



JENNY WILLIAMS suggests some approaches to starting your kindy kids on their paths to confidence and creativity ...

This paper is based on the key messages and suggestions that came out of the *Centre for Professional Learning's* Early Stage One conference held in 2017. The focus spans across the dynamic nature of this formative year, including teaching the joy of reading, using play to develop literacy, exploring mathematics in everyday life, taking kindergarten outside, teaching appropriate behaviours, having fun with grammar and making music and movement a part of your daily routine.

Begin with the end in mind

Q: What brings three hundred kindergarten teachers together for a day?

A: The chance to explore together how to maximise the first year at school for all students!

Remember the [Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008](#)? Two goals from the declaration are quoted in the current [NSW English Syllabus K-6](#):

- Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence
- Goal 2: All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active informed citizens.

These are our nation's end goals for Australia's youngsters, and their journey begins at birth and continues on to adulthood.

In addition to the above Australian goals for students, we find these aspirations from Ontario inspiring too:

All children are viewed as competent, curious, capable of complex thinking and rich in potential and experience. [Ontario Ministry of Education](#), 2016

We know that learning doesn't start when a student first walks through the school gates. From the moment a child is born they are learning to be part of a family. Students' prior-to-school experiences often include day care and preschool experiences, sport, music and dance as well. Learning and attitudes towards learning are beginning to be formed long before students arrive at our classroom door.

[The Early Years Learning Framework](#) informs the education of students up to the age of 5. A review of the outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework can provide insight into the rich foundations



established by families and more formal prior-to-school experiences. The framework suggests that teachers of Early Stage 1 students can benefit from knowing and appreciating the knowledge that students bring with them from home and from prior-to-school experiences, such as family values, language (sometimes a second language), abilities to interact with other children and adults, a variety of reading and writing experiences, routines, a sense of fun, friendships, problem solving, responsibility, sharing and personal interests.

As teachers of Early Stage One, we should build on the known experiences provided by others. We do this when we make connections to home and value home language and when we build on this foundation of prior learning in the classroom.

Our responsibilities extend beyond the areas we are often limited by through formal structure for reporting to parents. For us, we feel that the abilities that are part of successful learning are epitomised in students who can say:

I am happy;

I am curious;

I am a learner;

I can persevere;

I share my thinking;

I work with others;

I reflect on my learning.

In schools today, we can easily become caught up in phonics, reading levels and collecting data; these considerations are each important. It is also worth reminding ourselves simultaneously that our students will never have a first year of formal learning again and that we have a significant responsibility as their first school teachers to keep a steady and clear eye on the end goal.

To this end, attitudes towards academic success are critical. More important than levels and scores is the way our students see themselves as learners.

In addition, developing social and emotional well-being is vital. The big learning goals identified above can be achieved through formal and informal lessons, through play and conversation, across all KLAs.

Successful learning requires us to plan and prepare and keep an open mind to meeting student needs as they arise.

Sparkling joy to teach reading

The big picture in the teaching of reading is supporting students to read for meaning and



understanding, not just to decode text. Our teaching should move all students towards being independent readers, with each child possessing a toolkit of resources they know they can access to decode, make sense, use texts and analyse texts.

The [NSW English Syllabus K-6](#) encourages teachers to value the reciprocity between reading and writing through the key processes of responding and composing. Sparking joy in reading for students can come through their newly gained satisfaction of being an effective reader and from engaging with rich, authentic texts.

Playing into literacy

Kindergarten should be a dynamic and creative year that establishes positive attitudes that can be maintained throughout all of the students' subsequent school years.

Kindergarten should also be fun!

Carefully planned and delivered experiences in learning centres allow students to build a rich vocabulary and to consolidate language development necessary for a smooth transition in the future into more formal aspects of reading and writing. A learning centre can be as simple as coloured paper, pens and pencils for a writing centre. You can turn your old puppet theatre into a fruit and vegetable shop with a sign, toy cash register and a range of plastic vegetables. Then it can become a pizza shop with a menu displaying a choice of toppings. The chef may then need to write her recipe for others to make and enjoy. Try an office – a stapler is very enticing, a discarded mobile phone and a real or toy computer and business deals will follow. Your students will be taking on Bill Gates in days!

Play that allows children to explore topics of interest, rehearse real life experiences and that gives time to dressing up and drama also offers unlimited opportunities for authentic reading and writing.

Children can and should play into literacy naturally.

Mathematics is all around us

Learning Mathematics well in kindergarten provides a solid foundation for all future understanding of mathematical concepts. Exploring mathematics in the world around them and explicitly making connections to real life helps students understand why we learn mathematics.

Providing an element of choice is an easy way to plan for student engagement. The Mathematics K-6 syllabus states in the rationale that students will 'obtain enjoyment from mathematics' and this is surely our aim as Kindergarten teachers.



