

CHAPTER 4

The Kindergarten/Primary Years, Ages 5 – 8

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Lucia Dias is looking forward to her first year teaching second grade. She has spent the past four years in Kindergarten and is ready for a change. Some of the children she had in Kindergarten will be in her class this year and she is eager to see how much they've grown. The principal, Sonny Levon, gave her the class list early – she has four children receiving special education services and he wanted her to get a head start on setting up the classroom and planning the curriculum. Maxine, 7, has a significant non-verbal learning disability. Lucia had her in kindergarten and she was eager and pleasant but she had an extremely difficult time transitioning between centres and would often find herself in tussles with her classmates. Benjamin, 6, is a new student to the school. He has autism, is non-verbal and uses a Picture Communication System (PCS). Lucia visited his classroom last year and completed a workshop on teaching children with autism spectrum disorders to read. He had many friends in his first grade class and he is worried about leaving them. Danika, 7, is quite puzzling. Although she was born here, Danika did not speak English when she started Kindergarten. Usually, this is not a problem, but Danika did not pick up English as quickly as the other English Language Learners. In fact, by the end of kindergarten, Danika could only identify three letter sounds. Her hearing has been checked, and the ESL teacher has provided her with support for the past two years. Unfortunately, she is no longer eligible for this support. The school support team wanted to give Danika as much time as possible, but Lucia wonders if she should be tested for a learning disability. The last student is Raymond, 7. Lucia is worried about him. He has attention deficit

hyperactivity disorder¹ and is very impulsive. He is bright and does well academically, that's if he gets the work completed. Last April, his parents separated and there has been a steady decline in his behaviour. He often lashes out at his peers and teachers. After being asked to return a book he had ripped out of a student's hands he picked up his desk and threw it across the room. In kindergarten, Raymond was very busy, but he wasn't destructive. He was eager to participate and he didn't mind being redirected. The way he is acting now is very different. Lucia is sure it has more to do with his family situation than with the ADHD.

As Lucia looks at her classroom, barren except for a table and 20 desks, she wonders how she can make it inviting and welcoming to all of her students. Besides the four students with IEPs² there are another 16 who need her attention. Lucia decides that the first thing she is going to ask for is more tables. If they're not available, she'll have to push the desks together. Lucia loved the vibrancy and energy of her kindergarten room. The children were always engaged, although she did have to admit that sometimes it got a bit loud. She wants to keep her classroom active and has been doing some reading on the Project Approach and differentiating curriculum. Her goal is to apply both of these strategies, but she is feeling the pressure of the provincial wide testing that takes place next year. Lucia begins with what she knows works. She goes to her car and unloads the large carpet scrap she got from the local flooring store. It will make a good area for their classroom meetings. Next, she will tackle the reading corner.

Starting formal schooling can be a dramatic shift in a child's understanding about what school is and how learning takes place. Prior to kindergarten many children spend their days, or

¹ Accommodations for ADHD would require a Section 504 plan in the US, unless there was a co-morbid learning disability or behavioural expectation. In Ontario, ADHD is not recognized as an exceptionality, however accommodations can be given without needing an identification.

² In Canada, some provinces refer to these documents as Personal Program Plans (PPP), Individual Support Service Plans (ISSP) or Individual Program Plans (IPP).

part of their days in preschool and/or nursery programs that allow them to explore, experiment and define what it is they would like to learn about. As they enter the structure of formal schooling their freedom is eroded. Differences in academic, social and behavioural expectations can make this transition difficult.

We have decided to group kindergarten with the primary years because philosophically we believe that much of what is happening in the primary grades is not appropriate and does not contribute to fostering critical thinking and creative learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). This is particularly true when we speak of the education children with disabilities are receiving in these grades. This chapter will not go into critical perspectives of developmentally appropriate practice but the authors strongly recommend reading in this area (see for example, Cannella, Carta, Lubeck, Kessler, Swadener)

