

As Kindergarten teachers, we find it increasingly difficult to fit in all of the academic elements included in our curriculum much less the hands-on, individualized, and center work that should be an important part of the early childhood educational experience.

We would also like to stress that socialization is an extremely important aspect of early childhood development. Children at this age do learn through play. A teacher observing children at play can develop a deeper understanding of her students. Conflict resolution, social skills, and gross motor skills, are just some examples of what would be observed during playtime. In our half-day Kindergarten, we seldom have time for regularly scheduled recess or inside playtime.

The most important curriculum area in Kindergarten is Integrated Language Arts (ILA). Here the foundation is laid for reading in first grade and beyond. Among other areas in ILA, our main focus is: letter recognition, identifying letter sounds, blending sounds, reading decodable words, and identifying high frequency words that we call popcorn words. Extending our day would give us the time and opportunity to spend enriching our curriculum with additional story times and other language experiences.

Some afternoons would be spent with the children working in classroom centers. The class would be divided into leveled groups. Each small group would spend time at centers engaged in a learning activity or game. Some centers would not require direct teacher supervision or guidance but two centers would. The centers would be: writing, math, science, and reading.

In the writing center the students would engage in Kid Writing. In a small group with a teacher we would be able to provide the children with more time and individualized instruction in writing which is so vital when learning early reading skills.

In the reading center the children could play any one from a wealth of learning games available. Some examples are: making the letter that we are concentrating on that week with play dough, writing the letter in sand, using magnetic letters on the white board to copy or spell popcorn words, etc. As the year progresses and as the children develop reading skills, time could be spent having the children read out loud to the teacher. This is an excellent method of an on-going assessment in this area.

A science center in the afternoon would allow us the time to engage in hands-on activities that we simply cannot find the time for in a half-day program. There is a wealth of Kindergarten leveled fun, learning experiments that we could do. Some examples are: growing plants from seeds and experimenting with light and water and the effect they have on plants, experiments with magnets, and experiments with objects that sink or float. When studying about Arctic and Antarctic animals, we could do an experiment with shortening, zip-lock bags and ice and first hand discover how these animals are insulated from the cold. Children learn best when they are engaged in fun, meaningful, and hands-on experiences. Children are naturally curious about the world around them and finding the time to schedule science is a real challenge.

In the math center, we could spend the afternoon reinforcing the skills that were introduced in the morning. When we learn about patterns and graphing, the children could spend time copying patterns, creating their own and making real graphs with real objects in the classroom. When addition and subtraction are introduced, we would have the time to allow the children again with opportunities to use manipulatives and work with and practice these skills. We now have little time to spend on hands-on math activities. With an all day program the children would have the opportunity to use manipulatives and concretely experiment with math concepts that become more meaningful and understood when they are more involved in the learning process.

The children love reading Bible stories. We now unfortunately do not always have time to read from the Bible everyday. In an all day program we would have more time to read from the bible and other children's religious books. Second Step is an anti-bullying curriculum that we teach within our Religion curriculum. It is an excellent program that addresses issues so relevant to our children that they face today and in the future. We try very hard to teach second step weekly, but many weeks we simply must sacrifice that time for ILA or math.

Art is certainly one of their favorite special classes. In our Kindergarten classroom we do art projects also. We would have the time to spend on more art projects with an all day program. Our art projects reinforce the themes and concepts that are taught in other curriculum areas. For example, we make different kinds of bats when we learn about bats in science during October. We would have more time to spend on projects, which the children truly enjoy. Using scissors, markers, glue sticks, gluing on googly eyes, etc. are all exercises that help to develop fine motor skills, which aid with developing handwriting skills.

Physical Education is also a favorite special class that the children look forward to each week. Incorporating physical activity into the classroom is a fun and proven method of reaching kinesthetic learners. Having more time to incorporate music and movement in a Kindergarten class not only provides additional physical activity but would give us the chance to play games incorporating the curriculum areas of ILA and math.

A full day Kindergarten program would allow the children a more enriching and encompassing learning experience in a more relaxed, less hurried pace.