

## The Dance

By Kristen Fraaza

Over the past few years I have come to describe the journey and accomplishments of my students as a "dance". I have found there really is no greater opportunity than the opportunity to inspire all children to learn, to love, to dream. . .to DANCE!

Each day Kaley and Carter enter my room the same as any of my twenty-five students. They manage to make their way through the heavy traffic and excitement in the hallways, arriving in our room to place their back-packs and coats in their designated areas, and find their seats to begin their morning work.

As I attempt to greet each student, take lunch money, book orders, poetry homework, tie a shoe, sharpen a pencil and discuss a concern with a parent, I look up hoping my students are making their way to their seats and beginning their morning responsibly. I give a few reminders and glance over to Kaley's table.

Two students in her group are helping her count out her math problems with manipulatives. I proceed over to Carter's table where I over hear the students at his table telling him how proud they are of him. His work was nearly complete.

As nine o'clock approaches, we gather on the rug for our meeting time. We review our daily agenda, the calendar, and then begin to recite the pledge and school song. Kaley begins to make her way to the front of the class, to be closer to the flag. I hear her reciting the lines with such great enthusiasm. I watch as the other students try to decide if they should be encouraging her to return to the rug with the rest of the class, as it is not her turn to lead the pledge. As one student raises this question to another with a whisper, I hear the child respond by saying, "She is fine. Kaley is so good at the pledge, I want her to lead!" Now, hand in hand, the class stands in a circle to continue with the school song and chant. . ., "We are SK2R: Safe, Kind, Responsible and Respectful!"

Our morning continues and we begin our centers. The class separates into small groups to rotate through five activities as I call up reading groups. I call up Carter's reading group first and he races over to the table with his book bag. He anxiously tells me how many times he read his story last night and what it was about. He sits at the table so eager to read to his group, and proceeds to go first. As the other

students take their turn, one of Carter's group members becomes a little frustrated. He hadn't remembered to bring his book bag home, so he was stumbling through many of the words. Carter leans over to the child's seat; places his finger on the child's page, points at the word and begins sounding it out with the child. "FR. . .ie. . .nd.s", he says. "The word is friends!" The child thanks Carter and tells him what a great fiend he is.

Nearing the end of our center time, and after repeated reminders to use quiet, working voices, I nearly give up on "crowd control". I am heavy into a lesson on comprehension strategies with the last reading group, when I hear the noise in the room die down. Many of the students are now speechless, and their attention drawn to the abc/word center. Most of the children at this center are either working on spelling words or making sentences. Kaley's job with her group is also to review her alphabet and sounds. Today Kaley is sitting at her center and proudly reciting each letter aloud. The class sits silent until she finishes and then erupts in cheers and applause!

Every day I am witness to small miracles just like these. There is so much that occurs, each and every day that can and will never be encompassed into any curriculum guide. Acts of love, kindness, acceptance, and generosity. Both Kaley and Carter are special needs students within my general education classroom. Each and every day I realize what "DANCING" is all about. Each and every day, the children in my room are learning the true meaning of what it is like to learn, to love, to dream, and to DANCE!

*Editor's note:*

*Kristin Fraaza is a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher at Delton-Kellogg Elementary School. She is a 2000 graduate of WMU and has successfully incorporated children with special needs into her general education classroom since the start of her teaching career. Currently, she has a child with autism and a child with Down syndrome in her class.*