

1. According to the Kindergarten curriculum, are children expected to be reading by the end of the Kindergarten year?

In accordance with the Kindergarten curriculum expectations and outcomes, children do not need to read by the end of the Kindergarten year. Furthermore, the ministry discourages direct, formal reading instruction in Kindergarten. There is a common misunderstanding that the “earlier we teach children to master the basic elements of reading, the better off or more prepared they will be in the following grade levels.” Research has shown that “in a comparison of 50 play-based classes, the children [by the age of 10] who had played in Kindergarten excelled over the others in their advancement of reading and mathematics, social and emotional adjustments, excelled in creativity, oral expression, intelligence and industry” (Miller and Almon, 2009). The motivation or disposition to learn to read is one of the most critical factors in affecting the achievement of reading competency. Research also indicates there are “no long-term gains from teaching children to read at age five compared to age seven” (Suggate, 2006).

2. How do I support Kindergarten children to develop the dispositions to learn about literacy?

It is the disposition to want to learn more and the desire to know many things that encourage children to ask questions, to discover, to make sense and to invent new ideas that enable them to become successful readers (Neuman & Roskos, 2007).

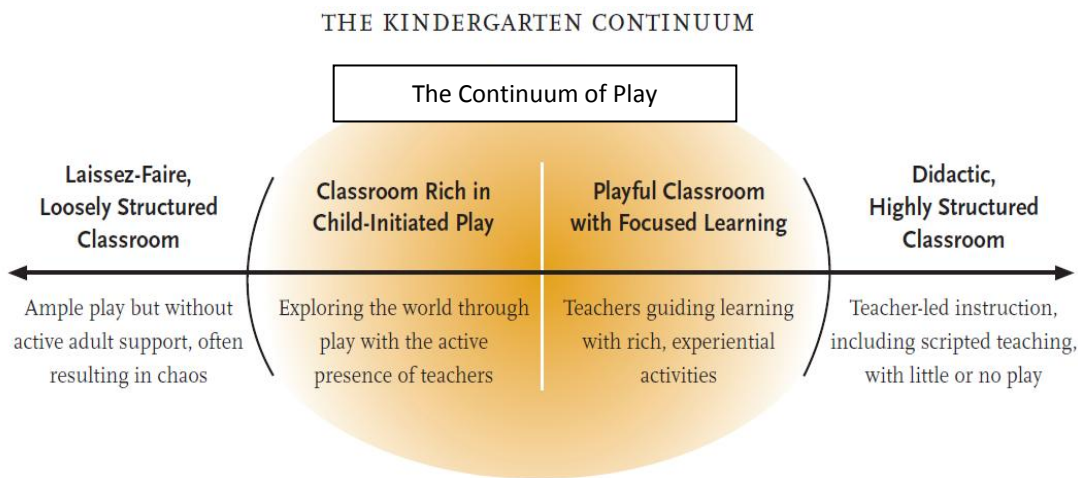
Through inquiry, play-based learning, children have opportunities and experiences to:

Dispositions to learn	Example
Take an interest.	A child role-play reads the story <i>Brown Bear, Brown Bear</i> to a peer and their dolls at the dramatic play centre.
Become engaged and involved.	The children are invited and encouraged to comment and ask questions about aspects of a story that interests them during a shared reading.
Persist despite difficulty or uncertainty.	A child continues to try to sing all the words and coordinate the actions along with peers when learning the song <i>If You’re Happy and You Know It</i> .
Communicate with others.	The children construct a model of a building; they plan, direct, explain and negotiate to create a three-dimensional representation.
Take increasing responsibility.	The children who are interested in learning more about spiders, search for information on spiders in the school library.

The desire to know many things is what drives children to learn about reading and writing (Dowling, 2010).

3. In both *Children First: A Resource for Kindergarten and the Kindergarten Curriculum*, inquiry, play-based learning is recommended as a developmentally appropriate approach to embed language and literacy learning. What is meant by inquiry, play-based learning?

Inquiry, play-based learning refers to what educators may understand as purposeful or intentionally planned play. The following is a continuum on play that illustrates the variances of inquiry, play-based learning in an early years' classroom.



(Adapted from Miller & Almon, 2009).

The role of the educator in inquiry, play-based learning involves intentionality and care in choosing and placing materials and props in the environment to invite children's investigations and inquiry. Educators co-create play experiences with children to support children's expansive range of interests, learning and development. In inquiry, play-based learning, the role of the educator involves listening to, observing, questioning, responding, recording and extending children's thinking and scaffolding learning.

4. Currently, my division expects Kindergarten teachers to use a commercialized program(s) to ensure that the Kindergarten children are developing reading and writing skills and are prepared for Grade One. Are commercialized programs appropriate for Kindergarten?

