

Session 1: A Child's Garden

What is kindergarten?

It is the German word for "A child's garden". In a garden we see colours, smell the flowers, explore and find living things; we hear the birds, feel the warmth of the sun, the soil, and the water needed to help plants grow.

Children are active.

Children make choices – to explore the 'garden' you set up for them. (Your kindergarten is the 'garden'.) The 'garden' is something the teacher creates – not necessarily a garden full of plants – but a garden of activities, full of colour, shapes, textures and sounds.

Children are developing language by talking to one another.

Children are involved in play.

Children are involved in creative activities.

What kindergarten is not –

Children sitting in rows of tables, all completing worksheets.

Does this mean that the children can never have instruction from the teacher?

No. There are times for teacher instruction, and times when children explore the garden and choose what they want to do.

Exploring the garden

How does the teacher create this garden?

Colours

Painting, printing, drawing, collage (sticking coloured paper shapes of materials on to paper), picture story books, dress ups

Shapes

Jigsaw puzzles, shape collage, blocks

Textures (how things feel)

Sand, water, fabric collage, toys, plants, play dough

Sounds

Music, listening to stories, talking to one another while playing, using puppets, pretending or dressing up.

Learning about the Creation

Outside activities – nature walks looking for insects or plants

Science table where children can explore things from nature, such as leaves, stones, shells

What is play-based learning?

What are the children learning while they are playing?

Many people think that a child is not learning unless they are being instructed by a teacher in phonics, reading, maths and science. This is not the case. Children between the ages of 3 and 5 are learning about the world by exploring it. The teacher has to set up situations that allow the child to explore.

Principles of play-based learning

From the perspective of the child...

When I'm painting, I'm learning:

- To develop my imagination and creativity
- To develop eye-hand coordination, that I will need for writing
- about colour and shape

When I'm drawing and making marks, I'm learning:

- To hold a pencil and control the pressure
- To express myself with words when I tell others about my drawing
- about colour, shape and size
- Eye-hand coordination
- The basic strokes of the printed language

When I'm cutting with scissors, I'm learning:

- To control the small muscles in my hand
- about shape, size and colour

When I'm gluing and doing collage or junk-modelling, I'm learning:

- About different textures
- How to create patterns and designs

When I'm learning about the Creation, I'm learning:

- To appreciate God as our wonderful Creator
- New vocabulary
- about texture, colour, weight and size
- To group things into categories
- To recognize likeness and differences

When I'm looking at books and listening to stories, I'm learning:

- That books are important and enjoyable

- That print on the page is written-down words
- To express my own thoughts, feelings, and ideas
- To handle books with care
- To follow the ideas in the plot of a story
- That I like books and someday, when I'm ready, I'd like to be able to read them too
- To recognise certain words when I see them in print
- To use the language of the story in my own speech
- To use my imagination and make up my own stories

When I'm playing with blocks, cars, and trucks, I'm learning:

- about shape, size and length
- To create and repeat patterns
- To cooperate with others

When I'm playing on climbing equipment, I'm learning:

- Physical strength, coordination, and balance
- To cooperate with others when involved in group play
- To solve problems

When I'm playing with sand or water, I'm learning:

- How to use tools
- To solve problems
- How to play socially with others
- about volume – how much sand will this cup hold?

When I'm sorting things, I'm learning:

- To notice likeness, differences, and to form groups
- about colour, size, and shape
- which group has more, which group has less

When I'm playing in the home centre, I'm learning:

- To express myself with my words while playing with others (language)
- To make decisions
- To use my imagination

When I'm making music and dancing, I'm learning:

- about of rhythms in music

- that music can be fast, slow, loud, soft, high, low
- Listening skills
- to recognise different sounds
- Memory skills when singing songs

All these activities help the children develop and get ready for the next stage of learning:

Physical – *gross motor*: (development of large muscles, e.g. arms and legs); *fine motor*: (development of small muscles, e.g. fingers)

Intellectual – Puzzles, memory games, building with construction toys, picking out similarities and differences

Language – Books, pictures, songs, rhymes, dramatic play using imagination, discussion, talking with friends

Emotional – learning to do things that are challenging

Social– working on activities alone or in a group, playing with one friend, two friends or a group of friends

The kindergarten age groups

Age 3 – still very dependent on parents; the home is usually the best environment for them. If they attend 3-year-old kindergarten, it should be for a short space of time and only one or two days of the week.

Age 4 – starting to develop more independence. In the kindergarten setting they can learn how to interact with other children, make choices and decisions and do things for themselves.

A kindergarten that places 3-year-olds and 4-year-olds in the one classroom is not ideal. Each group has a different level of independence and different educational needs.

Age 5 – getting ready for formal education. In many countries, 5-year-olds begin formal school. Whether we call it ‘kindergarten’ or ‘school’ doesn’t matter. The 5-year-old needs an environment where they can choose from a variety of creative activities, but also begin formal instruction in literacy and numeracy.

A kindergarten that places 4-year-olds and 5-year-olds in the one classroom is not ideal. Each age group has different educational needs and goals. If this has to be done because there is only one classroom, there must be different teachers assigned to 4- and 5-year-olds. The whole group can be involved in the creative activities, but ‘group times’ should be separate – one group time for 4-year-olds and one for 5-year-olds.