TABLE 16.3 Considerations for Kindergarten Teachers

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| With the increased academic demands of kindergarten, committed teachers must strive to engage in developmentally appropriate, effective practices that meet the needs of the whole child. | |
| IF YOU ARE THINKING OF TEACHING KINDERGARTEN, YOU MIGHT CONSIDER THAT: | |
| On the One Hand | On the Other Hand |
| Kindergarten is part of the formal school system, often more structured and with more challenging learning standards and curriculum expectations than in the past. | Teachers are still the most important influence on the quality and appropriateness of children’s experiences in school. The school system tends to offer higher salaries, better benefits, and more job security than do child care or preschool programs. |
| Kindergartners vary widely in their prior learning opportunities both at home or in preschool. Teachers face the challenge of teaching a general curriculum to diverse learners. | Effective teachers don’t expect all the children to achieve the same thing, at the same time, in the same way. By individualizing teaching and working with small groups, teachers experience the rewards of seeing children who are initially behind their peers make great strides. |
| Kindergartners don’t think and learn exactly like adults and older children—there are limits to their understanding of complex concepts. | Kindergartners are more competent learners and thinkers than many people assume. They strive to make sense of the world, solve problems, and are fascinated by learning about topics that interest them. |
| Kindergarten classes are usually larger than those in preschool and teachers do not always have the benefit of an assistant, making it more difficult for teachers to individualize their teaching. | Most schools have multiple kindergarten classrooms, and teachers can collaborate with colleagues within grade level and across grades. Specialists in music, art, physical education, and special education may also be available to offer support. |
| Kindergartners can function independently in self-help skills and need less adult support than preschoolers. | Kindergartners are still young children who rely on teachers for emotional as well as physical support and usually want to please their teachers. |
| The kindergarten curriculum tends to focus on literacy and math, raising concerns that there is insufficient attention to social-emotional development. | Good kindergarten teachers know that both children’s cognition and social development are essential. Their teaching integrates academic skills and concepts with positive social-emotional development and warm, responsive relationships. |
| Kindergarten may be included in school district accountability requirements. Children are sometimes tested inappropriately. | Effective teachers use ongoing assessment of children’s learning to adapt curriculum and teaching. They don’t place undue emphasis on formal tests but do hold themselves accountable to children and families. |

Lina Truesdale’s 22 first graders have very different backgrounds and abilities. Early in the school year, Lina spent time getting to know the children and assessing their abilities. She found that five of them were reading at the second-grade level or above, and four did not know all the letters and sounds. The district curriculum is designed for children somewhere in the middle. But like every good first-grade teacher, Lina knows that she teaches children first and curriculum second.



A major portion of the day in primary grades is devoted to reading and writing instruction. What are some ways that intentional teachers can integrate other areas of the curriculum such as science and social studies with reading and writing?

The school district requires that there be a 90-minute language arts block each morning in first grade. Lina knows that the children are more likely to stay energetic and focused if she varies the activities during this time, and makes sure that the children are as active as possible, both mentally and physically. She begins the morning with whole-group instruction and discussion of new concepts, introducing and explaining new vocabulary words in everyday language. Then the class divides into smaller groups. Each day, Lina works with small groups on guided reading, during which she assesses their reading comprehension and ability to monitor themselves for understanding. She coaches them to ask questions such as “Does that make sense?” “What does that mean?” and “How you know?”

At the same time, others read independently or in pairs. Then, children continue with individual work, such as writing in journals, while Lina observes and offers individual help as needed. She ends the language arts period with a whole-group read-aloud, which the children love. At this point in their reading journey, the books the children can decode on their own have limited vocabulary and are not as interesting as the stories that Lina reads to them. Lina keeps careful records of children’s reading progress. She takes great pride in their achievements while also focusing on ways to adapt her teaching for those who are behind.

Some days the class has physical education before lunch, and other days they have music. After lunch, they play outside for 20 minutes and then return for focused math time. Again, Lina varies the teaching context. She may introduce a new math concept, such as a put-together/take-apart problem, to the whole group. Then she gives them a problem to discuss with their neighbors: “Sixteen plus what number equals 21?” The children report their solutions and reasoning to the whole group. Seven-year-old Nancy explains, “We got 5. We started with 16 and counted 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and that’s five numbers.” Lina says, “That’s one way to solve the problem. Is there another way?”

Lina observes children’s grasp of the problem. Then, she follows the whole-group time with small-group work, during which she focuses on those who haven’t grasped the new concept, or gives more difficult problems to those who need challenge. Science or social studies projects follow that integrate literacy, language, and mathematics goals.

At the end of her day, Lina meets with the other first-grade teachers to talk about effective ways of helping struggling readers and children who are having trouble grasping basic math concepts. She also seeks their advice on ways to assist Irina and Carlos, who are learning English. She plans to communicate with their families as well.

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