

Classroom Setup



As I write this book, I am also redecorating my little boy's room, changing it from the baby version I did before he was born to one that suits who he is and what he needs now as a two-year-old. I see that his baby room was all about me—from my favorite shade of pale yellow to the amazing “Hey, Diddle, Diddle” curtains and quilt that my mom and aunt made. It's the room *I* dreamed about.

- You may have an idea for the kindergarten classroom that you've dreamed about, too. Perusing teacher catalogs, you can find all sorts of adorable furniture, kits to cover all sorts of curriculum concepts, and stuffed animals of all sizes. But if you get too carried away with your dream, you could end up with a room that is overstimulating for kindergartners. Or, when you work on your curriculum, you may discover that the supplies you've gathered don't really support your lesson plans. Perhaps you'll want to add bulletin boards to display children's work but realize that your walls are already full. The room may fulfill your dream, but will it serve the real needs of children in the classroom and your actual teaching?

Think preparation, not decoration. What kindergartners need is a simple, warm, and inviting classroom. The furniture should be minimal and functional, arranged to support how children will be working; the room organized so that they can easily find what they need and explore subject areas in a calm and hands-on way. They need a room that feels as if it is theirs, with their creations exhibited on the walls, with their favorite songs and poems displayed, and with books they enjoy neatly placed on shelves.

This chapter will help you set up a kindergarten classroom while always keeping the children in mind. It covers how to arrange the furniture; use, store, and organize supplies; and design classroom displays that serve a learning purpose.



Arranging the Furniture

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Whole-Group Circle

For me, it would be nearly impossible to teach kindergarten without an adequate and inviting circle space. The circle is important in all elementary grades, but especially vital in kindergarten. The circle provides a sense of togetherness for kindergartners. It helps them develop a greater ability to understand other points of view. It also provides an open space for the active and interactive learning that kindergartners need—hands-on, social, engaging, and appropriately paced.

The circle is especially helpful in getting every school day off to a great start. Having the children come together first thing each morning to greet each other, laugh, sing, and share can make such a difference. It can help those

who had a rough start at home put that behind them, help those who are still feeling a little unsure in the class feel more secure, and help everyone feel more invested in supporting each other. For my own morning kindergarten gatherings, I use the *Responsive Classroom*® Morning Meeting structure. But whichever structure you use, children will benefit from a well-designed circle space.

Learn More about Morning Meeting at
www.responsiveclassroom.org

The Morning Meeting Book by Roxann Kriete
(Northeast Foundation for Children, 2002).

"Morning Meeting: A Powerful Way to Begin the Day," *Responsive Classroom Newsletter*,
February 1999.

Ways to Use the Circle

Curriculum Area	Use the Circle for . . .
Social	Class meetings, practicing social skills and routines, singing, group games and activities
Writing	Mini-lessons, work sharing, interactive writing
Reading	Read-alouds; partner chats about books, poetry, and other shared reading experiences; dramatizations of books; mini-lessons about reading strategies; independent reading
Math	Explorations of manipulatives, mini-lessons, math games
Social studies	Read-alouds, examination of artifacts, dramatizations of historical events
Science	Read-alouds, examination of materials, experiments and other hands-on activities

You can also use the circle for instruction (see “Ways to Use the Circle” above). Plus, you can have children return to the circle whenever they need a movement break. Or have them work on the floor of the circle if they’re not yet comfortable working at a table.

The circle is so important to teaching and children’s learning that I plan this space first every year. Here are my recommendations for how to set up a circle area:

- **Use a large space.** Kindergartners thrive on active learning, so allow enough room for movement, active games, dramatizations, and similar activities. Ideally, each kindergartner will have enough room to stand up and move in her own spot (and not land in a neighbor’s lap if she falls over sideways, which sometimes happens!). Also, allow enough space in the circle area for a chart stand and any other supplies you plan to use for whole-group instruction. Consider using a rug or carpet squares for more comfortable seating on the floor.

- **Try to make a true circle.** A circle works best when everyone can see each other and when every child can see the chart stand or easel. An actual circle, as opposed to a square or other shape, helps ensure these results. It can also discourage unwanted behavior, such as children shifting around to make themselves the center of attention or to hide from view.
- **Mark spots.** Kindergartners do best when they know exactly where to sit in the circle. There are many commercially made rugs with spots marked. However, a more economical solution is to mark spots with removable tape or tape numbers, letters, or index cards (possibly with a photo) at each spot.
- **Assign circle seats.** To ease transitions to and from the circle and keep the focus on learning, assign each child a seat. Without assigned seats, you may end up with some children vying to sit next to you or a favored friend while others try to sit farther away from you than you might like.
- **Rotate seat assignments.** You also want kindergartners to have a chance to interact with a variety of classmates. Help them accomplish this by changing their circle seats every week or two.
- **Move children as needed.** Be flexible and set children up for success by switching assigned spots sooner than planned if the need arises. For example, if two children sitting next to each other find it hard to refrain from talking or are having conflicts, assign them new seats immediately to ensure that circle time stays positive and productive.