Making Mathematics enjoyable is crucial and this can be done in many ways. Kindergarten students are typically engaged when exposed to novelty, for example using LEGO as manipulatives is one way to gain their interest. Learning mathematical concepts through structured play, such as restaurant role-play, building cities, and creating 3D shapes with everyday materials are just a few examples that your students may both enjoy and learn from.

Taking kindergarten outside

Taking Kindergarten students outside for learning and play can quickly develop both their confidence and emotional connection to their school. It also sows the seed for teaching for sustainability and other learning across the curriculum. A small corner of your school grounds or a nearby park can provide the backdrop for authentic learning experiences. Spaces outside the classroom can be safely used for developmental play, Mathematics, Science, Geography and History.

A shared experience outside the classroom can also provide a rich, multi-sensory stimulus for writing.

Setting up your room for success

Dynamic learning is enhanced when students feel a sense of independence and ownership in their learning space. Student-centred learning, where students see themselves as learners, can be achieved through establishing a classroom that is:

Calm

Students say, *“I know what is happening.”*

Establishing routines and making resources and rosters easy to find supports a calm classroom.

Collaborative

Students say, *“We all learn together.”*

Explicit teaching and harnessing the power of students talking together to learn encourages collaboration. Clear learning goals and feedback also help to develop self-regulated learners and walls that teach scaffold their learning experiences.

Consistent

Students say, *“The teacher supports my learning.”*

Using modelled, guided and independent teaching strategies represents best practice. Reading and writing every day also develops skills further. Differentiating the learning experiences while



maintaining high expectations can create a classroom culture where students see themselves as learners.

Dice, hoops and chairs to teach grammar

If you start with quality literature and then add coloured dice, hoops and some chairs you can teach any aspect of grammar in a dynamic way.

Making coloured dice to match these [baseboards](#) supports your students to create grammatically accurate sentences.

Hoops provide a framework for sorting: books that you like or do not like; phrases that describe ‘when’ and ‘where’ chosen from favourite books -- Let your grammatical imagination run riot.

Chairs are a visual scaffold to support sentence structure, storying retelling, changes to tense and adjective order. Really it is just a case of make a label and then sticking it on. Further grammar ideas can be found in the book [Practical and Purposeful Literacy Strategies](#). This hands-on, kinaesthetic and playful approach gives kindergarten students a chance to have fun as they learn.

Teaching grammar to our youngest learners is done with ease and more importantly, supports the critical oral language that allows them to be successful readers and writers.

All while having fun!

Behaviour management

Students starting school bring with them behaviours that they have developed to manage in their world. Our role as teachers is to ease them into the role of being a student within a class group and school environment. This is not always an easy task and takes patience and persistence on behalf of the teacher.

Our aim is to develop dynamic learners who are independent, confident and self-regulated. The ability to self-regulate includes: following instructions and routines, taking turns in a group and concentrating. Including play in the curriculum allows students to develop language and social skills as students negotiate with their peers in the process of becoming more aware of others. Communicating during play involves expressing their thoughts and ideas and listening to others in order to solve problems and think critically.

Kindergarten teachers play a crucial role in developing these characteristics and play a major role in creating a successful start to school life.



Making music and movement part of the daily routine

Using music, singing and movement in the daily kindergarten routine can help create a sense of community in the classroom, deepen knowledge and encourage creative thinking.

Simple music and singing activities can also be used to manage classroom transitions in a fun way. Singing, chants and movement help to build foundation literacy skills such as phonemic awareness and speaking and listening skills.

For example your students can act out a familiar song such as “Ten in the Bed” while the class sings along. A large rectangular chalk “bed” drawn on the carpet can provide an engaging start to a maths lesson as the students roll out of the bed one at a time to model subtraction.

Chanting a poem or singing can provide an enticing, low stress way of lining up for transitions. Poems such as “The Ning Nang Nong” by Spike Milligan or familiar stories such as “We’re Going On A Bear Hunt” lend themselves to group recitations and movement.

A dynamic first year of schooling can ensure that our students see themselves as learners and the effects of this will be felt in all subsequent schooling.

Resources:

Australian Federal Government, National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care Early Years Learning Framework, 2017

<https://docs.education.gov.au/node/2632>

Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians, 2008

http://www.curriculum.edu.au/verve/resources/National_Declaration_on_the_Educational_Goals_for_Young_Australians.pdf

NSW Education Standards Authority, K-6 English Syllabus

<http://syllabus.nesa.nsw.edu.au/english/english-k10/>

Ontario Ministry for Education, The Kindergarten Program, 2016

<https://www.ontario.ca/document/kindergarten-program-2016/introduction>

Jenny Williams has extensive experience as a teacher in public schools and now works assisting teachers including through the Centre for Professional Learning and Trio Professional Learning. She can be contacted at trioprofessionallearning.com.au