Many children with disabilities transition well into kindergarten but find themselves becoming increasingly segregated as they pass through the grades. It begins innocuously with short, specific interventions until it progresses to full withdrawal for language and mathematics, if not more. For some children with more severe disabilities, they are not even given the opportunity to begin the primary grades with their peers and they find themselves in segregated classrooms because the expectation is that they can't do the required work. We would argue that often the real reason for the placement is that the general education teacher does not feel prepared to work with children with disabilities, especially children with low incidence or severe disabilities. Adding to this, many believe that special educators are the only ones who can deliver programs to children with disabilities and consequently, do not consider the option of supporting the child in the general education classroom. This chapter will attempt to address some of the significant characteristics of the kindergarten/primary classrooms and expectations and discuss

how children with disabilities can be educated with their peers in the general education classroom. Specifically, we will address environmental set-up (including behavioural expectations), differentiating instruction and opportunities for play.

Environmental Set-up

The majority of kindergarten classrooms are set-up with centres, areas at which students explore and learn about specific topics, practice pre-skills and skills, socialize with their peers, engage in imaginative and socio-dramatic play, or spend time alone listening to stories or reading books. Circle time, or a class meeting, begins each class. Space is made for the flexible individual, small and large groupings. Teachers believe in child-initiated activities; they encourage experimentation with materials, letters, numbers and sounds. The walls display the children's work and families are welcomed into the classroom. There is a lot of movement, talking, singing and laughing.

Unfortunately, once children have completed kindergarten these opportunities begin to dwindle. They are now in "big" school and they have to act and learn like "big people." Usually one of the first things to appear is the desk, and one of the first things to go is the centre approach. Children's learning needs do not change so dramatically in the summer months between kindergarten and first grade that the rules and expectations of school need to completely change. Yet, suddenly children find themselves in desks, possibly beside a peer if they're lucky. The comfort of the reading corner, where they used to curl up with a book is gone. The listening centre, loved by the many children who couldn't read, by those who needed some quiet time or time to refocus, is gone. The art materials are in cupboards and can only be used during art time or during a special activity. Places for movement, like the dress-up centre are gone and children

are expected to spend much more time sitting and “working”. The only real time to dance, jump, hop, skip, and move is at recess and during physical education.

We see first grade as the transition year. In this grade, most teachers hold on to constructivist beliefs about how children learn, although these are not always reflected in their practice. Science and social studies will still focus on centres, some may even broach using projects. But the seriousness of studying mathematics and language arts is beginning to become much clearer to the students. There actually is a right way and a wrong way to write. They have baskets of notebooks they write new words into every day and are tested on every week. It doesn't matter that they don't know what the word means, what it sounds like, or what it rhymes with, they still have to learn them. Some of the students can already read or have a great memory and they seem to do well. Others get most of them right but they're not able to transfer these words into their writing or reading. And others, like Benjamin and Danika, never get them right. They practice at home, they try their best but they just can't do it.

Lucia has begun to keep a spelling test chart and everyone who gets perfect gets a sticker. Benjamin and Danika are the only two without stickers and they have already learned that no matter how much they practice at home it won't make any difference. Although Lucia has read about differentiating curriculum, she hasn't really given it much thought yet. How hard can the work be? It's only the second grade? If we know that there can be upwards of four grade levels of ability in one classroom, why wouldn't we expect to see quite a significant spread in the early primary grades. Children in these grades need to have differentiated instruction just as much as the higher grades. In fact, by not providing this, young children are at danger of developing learned helplessness and of feeling their self-esteem decrease.

Benjamin's mother comes in to talk with Lucia about the spelling chart. She shares the eagerness with which he began studying the words only a month ago. Now he won't even pull out his notebook. He cries when his mom asks him to practice and he says that he is "dumb." Lucia is shocked. She really thought that the stickers would motivate the students. Kanika and Devon are always talking about the chart, but then again, they have the most stickers. It suddenly dawns on Lucia that no matter what she provides as a motivator to a student, if he is not capable of doing the task, he will not be able to do it, even with the motivator. Tomorrow during their class meeting she will tell the students she has decided to end the chart and why.