If Your Room Is Small

If your room is tight, be creative in finding space for a circle and resist the urge to give up on it. See if you can save space in other areas of the room (see “Three Pieces of Furniture You Can Lose” below). At least, try to set up the classroom so that you can meet as a whole group (with space for children to move around), even if the space can’t be a circle.

Three Pieces of Furniture You Can Lose

- **A teacher’s desk.** These often take up a great deal of space, but we seldom use them to teach. When I got rid of my desk, I had many more options for arranging the classroom and collected much less clutter.
- **A large file cabinet.** These encourage us to keep things we don’t need. Think smaller. What files are essential? You can probably store these in one or two mobile file cabinets.
- **The latest, greatest thing.** Education has fads, and furniture is no exception. My first year of teaching, I paid too much for a nifty folding table to house the listening center. The table never really worked and always seemed to be in the way. You’re better off sticking to the basics.

Work Tables

Kindergartners need space to do independent, partner, and small-group work. If you can, have children work at tables rather than desks and put needed supplies on the tables (or nearby). Tables can offer more actual work space and greater flexibility than desks—you can use tables for both independent work and center areas.

If you use desks, arrange them in small groups, such as groups of four, and avoid front-facing rows. Also avoid having kindergartners use desk storage spaces because keeping desk contents organized can prove quite a struggle for them. If possible, arrange the desks so that the storage spaces are inaccessible.

■ Assign seats for some parts of the day.

When children need to work on one independent task, such as writing workshop, assign seats at tables or other work areas. Knowing exactly where to go to work will make transitions from one area to another smoother for children.

■ Change seat assignments frequently.

Kindergartners need help getting to know their classmates and learning how to interact with a wide variety of friends. Rotate seat assignments every two to four weeks to provide them with these opportunities.

■ Offer alternative spaces.

Although most kindergartners can work productively at tables with others around them, some may prefer more isolated spaces at times. Scatter a few desks around the room. If you can't do this, provide children with clipboards or lap desks. Use interactive modeling to show children how to move to alternate work spaces and how to use clipboards or lap desks. (See Chapter 2, "Schedules and Routines," pages 43–51, for more on interactive modeling.) Explain that once they move to a non-table spot, they need to stay there—and practice what this looks like with them ahead of time.

Tips for Assigning Table Spots or Desk Seats

- Balance the number of boys and girls in each group, if possible. Make sure all children eventually sit with everyone in the class.
- Group children strategically. For example, group children who have been working well together with each other. Group children who need lots of quiet together.
- Do some children need a little extra help at work time? Have them sit with classmates who are able to help them (without being distracted from their own work).



- **Set up tables as “center areas” if you plan to have centers or choice time.** Tables can double as center areas if you place bookshelves with needed supplies for the centers nearby. For instance, put one table and a shelf of art supplies near the sink to serve as an art center. Another table could serve as a math center, with manipulatives nearby, and so on.

Other Areas of the Classroom

Although it’s a good idea to keep furniture and other materials to a minimum, you may find that you need a few additional areas and furnishings. When planning these, remember that you should be able to see every child (and every child should be able to see you) from all areas of the room, so choose furniture that is no taller than your average kindergartner.

- **A multifunctional table area.** Plan an area that enables you to work with small groups or with individual children on reading, writing, and math. A table big enough to seat you and several children would work, as would a small area rug.
- **A classroom library.** Kindergartners need a variety of books to read or look at on their own. The classroom library should also contain a variety of books for the class as a whole, including those for read-alouds.

If you have space, store books within easy reach of the children and use front-facing baskets so that they can flip through and see the covers as they browse. Use bookshelves that are low enough for children to see the books on each shelf and for you to see the children while they're in the library. If your school allows it, include beanbag chairs, pillows, and reading lights to make a cozy reading area. (See "The Classroom Library" on page 26 for more on classroom library books.)

