

How Kindergarten Children Learn: Our Teaching Philosophy

Nellie Edge Kindergarten Cadre

Bonds: We believe that respectful, caring bonds with children and their families are the vital foundation for an empowering kindergarten experience. As teachers of the young, we share with parents the responsibility for educating their child.



Differentiation: We believe that each child has unique strengths, prior language learning experiences, and preferred learning styles. Our instruction within a comprehensive literacy framework must be differentiated to provide enough challenge and support for all children to build on success and develop positive attitudes toward themselves and learning.

Emotion: We believe that emotional engagement is the key to all powerful learning. That is why we bring love, laughter, passion, the arts, and meaningful project work into our kindergarten. We seek for ways to personalize learning and engage the child's imagination.

Language: We believe childhood is for language. It is the familiarity with the English and Spanish languages that precedes and underlies excellent literacy instruction. This familiarity allows the child's decoding to be error-free and reading to be fluent. While actively and systematically developing language, we encourage children to become "voracious vocabulary learners," master ABC phonics skills, and build reading comprehension to meet rigorous Common Core standards.

Performing: We believe that children deserve to memorize, recite, and perform many delightful pieces of language in kindergarten — to turn print into sound and turn the pleasures of sound over to an appreciative audience. Our curriculum invites children to talk, sing, dramatize, and perform language. Developing the child's "I can" attitude and capacity for language and thinking underlies everything we do.

Creativity: We believe that rich experiences in the many languages of art, music, drama, dance, storytelling, and play help children develop social-emotional skills and find personal meaning in school. We intentionally develop these multiple "ways of knowing" while nurturing creative and higher-order thinking.

Environment: We believe children deserve a beautiful, organized, and nurturing environment that is clutter-free. Our anchor charts show children what learning success looks like. Photos of our students and their art adorn the walls, creating an atmosphere of belonging, friendship, and collaboration.

Perseverance: We believe positive discipline, dependable routines, and empowering messages help children develop self-discipline, perseverance, and the belief that when they work hard, they can accomplish any new goal. A growth mindset prepares children for success in school—and in life.

Multisensory Teaching: We have proved that joyful Multisensory ABC/Phonics Immersion strategies (singing, signing, fingerspelling, and writing) are the fastest way to develop

mastery of letters and sounds. These instructional practices are consistent with how the young child's brain learns best. Active art-infused teaching builds motivation and enthusiasm for learning and incorporates an optimal learning framework.

Kindergarten-Friendly Phonics: We have learned that some children need much more systematic, intentional practice to build fluency with phonics-based words and fluency reading and writing high-frequency sight words. **Phonics Instruction must be differentiated** right from the start to allow proficient students to soar and provide a scaffold of success for less experienced learners.

Literature: We believe we must choose only the finest literature, nonfiction, songs, poems, and rhymes to give our children. These language models are the seeds that inspire our children to love language and grow into powerful writers and thinkers. We want imaginative language, poetic phrases, and metaphors to become a part of our children's thinking, speaking, and writing. The first books children read must inform and delight the heart and mind.

Writing to Read: We have proved that writing unlocks the key to higher literacy standards in kindergarten, and young children love to write. We believe that children deserve strategies to begin drawing and writing from the very first day of school. Within the context of writing, we systematically provide phonics instruction that has meaning to each child so they can understand how the writing and reading process works.

American Sign Language (ASL): We believe that all young children deserve to learn memorable songs in American Sign Language (ASL). Children fortunate enough to learn ASL and experience the joys of performing delightful songs in sign for appreciative audiences have a lifelong advantage in developing dynamic communication skills.

Memory Reading: We believe that "magical memory reading" and reading the pictures are essential literacy experiences for young children who may have limited language and print experience. "Memory reading" and reading the pictures with nursery rhymes and song picture books build oral language fluency and allow children to develop concepts of print while learning to read word-for-word. These opportunities to role-play themselves as successful readers while systematically learning phonics skills and sight words must accompany traditional shared and guided reading instruction — especially for children who have not had years of repeated "magical memory reading" experiences at home. One of the ways we develop oral language and reading foundations simultaneously is with our "I Can Read" Anthology Notebooks.

Books: We believe that parents and children need to understand that engaging experiences with real books build real readers. Research documents that reading just right "I can read" books of one's own choosing every day at school is the best way to become a better reader. Young children can develop skill in choosing books and take pride in building their stamina as they become proficient readers. We encourage family reading rituals because the best readers have families who read with them every night!