The next day, she is pleasantly surprised by the students' understanding of how those who have fewer stickers may feel. She tells them that she is no longer going to ask them to memorize words but she still wants them to be able to practice letters, sounds, and words. The word wall will be added to regularly so the children can look there if they need to know how to spell something. She asks them to make suggestions on how to make spelling time more fun. Raymond becomes quite excited when he suggests having a sandbox to write letters and words in. Lucia decides to make spelling time activity based. Children will be able to pick the activities they most enjoy along with the ones Lucia asks them all to complete. She will make sure to include activities that address auditory, visual and tactile/kinesthetic learners. This approach will free her up to work individually and in small groups with the students who need attention. She will be able to do more intensive phonemic awareness activities with those who need it, as well as spending time with those who need enrichment. Three of her students can already read the chapter books she reads to the class, on their own. They rarely have time to read independently because Lucia does not have a class-wide silent reading time. This will give them some time to read and talk about the books and work on activities related to them.

Lucia has quickly learned that the children must be given opportunity for movement many times throughout the day. They really can only sit focused for fifteen minutes without getting too fidgety. She incorporates movement into the transitions between activities. When she is ready for the children to move, either to a new activity, or to their seats, she plays some gentle music. They are welcome to move anyway they wish during the transition as long as they stop when the music stops and they keep their hands and feet to themselves. Everyday, right before math activities she implements a more vigorous activity for two minutes. Sometimes they play Simon Says, sometimes a child leads the class in stretches and movements. Other times they just dance. Almost all of the students have taken the opportunity to lead the class. Benjamin's mom helped him program his switch to give directions to the students when it was his turn.

The temptation to have children in the primary grades stay in their desks or at their tables for extended periods gets stronger as they progress through the grades. By the third grade, much of what made the kindergarten classroom such an exciting place to be is gone. Teachers' expectations have changed and so have their approaches. Some of this is understandable based solely on the developmental levels and abilities of the students; but some of it is due to a misunderstanding of what good teaching and active learning looks like at this stage.

Changes in Expectations

Lucia thinks back to her Kindergarten classroom and the expectations she had of the children. She didn't feel any pressure to rush the children and she viewed their "mistaken" behaviours (Gartrell, 2004) as teachable moments. Now there is a rigorous curriculum to complete, one that has expectations that have been pushed down from higher grades. There is pressure to have them all reading and writing well so that they will be prepared for third grade

and the standardized test. Lucia makes a list of how she envisions the second grade as different from kindergarten.

1. Children need to be able to read independently.
2. Lessons are longer so the children need to remain seated for longer periods of time.
3. There will be fewer choices for the students.
4. Centres and the Project Approach (Katz & Chard, 2000) will be used only for Science and Social Studies.
5. Children need to be responsible for bringing their agendas back and forth, and for completing homework.
6. There will be a greater demand to write legibly and conventionally.
7. There will be less opportunity for movement, songs and creative activities.

She worries about how she is going to enable Benjamin, Danika, Raymond and Maxine to meet these expectations. How will she find time to work with them and program for them individually? Lucia makes an appointment with Sophia, the special education resource teacher at her school, to talk about the accommodations, modifications and adaptations she will need to make so everyone has a successful year. It is only October and there is still plenty of time to make changes.

Sophia greets Lucia enthusiastically and is eager to collaborate on some overall strategies that will help her class transition smoothly. She questions some of the expectations Lucia has suggested, such as the reduction in choice and centres. Maybe there is a way to keep child-initiated, active learning a key component of her program without sacrificing curriculum expectations. Sofia believes that differentiating instruction is the key. "Differentiation – one facet

of expert teaching – reminds us that [high quality curriculum and instruction³] are unlikely to happen for the full range of students unless curriculum and instruction fit each individual, unless students have choices about what to learn and how, unless students take part in setting learning goals, and unless the classroom connects with the experiences and interest of the individual” (Tomlinson, 2000, pg. 7).