- **An active play area.** Plan an area or areas where children can move and build with blocks, work on puzzles, engage in dramatic play, and enjoy other activities. If space is limited, this area could also be used as the circle area.
- **A computer area.** If you have classroom computers, keep them apart from other areas and centers so that you can easily monitor children's computer use. If this is impractical because of space considerations, turn off and cover computers when not in use.

Classroom Supplies

I think of kindergarten as an experimental year during which children get to try out many materials and develop a repertoire of skills for how to use them. Kindergartners need a wide variety of high-quality equipment and supplies to maximize their active and interactive learning. But be careful not to overdo it—if the room is cluttered with too much stuff, children may feel overwhelmed and end up being less careful than you would like. Follow these guidelines for acquiring supplies and helping children use and care for them.

Have Community Supplies Only

The traditional approach to supplies is to give families a list of items to purchase for their individual child. Problems can arise with this approach, however. For example, children may be envious of a classmate's special pen or superhero folder. Also, some families may not be able to afford supplies or have time to shop for a long list of items.

Seeking Supplies

In addition to asking parents to contribute supplies, explore using a website set up to link interested donors with classrooms. For example:

- WWW.DONORSCHOOSE.ORG
- WWW.ILOVESCHOOLS.COM
- WWW.ADOPTACLASSROOM.ORG

Instead of this traditional approach, try a community supplies approach in which each parent donates one category of supplies to the class (one parent supplies the pencils, another some markers, and so forth). Or provide all the supplies yourself (if you have a supply budget). Either way, the community supplies approach creates a sense of fairness and equity in the classroom: All the children will have what they need and can share equally.

Using community supplies also gives children the opportunity to try out different kinds of supplies and figure out what works best for them. Finally, having one set of supplies creates a sense of shared ownership in the classroom, which in turn contributes to a sense of common purpose and community.

Despite all the good reasons for having community supplies, many parents may not be used to this approach. Be sure to share your reasons for choosing it when you ask them to purchase things.

What Supplies Do Kindergartners Need?

Kindergartners need a lot of stuff, so it's easy to get overwhelmed when you start assembling supplies. Try to prioritize—start with what's most essential. Then add to what you have by seeking donations from other teachers and families, looking for sales, and using other money-saving strategies. The tables below and on the next three pages make a great starting point in prioritizing supplies for a kindergarten class.

Dealing With What You Inherit

If you inherit supplies when you begin teaching kindergarten, you may find it hard to decide what to keep. Here are some “toss” guidelines:

- **Out-of-date materials.** Rarely is there any reason to keep old textbooks or unused workbooks from prior curriculum adoptions. Instead, offer them to interested families or return them to the central office.
- **Materials with missing parts, or things you just don't like.** If you can salvage something useful (game tokens, for instance), do so. Otherwise, get rid of these materials! If you don't like them now, you won't use them later.
- **Mystery materials.** If you don't know what something is or how to use it, ask more experienced colleagues for their advice about whether it's worth keeping.

Good Supplies for a Kindergarten Classroom

Category	Early in the Year	Later in the Year	Sample Quantities
Literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Books (variety of genres and levels) ■ Chart paper and stand; pocket chart ■ Pointers for reading charts and big books ■ Listening center and audio books ■ Variety of paper ■ Pencils, erasers, felt tip pens, grips ■ Writing notebooks, journals, or folders ■ Magnetic letters and cookie sheets ■ Puppets and finger puppets ■ Letter stamps and stamp pads ■ Letter stencils 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Books (new genres and authors as replacements) ■ Bookmaking supplies (cardstock, hole punchers, yarn, etc.) ■ Small dry erase boards, nontoxic dry erase markers, and erasers ■ Envelopes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pencils—about eight per child ■ Pencil grips—about two per child ■ Magnetic letters and cookie sheets—enough for a group of four or five children
Music	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Variety of CDs or downloaded music ■ Charts of songs ■ Rhythm sticks ■ Maracas, bells, other hand instruments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Additional CDs and downloaded music 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Two rhythm sticks per child ■ One hand instrument per child

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Good Supplies for a Kindergarten Classroom CONTINUED