The ministry cautions educators about using a commercially developed program. Research demonstrates that Kindergarten children will develop emerging literacy skills and positive dispositions toward reading and writing through inquiry, play-based learning.

Educators need to reflect on the learning environment to assist children in exploring and understanding letters and sounds. Baskets of letters can be included in a game of I Spy at the sand table, as props for children to use when role playing, as tracers at a creative arts centre or as a collection to pattern and sort. Possibilities are endless when educators take a reflective approach regarding how and why they are using materials and how are meaningful ways provided for intentional play experiences that embed letters and sounds.

Effective literacy approaches include the use of concrete, real-life materials, field trips, teaching through modelling, self-initiated writing, finger plays, games, poems and songs (David Elkind, 2007). Additional supporting documents for Kindergarten may be accessed at www.curriculum.gov.sk.ca:

- *Literacy Practices in Kindergarten Statement* (2014)
- *The Importance of Play* (2011)
- *Key Language Cues and Conventions* (2011)
- *Spelling and Phonics in Kindergarten* (2011)
- *Journal Writing* (2011)
- *Environmental Print* (2011)
- *Early Literacy: A Resource for Teachers* (2002)

5. I have been asked to block two 30-minute periods for literacy and numeracy instruction within my 2 ½ hour Kindergarten day. How should literacy and numeracy learning be approached in Kindergarten?

While it is important that children learn about letters and numbers, it is not recommended that time be scheduled for formal instruction or drill on letters and numbers (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, March 2011). Literacy and numeracy should be integrated throughout the environment and program. Although there is not a designated time for subject areas in Kindergarten or a defined schedule, it is recommended that children have 60 to 90 minutes of uninterrupted inquiry, play-based learning time. During this time, there are many opportunities for educators to offer shared literacy experiences and numeracy learning using invitations, learning centres and projects.

6. I have spent hours creating beautiful posters and spent money on charts and word walls for my Kindergarten classroom. What does the term language-rich, print-rich environment mean? How might I use these materials (e.g., posters, charts) in developmentally appropriate ways?

Language-rich environments feature the following:

- Trusting, caring, positive relationships with peers and adults
- Real-world materials embedded in learning centres (e.g., magazines, flyers, phone books, recipe cards, maps)
- Interactive read alouds with individuals, small and large groups (e.g., enticing invitations that evoke language in listening centres, library corners)
- Meaningful conversations, open-ended questions and reflective discussions.



Print-rich environments feature the following:

- Text types and writing materials interspersed throughout the learning centres
- Text types that are accessible and relevant to the interests, cultures and needs of children
- A variety of high-quality text types (e.g., non-fiction, fiction, photographs, poems, graphs, signs)
- A variety of writing materials accessible and embedded throughout the learning centres (e.g., clipboards, notepads, pens, pencils, markers, stamps, crayons, stencils).



It is important for educators to consider the relevance of posting charts or word walls and if there are other ways the materials and information can be useful and accessible for children during inquiry, play-based learning experiences. For example, having a list of class names on word cards or in a classroom photo directory could be included in the Family/Housekeeping Centre. Photographic signs with the names of common places

or signs children see in the community could be included in the Block/Construction Centre. In the Science/Inquiry Centre, an informational chart labelling parts of a plant could be placed beside a live plant and at the child's eye level.

7. How many letters and sounds should Kindergarten children acquire by the end of the school year?

In reference to the Kindergarten curriculum, there is not a specific number of letters and sounds that children should be acquired by the end of the Kindergarten year.

- English Language Arts outcomes:
 - CCK.2 Use and construct symbols, pictures, and dramatizations to communicate feelings and ideas in a variety of ways
 - CCK.4 Create messages using a combination of pictures, symbols, and letters

Rather than placing the importance on the number of letters/sounds children should know, it is more important to consider how the children understand and use the letters and sounds. Children readily learn and use letters/sounds in role-play writing and picture-making when the letters are meaningful to them. This type of understanding allows children to connect and develop comprehension: the concept of how “reading is thinking and writing is communicating a message.” Drawing upon the letters that are meaningful to the children such as the letters of their name, environmental print seen in the community or the letters found in their favourite stories are ways educators can use to support letter/sound learning.

8. I am trying to find a way to assess the language and literacy skills my Kindergarten children are demonstrating through their play. What are some manageable and thorough ways to assess Kindergarten children?