Accommodating Students’ Needs through Differentiating Instruction

Lucia can differentiate instruction through content (what students learn), process (how students make sense of the information) and product (how students demonstrate what they have learned) (Tomlinson, 2001, pg. 4). If she remembers to keep in mind the readiness level, the interests, the learning style, life circumstances and experiences of each student while planning she will be able to create lessons, activities and assessments that are good matches for the students (Tomlinson, 2000). Sofia explains that although the students get what they each need, differentiation is not individualization as Lucia was imagining when she wrote up her expectations. Rather than spending a few minutes with each student she will be able to spend more time with them and get a better sense of where they’re at, through the flexible grouping. This makes a lot of sense to Lucia. Raymond would be able to work at an enriched level with his peers, which might keep him more engaged and less likely to act out. The others are at the expected grade level, although Maxine and Benjamin struggle with concepts that are more abstract. Danika will need to have directions put on graphic organizers. Actually, using visuals will benefit many of the students in the class and Lucia files this strategy away as something she

³ “Expert or distinguished teaching focuses on the understandings and skills of a discipline, causes students to wrestle with profound ideas, calls on students to use what they learn in important ways, helps students organize and make sense of ideas and information and aids students in connecting the classroom with a wider world (Brandt, 1998; Danielson, 1996; Schlechty, 1997; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998)” (Tomlinson, 2000, pg. 7).

needs to use more regularly. Benjamin, also a very strong visual learner, uses daily graphic organizers but Lucia hadn't considered using them with Danika or Maxine. Maybe she should.

Tomlinson (2001) provides several strategies for understanding the needs of students who struggle. Identify the student's strengths and design tasks with those in mind. Enhance their strengths instead of focusing only on remediating what they can't do. Make what they're learning relevant and ensure they understand the key concepts or principles. Create tasks that are slightly more difficult than what you think they can accomplish, and support them in completing them (i.e. scaffolding). Tomlinson calls this 'teaching up.' Provide many avenues to learning so the curriculum is accessible to everyone. Accept your students for who they are unconditionally and believe in their potential (pp. 13-14).

Deciding on appropriate assessment tasks can be difficult for teachers. Many students appear to be doing worse than they are because of the chosen assessment. This is particularly true for children with disabilities. As children progress through the primary grades, assessments often include more tasks that involve writing and memorization. Children who struggle with these are at an automatic disadvantage. There are several key things to keep in mind while you are considering assessments.

1. Differentiating instruction provides the opportunity for on-going assessment.
2. Provide a variety of avenues for children to demonstrate their knowledge.
3. Be very clear on what you are assessing. The task should assess only the expectations you identify. Do not lump other things in (e.g. neatness, spelling, artistry etc.) unless they are expectations you are specifically assessing. For example, if you are giving a test on habitats you would not take off points for spelling errors. If you decide that you are going to use a science project as a way of assessing conventional grammar expectations as well as science expectations

the students need to know this up-front. A child, who cannot write, will have a modified program in the writing component of Language Arts (meaning they are not completing grade level expectations); this does not mean she needs modified expectations in all subject areas. Find a way, other than writing, for her to demonstrate her knowledge.

4. Determine whether the expectation is foundational and requires mastery. This may lead to opportunities for multiple assessments (through varying avenues) of the same expectations.

5. Be creative. Consider portfolios (on-line and paper), dramatizations, oral reports, visual representations, audio and video taping, and peer scribes/readers

6. If a child has an IEP and requires accommodations for assessment, you MUST provide them. Incorporate choice in products or other assessment tasks so that she isn't the only one doing something different.

If you keep to the philosophy of differentiation, you will find that any accommodations, modifications, or adaptations you need to do will not feel like extra work. They are already included in your plans and chances are more than one child will benefit from the options.

Opportunities for Play

Kindergarten generally provides many opportunities for play during a school day. Dramatic play is encouraged and many of the centers include writing materials to facilitate emergent literacy. Literacy is incorporated directly into the play activity. For example, children playing in a post office can write letters, design stamps or make signs. "The value of play can be difficult to explain to those who adhere to more traditional methods of direct instruction. Even more difficult is trying to convince these proponents of direct teaching and drill on isolated skills that young children do not learn well this way" (Callas, Bruns-Mellinger, King-Taylor, 1998, p. 21).