Category	Early in the Year	Later in the Year	Sample Quantities
Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Counters ■ Unifix cubes ■ Pattern blocks ■ Unit blocks ■ Rulers, meter sticks, tape measures ■ Math games ■ Dice or spinners ■ Playing and numeral cards ■ Tactile numbers and shapes ■ Materials and trays for sorting ■ Real or play coins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pattern block cards ■ Tangrams ■ Geoblocks ■ New math games ■ Play clock with movable hands ■ Attribute blocks ■ Stamps and stamp pads ■ Dominoes ■ Calculators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pattern blocks, Unifix cubes, etc.—several sets ■ Counters—several different sets ■ Playing and numeral cards—one set of each for every two children
Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Globe ■ Maps, especially of school and local area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Map puzzles ■ Theme-related artifacts, posters, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ One globe per class ■ Several maps of different types
Choice Time and Recess (outdoor and indoor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Variety of balls ■ Cones to mark areas ■ Hula hoops ■ Jump ropes ■ Sidewalk chalk ■ Blocks ■ Board games ■ Legos, puzzles ■ Small animal toys ■ Small cars, trucks, and other vehicles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ More complex games ■ More complex puzzles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Three to four balls per class ■ Four to six single jump ropes and two longer ones

Good Supplies for a Kindergarten Classroom CONTINUED

Category	Early in the Year	Later in the Year	Sample Quantities
Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Crayons ■ Colored pencils ■ Markers (thin and thick) ■ Paint, paint cups, brushes, and easels; smocks or old T-shirts ■ Drawing paper ■ Construction paper ■ Magazines for cutting ■ Brown paper bags ■ Collage materials (buttons, fabric, cotton balls, etc.) ■ Scissors ■ Glue and glue sticks ■ Tape ■ Modeling clay ■ Craft sticks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Watercolors and brushes ■ Small trays for paint (ask at your local grocery store if you can have some for free) ■ Colored tissue paper ■ Yarn ■ Glitter ■ Toothpicks ■ Hole punch ■ Scissors with decorative edges ■ Origami paper ■ Stamps and stamp pads ■ Staplers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Scissors—one pair for every child ■ Glue—one bottle for every two children ■ Glue sticks—two per child ■ Markers, crayons, colored pencils—an ample supply for each table cluster ■ Yarn, glitter, other specialty supplies (bring out less often)
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hand lenses ■ Small trays ■ Seeds, beans, shells, rocks, polished stones, and similar natural objects ■ Magnets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Balance scales ■ Containers for growing things or observing living things ■ Theme-related artifacts, pictures, and posters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hand lens—one for each child ■ Small tray—at least one per child ■ Balance scale—one or two at a center

See the appendix (pages 137–141) for favorite books, board games, and websites for kindergartners.



Quality of Supplies Matters

Much like adults, kindergartners are better able to do their best work when they have high-quality materials at hand. That doesn't mean everything has to be new—for example, I actually prefer older pattern blocks to newer ones because the wood has a heftier feel and texture—but materials must be well cared for and in good working order.

When purchasing new supplies, choose those of high quality. Because quality varies widely, specify the brands you trust when communicating supply needs to parents and other donors. Or ask experienced colleagues for their recommendations. Then, so that supplies will last, be vigilant about how children care for them. Finally, set aside time now and then to cull through supplies and get rid of anything that's not in good shape.

Storing and Organizing Supplies

Use an organizational system that will make sense for both you and the children. Here are some tips:

- **Have student cubbies.** Although kindergartners do best without desks, they still need a space for coats, sweaters, backpacks, papers, folders, and notes that go back and forth between home and school. If you can, have cubbies (or a basket or shelf) in the classroom for each child so that you can keep your eye on children as they put things away or retrieve needed materials.
- **Set up a storage system for folders that stay at school.** Depending on the curricular approach you use, children may have writing folders, math and science journals, and other collections of work. You may need to review these frequently while giving children easy access to them, too. One storage system that works well is using small, hanging file holders for student folders and crates for hardbound journals. Organize folders and journals in alphabetic order or by group designations so that they can be found quickly and easily. Also helpful is having groups of folders and journals split up into different areas of the room for easier access.

- **Put close-at-hand supplies on tables.** You'll want children to have easy access to some supplies (such as pencils, erasers, and crayons) all the time. Keep these in baskets or caddies in the center of tables.
- **Put supplies that are needed less often near centers.** Organize supplies that children will use less regularly in the writing, math, and other areas or centers discussed earlier. Keep these supplies in easy-to-reach, well-organized baskets or bins labeled with pictures and words.
- **Have a private storage area.** You'll need your own storage, not accessible to children, for extra supplies, plus special supplies such as paint, science materials, and social studies artifacts that may be messy, hard to replace, or appropriate only for occasional use.
- **Slowly introduce supplies.** To help ensure that children learn how to use and care for supplies properly, wait to put out certain supplies until you've formally introduced them. Begin with empty shelves and slowly add supplies as you teach and model their use. (See "Teaching Children How to Access and Maintain Supplies" on page 27.)
- **Rotate supplies.** Once you've filled the shelves, keep kindergartners engaged in their learning by occasionally removing some items and replacing them with others. Rotating supplies keeps shelves from being overcrowded and may lead to better care of supplies since you and the children will have less to manage.