Scaffolding: We believe some children need much more carefully scaffolded instruction than we used to consider appropriate. We support these students early in the year. As teacher-researchers, we love the challenge of building success for each individual learner. We are

constantly learning and open to new insights from evidence-based research and our wise teaching colleagues. Our high expectations for children's literacy development, thinking skills, and love of learning keep us challenged and reflective.

Nature: We believe that by awakening children's love of nature, we create compelling reasons for them to want to read, write, research, and to meet the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). Our goal is to develop a sense of wonder and respect for the natural world. As we bring our connections with nature back into the classroom, we create a more engaging and lively learning environment. Children who learn to observe closely, think deeply, and respect the natural world will make wiser ecological choices now ... and in the future.

Making Things: We encourage our budding scientists, engineers, artists, writers, and mathematicians with a curriculum that invites them to make things...to ask, imagine, plan, create. We are intentionally growing creative thinkers for future science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) careers. Building and making things develop not only the engineering brain but allow children to believe they can do great things!

Joy: We believe that the kindergarten experience must nurture social-emotional skills in each child and create joyful school memories. Kindergarten is a magical journey, and one of our jobs is to develop the imagination and create memorable rituals, traditions, and celebrations that honor childhood. We value dramatic play, block building, dance and movement, and the many forms of literacy play. We want children to be active learners and disciplined, creative thinkers; to learn to work hard, make good choices, and be kind. We want children to love coming to school each day.

SMILE! We believe that young children deserve a multisensory and differentiated literacy program within a joyful, caring community of learners — a *child's garden*. Their lives must be valued, celebrated, and incorporated into the literacy curriculum so they care about school and develop a love of learning. Authentic, meaningful learning always elicits a SMILE (Systematic, Meaningful, Intentional, Language and Literacy Experiences).

A special thank you to kindergarten teachers everywhere who are commitment to
Parents as Partners in Kindergarten Success



Winter Curry



Celeste Starr



Katie Nelson

How to Develop a Kindergarten Philosophy and Photo Essay Notebook: Share with Parents and Administrators

My Philosophy and Practice - How Children Learn

Consider this book as an ongoing project that might help you:

- Introduce yourself to the parents of your students. Consider doing captions in English and Spanish.
 - "Sell yourself" in applying for a teaching job.
 - Articulate who you are in the lives of children for school evaluation purposes.
 - Meet the practicum requirement for professional development credit.
 - Document your professional growth as a part of National Board Certification.
 - Meet district requirements for new teachers developing professional growth plans.
 - Have a wonderful memory book of your passion for exemplary kindergarten teaching and the young children whose lives you have touched.
- **Write a one-page personal philosophy statement of your beliefs**, based on research and experience, about how children learn.
 - **Assemble ten to twenty photos of children engaged in learning** inside and outside of your classroom. Write short captions that express how the children are learning. (See sample captions.)
 - **Include a cover with your name**, school and at least one photo showing who you are.
 - Include another sheet with name, address, phone number, teaching experiences, degrees held, any special training or skills, and significant continuing education training.
 - Consider including a **page providing photos and captions about your family** and/or your special interests. (See *All About Me*)
 - Highlight key pieces of early literacy and child development research.
 - Emphasize research on how the brain learns best.
 - Include favorite quotes.
 - You might even include one of those wonderful picture-letters that kindergartners spontaneously send - "To teacher. I love you. From Joshua."
 - Choose some of your favorite colors for the photo pages and develop a consistent, unifying theme (i.e., pages in primary colors, pictures with photo corners, and print on white).
 - **Organize the pages inside plastic sheet protectors in a white 3-ring view binder and/or on your school website.**



Tip: 4x6 or 5x7 pictures work best.

You are welcome to use or adapt any of the materials included in this document with credits noted. See "About Nellie Edge" at <http://www.nellieedge.com/myphilosophy.htm> for sample kindergarten philosophy pages.

Personal Philosophy and Photo Essay: Sample Captions

A Photo Essay on your teaching philosophy showing students actively engaged in meaningful learning becomes a powerful communication piece to share with colleagues and parents. We recommend using a 3-ring notebook with clear plastic sleeves to protect the photos. It is useful to first read and study the Common Core Standards; be intentional about how your practices are consistent with the goals of excellent first teaching.

