



Excerpts from *Kindergarten Today,* *Teaching and Learning in the* *Kindergarten Year*

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It is absolutely reasonable to expect that kindergarten is about playful learning and learningful play, and about academic socialization and social academics. To make the most of the kindergarten experience, a teacher must be a master of knowledge about specific curriculum content, about children in general, and about her students in particular.

The kindergarten year requires a nuanced balance: plenty of play, child choice, verbal interaction, and learning of foundational skills in classrooms rich in engaging activities that are adaptable to children's varying readiness for experience-dependent learning. Kindergartners learn best under conditions in which adults guide and support their active efforts, with gradual and measured introduction of more formal lessons.

Kindergarten plays a powerful role in children's successful introduction to formal schooling. Children need challenging learning experiences that help them move forward. **But when classroom experiences are not attuned to children's developmental needs and individual characteristics, they undermine rather than foster children's learning.** For example, when kindergartners spend much time in drill-oriented instruction, they display stress behaviors, express less confidence in their abilities, and are less advanced in motor, academic, language, and social skills at the end of the school year. These outcomes, moreover, are strongest for low-income children. **Follow-ups reveal lasting effects through elementary school in poorer study habits and achievement** (Burts et al. 1992; Hart, Newell, & Olsen 2003; Hart et al. 1998; Stipek et al. 1995).

- **It is critically important to diversity instructions to meet individual needs.**
- **Keep instruction active and consistent with how young children learn.**
- **Instruction should go beyond the acquisition of isolated skills** to help learners strategically apply what they have learned.
- **It is important to maintain a balance between explicit instruction and informal, incidental learning.** Both have a role in the curriculum. Both require planning.
- **The prevailing method of instruction should be scaffolded instruction,** in which teachers: model; engage children in collaborative literacy activities (shared reading and writing, for example); and provide opportunities for guided independent practice.

Standards should include young children's physical development, social-emotional development, and their approaches to learning.

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