Assessment in Kindergarten provides a complete picture of what the children are capable of doing, where they are experiencing challenges and the supports that will be needed. Therefore, it is important for educators to engage in reflective practice as it relates to assessment. On-going classroom assessments involving observation and documentation of children's learning are critical in understanding and scaffolding children's language and learning. Observations may be documented in the form of a checklist, chart or journal entry in addition to story-telling/re-telling, photographs and voice recordings to demonstrate children's stages of development throughout the year. Performance-based assessments include video recordings, art samples, writing samples, projects and documentation panels. These samples are taken from the day-to-day work that evolves from the children's inquiry, play-based learning and projects. Portfolios or documentation folders are useful ways to manage, collect and share this type of assessment.

Formative assessments, such as the Early Years Evaluation (EYE) and Help Me Tell My Story (HMTMS) are carefully used to provide a snapshot of the skills children have at that point in time and identify where children may require supports. When educators use a thoughtful, balanced, dynamic approach in collecting data about children's learning, a complete and holistic understanding will be established providing insight about the ways the educators can support and enhance children's learning and development.

9. Families ask when I will start teaching the children letters/sounds and why practice booklets and worksheets have not been sent home. How do I respond to families' misunderstandings on skill- specific instruction and the value of inquiry, play-based learning?

Research demonstrates the need for play as it "is a way for children to learn about [themselves] and the world through self-created experiences. By doing this, children develop creativity, innovation, independence, self-esteem and the foundations for cognitive functioning" (Miller and Almon, 2009). Sharing documentation of children's play-based literacy learning with families will demonstrate that play is the most powerful mode of learning and the way the children make sense of the world, of text, of reading and of writing. By sharing documentation, resources and information about the developmental continuum of language and literacy, as well as inviting families to participate in the classroom, educators empower families through opportunities for first-hand experiences in the value and understanding of literacy and inquiry, play-based learning.

Articles and Web-Based Resources for Engaging Families in Literacy Practices at Home

- International Reading Association. (2005). *Strategies for engaging parents in home support of reading acquisition*. *The Reading Teacher*, 58 (5), 476-478.
- Encyclopedia on Childhood Development. <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/en-ca/recherche.html?q=Literacy>.
- Greenberg, J. & Weitzman, E. (2013). *I'm ready: How to prepare your child for reading success*. A Hanen Centre Publication: Toronto, Ontario. <http://www.hanen.org>
- Saskatchewan Public Libraries and the Government of Saskatchewan: A province-wide initiative to promote early literacy. (2011). www.growwithstories.org.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2013). *Tips and Tools for Parents*. abc 123 Reach Every Student. Retrieved January, 2014: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/abc123/eng/tips/>.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1998). *Continuum of children's development in early reading and writing*. *Young Children*, 53 (4), 30-41.

References

- American Psychological Association. (2014). Curricular materials: Research in brain function and learning. *The importance of matching instruction to a child's maturity level*. Retrieved February, 2014 from: <http://www.apa.org/education/k12/brain-function.aspx>.
- Dowling, M. (2010). *Young children's personal, social and emotional development*. London, GB: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Elkind, D. (2009). *The power of play: Learning what comes naturally*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press.
- Neuman, S & Roskos, K. (2007). *Nurturing knowledge: Building a foundation for school success by linking early literacy to math, science, art and social studies*. Toronto, ON: Scholastic Ltd.
- Miller, E. and Almon, J. (2009). *Crisis in the kindergarten: Why children need to play in school*. College Park, MD: Alliance for Childhood.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2009). *Children first: A resource for kindergarten*. Regina, SK: Author.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2010). *Kindergarten curriculum*. Regina, SK: Author.
- Suggate, Sebastien. (2009). School entry age and reading achievement in the 2006 programme for international student assessment (PISA). *International Journal of Educational Research*. 48, 151-161.

Additional Resources

- Christ, T. & Wang, C. (2010). Bridging the vocabulary gap: What the research tells us about vocabulary instruction in early childhood. *Young Children Journal*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved December, 2013 from: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201007/ChristWangOnline.pdf>.
- Collins, M. (2012). Safer, sophisticated, and sedulous: The importance of discussing 50-cent words with young children. *Young Children Journal*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children. Retrieved January, 2014 from: <http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/201211/YCCollins.pdf>.
- Miller, E. and Almon, J. (2011). *The crisis in early education*. Alliance for Childhood. Retrieved December, 2013 from: http://www.habitot.org/museum/pdf/play_research/Crisis_EarlyEd.pdf.
- Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. (2002). *Early Literacy: A resource for teachers*. Regina, SK: Author.
- Schickedanz, J. & Collins, M. (2013). *So much more than the ABCs: The early phases of reading and writing*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Schickedanz, J. & Casbergue, R. (2005). *Writing in Preschool: Learning to orchestrate meaning and marks*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.