Here are some sample captions that you are welcome to use or adapt:

Our classroom is a literacy-rich environment that reflects the lives of our children. Notice the poetry posters, anchor charts, name/photo word walls, and student self-portraits and anchor charts.

Shared reading experiences teach children concepts about print, builds language fluency, and provide a social context for learning. It allows us to nurture a love of reading. These children are reading and dramatizing the Nellie Edge Read and Sing Big Book™ *Teddy Bear, Teddy Bear*.

Phonemic awareness skills are strengthened by memorizing and reciting poems and songs. These children are reciting *Alligator Pie*.

Children develop oral language fluency and vocabulary concepts effortlessly and joyfully through memorizing and performing many songs. Our children sing throughout the day because it is how the brain learns best.

Cooking in our kindergarten gives children practice reading and measuring. Here we are making playdough from our picture recipe.

Children use art to remember important learning experiences. This collage represents memories of our visit to the pumpkin patch.

Children learn about science by thinking like a scientist. In our science observation center these children are observing the changes in their sprouts. They are recording observations in their *Little Sprouts* journal.

Children learn best as a joyful community of learners in a non-competitive environment. These children are playing math games. They have learned to say, "good job" no matter who wins.

Kindergarten children love to "buddy read." We tell children **"the more you read the better you read, so read, read, read!"** These buddies are reading their class made books to each other.

Giving children experiences with quality fiction and nonfiction helps them **develop a life-long love of reading.** Children hug their favorite books.

Children learn high-frequency "heart words" by using word stamps to build sentences. **These children are making their own "stamp and read" skinny book.** They can read "My Book, by _____ and the sentence "I see a cat."

Learning in science depends on actively doing science. Here children are planting bulbs/watering seedlings...

All children deserve to own a collection of books that they can joyfully read from cover to cover. These children are "reading-to-self" from their Read and Sing Little Book bags. Children will choose "Just Right: I Can Read" Books to read over and over again, at school—and at home.

Through art experiences, children develop their visual intelligence, experience the creative process, and have the satisfaction of making things! This is one way we are building the experience base for future STEM careers. Kimberly is standing next to one of our easels. She wants to be an artist when she grows up.

Personal Philosophy and Photo Essay: Sample Captions, continued

Learning to work cooperatively as a member of a group develops important life skills. Here children are collaborating to build a castle.

By using writing for real world purposes, there is a natural motivation for children to learn new words and improve their handwriting and spelling. These children are writing messages to their friends.

Children learn through active exploration and interaction with adults, other children and materials. These children are exploring floating and sinking objects. They are making a picture graph of what they are learning.

In our classroom we use reading and writing for real purposes. These children have made signs for their block structure.

Kindergarten children need to see themselves as writers, to select topics, take risks, and write everyday. These children are writing, using both their phonetic (phonics-based) spelling and some high-frequency "heart words" that they have learned to spell conventionally. Writing workshop is where the skills of becoming a writer are developed.

Student-led parent conferences allow children to play an active role in setting goals and take pride in reporting their learning progress. Joseph is sharing his portfolio of projects with his family.

The dramatic play area allows children to develop social skills and concepts around thematic topics. These children are using a veterinarian's clinic to care for their pets.

Kindergarten children need to memorize, recite and perform language. These children are reciting *Hey, Diddle, Diddle* at our Mother Goose Recital. We have several parent performances every year.

It is important for children to have opportunities to share their writing. Here Landon sits in the author's chair and shares a book he has written and illustrated. The children are an attentive and respectful audience. They are learning how to give him positive feedback and ask questions. "I like the way you..." and to ask good questions (who?, what?, where?, when?, why?, and how?).

Kindergarten is a place where memories of learning to read must be ones of joy and success. Amanda proudly reads and sings the Nellie Edge Read and Sing Big Book™ *Goodnight Irene* to her classmates.

We invite children to respond to literature to deepen comprehension and build vocabulary and story knowledge. These children are dramatizing the book *Caps for Sale*.

Children love illustrating and reading their poetry "I Can Read" Anthology Notebook pages. The *Reading is Fun* rhyme is illustrated for the final page of these notebooks as they think about and illustrate where they will read this summer.

One of my goals in kindergarten is to create a joyful community of learners who work hard, and are kind. These three girls are collaborating on a mural of our walking trip to the post office.

Parents are our vital partners in helping each child develop a love of reading. The Read and Sing Family Book Club builds the Family Reading At Home Habit and teaches children to set reading goals.

