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Kindergarten

Worksheets

Are worksheets appropriate for Kindergarten students?

Research has shown that, in most cases, worksheets are too abstract for four to six-year-olds and, therefore, devoting time to them is not a wise investment in the education of our children. Rather, children should be involved in a play-based inquiry program which provides invitations for the children to explore and inquire through a variety of activities, including the project approach. Writing tools, paper, and numerous concrete materials found throughout the classroom and community environments, meaningful conversations, and intentional, purposeful play are developmentally appropriate activities for children of this age.

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Teaching Letters and Numbers

How much time should be scheduled for the formal teaching of letters and numerals in Kindergarten?

While it is important that children learn about letters and numerals, it is not recommended that time be scheduled for formal instruction or drill on letters and numerals. For many children of this age, sitting passively for more than a few minutes is often frustrating and stressful. Research has shown that Kindergarten children will learn letters and numerals more effectively through the use of concrete materials, field trips, teacher modeling (experience charts, graphs on chalkboard, etc.), self-initiated writing activities, teacher-directed finger plays, games, poems, and songs in a stimulating, print-rich environment.

As children recognize that print communicates meaning, feel the excitement of self-expression via writing, and experience the satisfaction that reading and writing bring, they will usually learn letters and numerals at a very fast pace.

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Games and Puzzles

Are file folder games and other teacher-made or commercial games and puzzles that focus on numerals, letters, rhyming words, etc. appropriate to have in Kindergarten?

File folder games and puzzles are appropriate materials to have in the classroom. Children may decide to use them in the context of their play and interests. Through conversation and play, teachers can support children who are particularly interested in concept experiences. This way children who are ready to learn the letters and numbers will have the opportunity without pushing children who are not yet ready.

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Printing

Should Kindergarten children be taught to print?

Children arrive at Kindergarten as emergent writers. Their writing may be in the form of scribbling or non-phonetic letter strings, but these represent stages of writing development just as babbling represents a stage of speech development. Teachers should accept children in the stage they are at and optimistically anticipate advancement. Teachers should not teach formal printing lessons, but should provide numerous opportunities for children to express themselves through print.

Every Kindergarten program should be well stocked with items such as paper, pencils, crayons, staplers, and hole punches so that children can make booklets, write letters, or create stories, etc. during their playtime. In

addition, writing tools and paper should be located in play areas so that children can create maps, menus, lists, signs, etc. as needed to support their play activities.

It is important for children to see teachers model proper letter formation when writing poems, songs, thank-you letters, etc. It is also important to have print displayed in a variety of ways in the classroom (e.g., signs, labels, posters) and to take children into the community to examine print in everyday life.

Teachers should be available to assist children on an individual basis as required. For example, if a child asks how to make the letter D, the teacher could point one out where the letter is displayed in a book, around the classroom, or demonstrate how to make one on a scrap of paper. These are only a few ways that teachers can guide children in becoming confident and capable writers.

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Developmental Skills and Abilities

How can the wide range of developmental skills and abilities of children entering Kindergarten be addressed in the Kindergarten program?

In a play-based program which considers the socio-emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual development of each individual, there are unlimited opportunities for growth and learning for everyone. Through conversations, observations, and documentation, the educator will identify strengths, interests, and needs of all children and plan accordingly.

The teacher could foster a child's interest in plants by creating an invitation that included seeds, soils, pots, watering cans, books, plants that have been previously established, seed catalogues, recording charts and paper. Learning should be scaffolded by the teacher through conversation, questions, and play. As a result of conversations and observations, the teacher may realize that the child overwatered and subsequently provides the child with opportunities to learn about watering plants. To facilitate growth and learning, the teacher could bring in a local gardener to answer questions and educate the children about plants. The children may decide they want to create a florist shop during their play.

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Play

How should a teacher respond when someone refers to the Kindergarten program as “just play”?

A teacher could respond by inviting the person into the classroom to observe the learning that takes place during the Kindergarten day. If the invitation is accepted, a checklist could be provided to help guide the visitor's observations. The teacher could offer to loan the person a resource that aptly explains the value of play. There are presently many excellent materials available on the topic including videos, booklets, articles, and books. Several of these titles have been included in the *Core and Additional Resource List (2009)* for Kindergarten, available on the Ministry of Education's website.

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Extra year of Kindergarten

Are there situations where a child would benefit by being retained in Kindergarten for an extra year?

The child-centred philosophy is generally not supportive of retaining children. Reliable studies have indicated that the majority of children do not benefit from retention. A preferable alternative to retention is to promote the child to a Grade 1 program that will adapt to all of the needs of each individual. The purpose of such adaptation of materials, instruction, and environment is to support student achievement of curriculum outcomes.

