

Foreword

Every now and then you find a book that reminds you why you love teachers who love what they teach and, more importantly, love who they teach. This engaging book speaks to the heart and soul of kindergarten teachers and parents who want to enrich the lives of their children through interaction with literacy. You will find ideas and resources to equip and encourage you as you embark on a joyful journey into learning with young children.

The importance of children's early literacy development cannot be overstated. Children's success in school and later in life is to a great extent dependent upon their ability to read and write. One of the best predictors of whether a child will function competently in school and go on to contribute actively in an increasingly literate society is the level to which the child progresses in reading and writing.

English Language Arts the Kindergarten Way includes four chapters to guide your wondrous adventure. Each chapter includes specific strategies rich in language development and engaging activities that spark curiosity, motivate through success, and leave the kids hungry to learn more.

Chapter One: Building a Literacy Foundation, Chapter Two: Engaging in Reading and Writing, Chapter Three: Reading and Writing with Purpose, and Chapter Four: Keeping Track of Learning are powerful stepping stones for each child's future.

This thoughtful, purposeful book is written by two phenomenal kindergarten teachers who saw the need to focus on what children know and are curious about. This provided the catalyst for them to build a program that moves young children ahead in their growth as speakers, readers, and writers. They do not focus on developing specific skills, such as letter recognition or auditory discrimination, in isolation of content. They are early childhood teachers who believe we should be facilitators of children's existing literacy knowledge, supporting and extending it to greater levels of complexity. Thanks to this book, the guesswork is gone; the magic begins.

Mary Ann Ranells, PhD
Superintendent of Schools
West Ada School District
Meridian, Idaho

Introduction

We believe that kindergarten, as the beginning of a child's public education experience, should be engaging, active, social, and fun! It should not be a sharp change from the holistic, exploratory nature of early childhood, but a seamless transition that, while providing the intentionality and rigor to reach literacy goals, should teach and listen to the whole child. According to *Learning to Read and Write: What Research Reveals* by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (n.d.),

Early literacy activities teach children a great deal about writing and reading but often in ways that do not look much like traditional elementary school instruction. Capitalizing on the active and social nature of children's learning, early instruction must provide rich demonstrations, interactions, and models of literacy in the course of activities that make sense to young children. Children must also learn about the relation between oral and written language and the relation between letters, sounds, and words. In classrooms built around a wide variety of print activities, then in talking, reading, writing, playing, and listening to one another, children will want to read and write and feel capable that they can do so.

Yes, there are demanding kindergarten English Language Arts standards to be met; yet young children must be shown the bigger picture. We must keep the joy in kindergarten by remembering that we are teaching children, not teaching "standards." Kindergarten students must be immersed in an environment where they can experiment with reading and writing. They must be exposed to all of the meaningful ways that reading and writing can enhance their world. By satisfying an innate desire to know more about the things that interest them, children learn to read and write. This was the motivation for us to write *English Language Arts the Kindergarten Way*!

Literacy cannot be explicitly taught in a fixed, skill-by-skill fashion. It must be acquired rather organically by submersion in daily experiences that plainly teach the basic skills while simultaneously exposing children to authentic reading and writing a step above their working level. There should be continuous overlap in what the student can do and the desired outcome. For example, at the same time children are beginning to gain knowledge of letter sounds and the understanding that text is read from left to right, we are continuously modeling fluent reading and purposeful writing. And we are continuously giving students opportunities to explore,

through speaking and listening or interactive play, the more advanced skills needed for reading and writing.

There is, however, a loose developmental continuum along which children progress when immersed in integrated, meaningful reading and writing activities, so we have arranged the lessons in this book according to this continuum. This path encompasses a kindergartner's development from an understanding that lines and curves form letters to the comprehension of content and the ability to write with intent. We begin the kindergarten year by laying the foundation for literacy learning, where targeted instruction centers on letter names and sounds, rhyme and wordplay, and book exploration. By midyear, we help children discover all of the reasons to be both readers and writers. Lessons show students the thrill of communicating through writing and of gaining knowledge through reading. By the end of their kindergarten year, students are beginning to purposefully read and write. Children are ready to begin the journey into creative writing, narrative writing, writing for an audience, and reading for both entertainment and for information.

Throughout this progression of directed literacy strategies, we are constantly exposing children to the places literacy will take them. We've written *English Language Arts the Kindergarten Way* to provide you with rich literacy teaching strategies that successfully integrate essential reading and writing skills and stay true to children's interests and abilities. We encourage you to use these activities throughout the school year to enhance your current language arts curriculum. We have also included some self-monitoring ideas to help students track and record their achievements for letter knowledge, sight words, and basic writing. We have found that children respond well to monitoring their own learning and enjoy recording their accomplishments!

To use this book, visualize the school year in thirds. Lessons and activities to include at the start of the year are in **Chapter One: Building a Literacy Foundation**, strategies for midyear are in **Chapter Two: Engaging in Reading and Writing**, and activities for the end of the year are in **Chapter Three: Reading and Writing with Purpose**. Each chapter contains several teaching strategies, with lesson ideas falling under each strategy. Each activity has instructions for use in your classroom, extension ideas, and reproducible activity sheets as needed. They are designed to support your kindergarten standards and curriculum.

You may choose to integrate the activities throughout your school year in much the same order they are presented, following the path of strategies from the beginning of the year to the end. Or you may want to pick and choose activities that meet the needs of your students at a particular point in the year.

Foundational skill lessons that fall early in the year should be used repetitively to build letter recognition, phonological awareness, and a solid understanding of basic print concepts. As kindergarten teachers, we recognize that building these foundational skills takes a great deal of repetition and that young children acquire the skills at varying rates. We also know that activities that build letter-sound fluency and confidence with rhyming, blending, and segmenting should not be stopped at any

time during the kindergarten year. Instead these activities should be used consistently for ongoing practice. Even as the year proceeds and students gain ability in these basic skills, you may decide to revisit some of the earlier activities to reinforce a strategy with the whole group or to focus on a particular concept with a small group of students.

There will be and should be much overlap in where the lessons fit into your teaching. Many activities can be used in two or even all three stages of early literacy with a little modification. For example, it's a great idea to introduce journals early in the year so that students can use pictures and letters at the beginning, labeling and words for midyear, and sentences at the end of the year.

We encourage you to adapt our activities where you see fit and to use these lessons as your kindergartners' learning dictates. Feel free to select lessons as they fall into *your* school year to best accompany your current curriculum and then tweak them to fit the needs of your students. We hope these strategies will help you easily adapt your curriculum materials for fun and engaging learning. We also hope you and your kindergartners love these activities as much as we enjoy them in our own classrooms!

Molly Cochell and Laura Fullmer