Consider reading the beautiful photo essays on Nellie Edge's Kindergarten blog for additional documentation of beliefs in practice.

From *Parents as Partners in Kindergarten and Early Literacy: Family Connections that Multiply Our Teaching Effectiveness*. 2012. Permission granted for teachers to use or adapt these captions in developing photo essays for their families and to document their professional learning goals.

Excerpts from *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* by John Hattie, Routledge Publishers, 2009.

Chapter 3 - The Argument

...**"Visible teaching and learning occurs when learning is the explicit goal, when it is appropriately challenging, when the teacher and the student both (in their various ways) seek to ascertain whether and to what degree the challenging goal is attained, when there is deliberate practice aimed at attaining mastery of the goal, when there is feedback given and sought, and when there are active, passionate, and engaging people (teacher, student, peers, and so on) participating in the act of learning...The remarkable feature of the evidence is that the biggest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching, and when students become their own teachers.**

...**"The act of teaching requires deliberate interventions** to ensure that there is cognitive change in the student: thus the key ingredients are awareness of the learning intentions, knowing when a student is successful in attaining those intentions, having sufficient understanding of the student's understanding as he or she comes to the task, and knowing enough about the content to provide meaningful and challenging experiences..."

...**"Teachers need to be actively engaged in, and passionate about, teaching and learning."**

...**"Teachers must be able to openly discuss the three key feedback questions: "Where are they going?" "How are they going?" and "Where to next?" (The "they" refers to both the teacher and to the student.)...the aim is to make students active in the learning process—through actions by teachers and others—until the students reach the stage where they become their own teachers, they can seek out optimal ways to learn new material and ideas, they can seek resources to help them in this learning, and when they can set appropriate and more challenging goals...**

"The major argument is that when teaching and learning is visible, there is a greater likelihood of students reaching higher levels of achievement."

Chapter 8 - The Contributions From the Curricula

...**"They concluded that Reading Recovery® "was reaching its fundamental goal of increasing the lowest performing first graders' reading and writing skills to levels comparable with their classroom peers", and there was a "lasting effect, at least by the end of second grade, on broad reading skills."**

...**A teacher using a combination of vocabulary, phonics, and comprehensive methods will be much more effective than either a phonics or a whole language teacher.**

...**"...a lack of fluency and automaticity (that is, quick and accurate recognition of words and phrases) may hamper growth beyond first learning to read..."**

Drama/Arts programs

...**"creative drama activities have positive effects on children's achievement at elementary grade levels in oral language skills, self-esteem, moral reasoning, role-taking abilities, and drama skills...reading the repetitive and hence predictable lyrics of songs helps train reading skills..."**

Reach for the Stars...

"I know well that only the rarest kind of best in anything can be good enough for the young." Walter de la Mare, from *Bells of Grass*

"My job is to make every child look good in front of their peers. Children have got to trust that I will never let them look bad." Bobbi Fisher, from *Joyful Learning in Kindergarten*

"If we as teachers ache with caring... writing matters because it's done for real reasons by real writers who ache with caring for a real response."

Mem Fox, from *Radical Reflections*

"The purpose of education is to learn to love to do what you have to do." Plato

"Community in itself is more important to learning than any method or technique."

Ralph Peterson

"It should be remembered that we speak more than we write. Throughout our lives we judge others, and we ourselves are judged, by what we say and how we speak."

Ernest Boyer

"Our job is not to help kids do we well in school. It's to help them do well in life."

Elliott Eisner

"It is the familiarity with the English language that allows the child's decoding to be error free, their reading to be fluent and their writing to be powerful."

Nellie Edge, from *Celebrate Language and Accelerate Literacy*

"Your children will not just learn how to read and write. They will choose to read and write. Now and forever."

Shelley Harwayne, from *Lifetime Guarantees*

"Unless we reach into our students hearts, we have no entry into their minds."

Regie Routman from *Reading Essentials*

"My goal in reading-writing workshop is to launch ships. My goal is to help youngsters set off on endeavors significant enough that they will want to write and learn with heart and soul. Launching ships."

Lucy McCormick Calkins from *Living Between the Lines*

"It's the dedication to detail that separates the master craftsman from those with stars in their eyes."

Eric Beall

The best way to become a better reader is to practice each day, with books you choose, on your just-right reading level. It soon becomes a habit.

Gail Boushey and Joan Moser from *The Daily Five*