Decisions about a child's progress and placement should be based on the principle of providing the most appropriate learning environment for each child. This decision should be made by an educational team led by the classroom teacher and should include the parents/caregivers and child.

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PreKindergarten Screening Test

Should all Kindergarten children have to pass a PreKindergarten screening test?

Screening tests should not be used as a basis for admission to the Kindergarten program. Some standardized tests may be biased in the areas of gender, culture, and socioeconomics, and may measure only certain areas of children's learning. It is difficult for tests to measure curiosity, the ability to get along with others, appreciation of beauty and diversity in the world, kindness towards others, persistence in real-life situations, or a sense of responsibility for self and others.

Furthermore, a child's test results can vary greatly in a short period because young children change so quickly. Their skills, abilities, and understandings blossom with tremendous speed throughout the early childhood years.

In addition, screening may suggest delayed entrance for the very children who need school the most – those who have experienced relatively less stimulating learning environments in their preschool years.

The main question in the child-centred view is not whether the child is ready for Kindergarten, but whether the Kindergarten program is ready or appropriate for the child. Unless there are unusual circumstances, all children who meet the school division's entrance age requirement should be allowed to attend Kindergarten.

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Kindergarten in a Multi-grade Classroom

How should the Kindergarten area be set up in a multi-grade classroom?

In a primary multi-grade classroom, Kindergarten involvement presents opportunities for play-based learning for all children. By starting from the Kindergarten curriculum, the teacher can build an appropriate program based on the developmental level of the students.

Desks are not needed but tables, chairs, and adequate space for learning and for personal belongings should be available, as well as quiet areas where children can choose to go if they are wanting quiet time. The environment must be equipped with a wide variety of materials, from simple to complex, in order to meaningfully engage all the children.

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Kindergarten Volunteers

How can educators encourage volunteers to help?

Volunteers need to know that they are welcome in the classroom and that their work is important. An invitation for them to participate can be extended at the orientation meeting and via letters or telephone calls. Parents/caregivers should be made aware that their involvement will contribute to their children's success in school because it reflects the attitude that school is important. People from the community, such as the elderly, should be told that their contributions are welcome and valued.

Once volunteers have offered their services, teachers should be flexible in assigning duties. Tasks should suit the interests and schedules of the helpers. Training sessions should be offered so that volunteers are clear about their responsibilities and understand the focus on the environment, conversation, and play.

The work of volunteers should be recognized. Some ideas for expressing gratitude to volunteers include inviting them to teas or meals, presenting them with student-created gifts, cards or letters, and displaying their pictures in places of honour.

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Preparing for Kindergarten

How can parents/caregivers prepare their children for Kindergarten?

Parents/caregivers should model a positive attitude towards school. Research has offered evidence that the attitude of parents/caregivers toward education has a strong impact on a child's success.

It is extremely important that parents/caregivers read to children and recite traditional verses and stories. Children need to hear the rhythm of language and they benefit from repeating the same stories and verses over and over again. If parents /caregivers value literature, then children usually will too.

Parents/caregivers can provide writing tools and paper for their children and encourage them to "write" lists, thank-you notes, etc.

Also, parents/caregivers can help children explore their environment by taking them to libraries, stores, zoos, farms, lakes, museums, art galleries, and parks. These outings are great opportunities to talk with children about what they see, hear, smell, and feel. They will provide valuable background experiences that will help to expand children's horizons and enhance further learning. For example, a story about a farm will mean much more to a child if she/he has visited one.

Parents/caregivers can provide suitable toys and manipulatives to enrich their children's play experiences. Additionally, parents/caregivers could take advantage of programs on parenting that are offered in their communities or elsewhere.

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Kindergarten Curriculum and Kindergarten Resource

Is *Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten* (2009) the same as the Kindergarten Curriculum (2010)?

The two documents are complementary, not the same. The Kindergarten Curriculum provides the teacher with the outcomes that children should achieve by the end of the Kindergarten year (what children should know, understand, and be able to do). As well as the final learning outcomes for Kindergarten for each Required Area of Study, the curriculum outlines the characteristics of an effective Kindergarten program which include:

- Incorporating the principles of early learning
- Actualizing the distinguishing features of an early childhood education program
- Providing meaningful contexts through a reflective lens
- Using the processes of observation, documentation, and interpretation
- Facilitating inquiry through play.

The curriculum also provides examples of what an effective program might look like in action.

Teachers are encouraged to continue to refer to *Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten* as it provides detail on each of the characteristics outlined in the curriculum. Please note that although the print copy of the resource contains draft outcomes and indicators, the drafts have been removed in the online version.

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