

# How Kindergarten Children Learn: My 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.

**Proven Kindergarten Phonics:** We have learned that some children need much more systematic, intentional phonics practice to build fluency with phonics-based words and fluency reading and writing high-frequency sight words. Phonics instruction must be embedded in authentic reading and writing tasks. It 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 proven the research that shows writing unlocks the key to higher literacy standards in kindergarten. We believe that children deserve strategies to begin drawing, storytelling, and writing from the very first day of school: Our students love to write! Within the context of writing, we systematically provide phonics instruction (encoding sounds to print) that has meaning to each child so they understand how the writing/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 committed to joyful teaching and learning with Parents as Partners in Kindergarten Success



Winter Curry



Celeste Starr



Katie Nelson