of whole numbers, students learn the basics of “regrouping,” such as exchanging 1 ten for 10 ones and vice versa. In addition, students learn to solve simple concepts of multiplication and division including skip counting of 2s, 5s, and 10s.

Patterns, Relationships, and Algebraic Thinking
In this strand, students learn to use the commutative and associative rules to simplify mental calculations. Also, students are expected to relate addition and subtraction number sentences to problem situations.

Measurement and Geometry
These strands place emphasis on understanding that measurement is based on identifying a unit of measure and then measuring the length of objects by iterating or repeating a nonstandard or standard unit. In geometry, students use attributes to solve addition and subtraction problems.

Problem Solving
In any mathematics curriculum, mathematical reasoning and problem solving are embedded throughout. Problem solving and formal and informal reasoning underlie all content areas. Together with other mathematical tools, students use mathematical reasoning to make decisions about how to set up problems, solve them, and evaluate solutions for reasonableness.

Considerations for Grade-Level Accomplishments in Grade Two

- Counting 100 through 999
- Writing numbers
- Borrowing
- Skip counting
- Understanding associativity
- Reviewing time equivalencies
- Understanding money
- Telling time
- Understanding fractions
- Counting groups of coins
- Aligning columns
- Writing numbers
- Borrowing
- Skip counting
- Understanding associativity
- Reviewing time equivalencies
- Understanding money
- Telling time
- Understanding fractions

The Rewards of Teaching
In essence, the rewards of teaching second grade are immeasurable! Positive learning experiences empower children to think, solve problems, communicate their thinking, and make real-word connections. Remember, to teach is to learn, to learn is to grow, and to grow is believing that each and every child is important in your class.

References

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