Many children with disabilities have difficulty initiating play or maintaining an activity with peers. They are included less often in interactive play than their peers without disabilities. Although degrees of social separation do seem to vary with severity of disability, even children with mild disabilities are less accepted as playmates than those children without disabilities (Diamond & Stacey, 2000, p. 63; as cited in Mastrangelo & Killoran, 2005). Inclusion can play an important role in creating equitable play situations. Proponents of inclusion believe that it is vital to encourage social interactions between children with disabilities and their peers. Lucia thinks of Benjamin. Although he interacts well with his peers, he only does so when she puts him in a group. She has not yet seen him initiate play with his peers and many of his peers don't know what to make of the PCS. She hasn't spent enough time teaching the class the pictures and their meaning. There's no point in having Benjamin use a PCS if she is the only other person who communicates with him while using it.

The teacher becomes a very important person in this equation of play and inclusion since she has the power to break down the barriers facing children with disabilities (i.e. inadequate materials, lack of opportunities to play with peers, inaccessible toys in the environment etc) (Mastrangelo & Killoran, 2005). Some of the ways to eliminate these barriers include providing environmental support, adapting materials, simplifying the play activity by reducing the number of steps, using child preferences, providing special equipment/assistive technology, adult support, peer support and invisible support through naturally occurring events to increase the probability of a child's success (Sandall, 2004, p. 44-5).

For typically developing children, learning through outdoor play experiences comes easily and naturally. For children with disabilities outdoor play may make them even more socially isolated (Flynn & Kieff, 2002). As children enter the later primary grades, their play can

become quite physical. Rough and tumble play peaks at this stage of development (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2002). Children like Maxine or Raymond may have difficulty controlling their movement and will quite often end up hurting a peer unintentionally.

During this age span, children move towards playing games with rules (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). At first, the rules seem quite arbitrary and are made up by the children. They become quite industrious at ensuring that everyone follows the rules. By the third grade, many children are able to play games with complex rules. Children with disabilities may be at a disadvantage here. Teachers who creatively team peers, who suggest adaptations to the materials, or changes to the rules set the example that everyone is included in play.

Before inclusion can happen, teachers must want to do it and believe they can do it. With the right mindset, frequent collaboration and effective teaching strategies teachers can create a welcoming, challenging, and supportive environment for all children. Including children with disabilities into the kindergarten and primary general education classrooms can become a reality for all teachers. Successful inclusive experiences in these classrooms will create a foundation for children with disabilities and their families; a foundation upon which they can build a lifetime of learning experiences with their peers in their community schools.

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Historically, the starting age for kindergarten has varied widely. In the past five years, both states and districts have pushed the minimum age to start kindergarten up so that more and more kids are at least 5 years old when they start school. (See minimum Kindergarten entrance ages for all states as of 2014.) Still, in states such as Connecticut and Maine (and certain districts in Ohio, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Jersey, and other states), you can easily find a 4½-year-old and a 6½-year-old in the same kindergarten class. Delaying kindergarten is on the rise, both because state minimum ages are higher and because some parents are opting to wait until their children are older to start school. Kindergarten: nursery - 3 years, Lower Kindergarten (LKG) - 4 years, Upper Kindergarten (UKG) - 5 years. These are not mandatory as per government rules but are recommended before joining 1st standard. 1st Standard: 5 years or 6. 2nd Standard: 7 years. 3rd Standard: 8 years. 4th Standard: 9 years. 5th Standard: 10 years. See more ideas about teaching, kindergarten literacy, kindergarten reading. Primary classroom resources, displays, home learning activities, topic packs, PowerPoints, assessment, teaching ideas, inspiration and more at Teacher's Pet Recycled Crafts Kids Crafts For Kids Arts And Crafts Diy Crafts Kids Diy Toddler Crafts Preschool Books Preschool Crafts. Preschool Classroom. 1000s of FREE teaching resources for Early Years and Primary School teachers. Cvc Worksheets Language Arts Worksheets Kindergarten Language Arts Kindergarten Literacy Kindergarten Activities Kindergarten Addition Worksheets Subtraction Kindergarten Matching Worksheets Kindergarten Phonics. Illustrated children's stories for kids between the ages of 5 and 8 that deal with more complex story and plot, including interactive stories that deal with deductive reasoning skills. These children stories are typically suitable for kids between the ages of 5 and 8. Every child is different, so please use your own (grown-up) judgement when reading our children's stories! Copyright © 2007-2021, Freechildrenstories.com, Daniel Errico, Soaring Ship, LLC. All Rights Reserved.