More Tips for Supplies

- **Scrap box.** Have a box or basket in which children can place large unused scraps of paper. Not only does this teach children the importance of not wasting paper, it also provides them with interesting shapes for making collages or other projects.
- **Pencil sharpener.** While kindergartners have many talents, using the pencil sharpener wisely may not be one of them! Instead, teach children to place pencils that need sharpening in a basket. Sharpen the pencils when you have time, ask a parent volunteer to do so, or teach children how to do this as a classroom job.
- **Book return box.** Kindergartners, many of whom may not read well, can have difficulty putting books back where they belong. Early in the year, have a basket where they can place books when they finish with them. Reshelve books when you get a chance, or ask a volunteer to help. As the year progresses (and if children develop more organization skills), model and practice how to put books back in their proper places.

The Classroom Library

A well-stocked classroom library can foster a love of books in kindergartners. Children need books they can read and those they can't (but can browse and survey). Further, you'll want a wide variety of read-aloud books. Here are some categories to get you started (for specific title suggestions, see the appendix on pages 137–141):

- Emergent or beginning readers at many different levels
- Picture books from simple to complex
- Poetry and nursery rhyme collections
- Simple comic books
- Nonfiction books about animals, the way things work, world cultures, and so on
- Alphabet books
- Number books
- Pop-up books
- Board books (some kindergartners will still enjoy these)
- Class-created books
- Big books



Some ideas for stocking up fast:

- Use book clubs (such as Scholastic or Trumpet)—check for specials and how to earn bonus points for free books.
- Scavenge from other teachers—they often have extra copies.
- Visit garage sales or school book drives.
- Ask for parent donations.
- Check local library sales.

Sources of books for emergent readers:

- Rigby PM Books (http://rigby.hmhco.com/en/rigbyPM_home.htm)
- Sunshine Books (www.awardinteractive.com)
- Learn to Read books published by Creative Teaching Press (www.creative-teaching.com)
- Readinga-z.com (www.readinga-z.com)

Teaching Children How to Access and Maintain Supplies

Kindergartners are starting from scratch. They need you to teach and model in detail how to use, maintain, and store supplies. Break down supply routines into distinct components—and teach children each one. For example:

Interactive Modeling

See Chapter 2, “Schedules and Routines,” pages 43–51, for a full explanation of interactive modeling.

- **How to use supplies creatively.** Because kindergartners often see only one way to do things, give them opportunities to stretch their thinking about the potential uses of supplies. I try to guide them, within a structured context and clear expectations, in exploring many creative uses of materials. My strategy for structuring these purposeful explorations is to use the *Responsive Classroom* method of Guided Discovery (see box below).
- **How to care for supplies.** Use interactive modeling to teach children the basics of taking care of supplies, such as how to make sure marker caps are on, how much pressure to use as they write with pencils or crayons,

Learn about Guided Discover at www.responsiveclassroom.org

One way to help children gain expertise with classroom materials is to use the process called Guided Discovery. This process focuses on observation, brainstorming, and exploratory play.

Guided Discovery is explained in more detail in *Learning Through Academic Choice* by Paula Denton, EdD (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2005) and in “Guided Discovery in Action” by Lynn Bechtel and Paula Denton (*Responsive Classroom Newsletter*, August 2004).

how to wind down glue sticks and put the tops back on, and how to put math materials back safely and quietly. Take photographs of children doing these things correctly and post them near supply areas for reference.

- **How to find supplies.** Even if you’ve chosen the most effective organizational system ever, be sure to explicitly teach children about it. If you’ve divided your room into areas, slowly introduce each one to the children. If you’re using pictorial labels for supplies and shelves, show these to them, too.



- **How to put supplies back.** Teach kindergartners how to play a matching game when putting supplies back—for example, they match the label on a basket to the label on the shelf where the basket stays when not in use. (This kind of label or sticker system can also work well for teaching children how to shelve books.) Model for children how to check around their work area for missing parts or pieces. For some supplies, such as staplers and tape dispensers, post an outline of the shape on the shelf so that children can match the item to the outline.
- **When to use supplies.** Kindergartners need some guidance about which supplies to use and when. Left on their own, they may find everything on the shelves interesting. Be explicit in your mini-lessons and directions—or place “Open” and “Closed” signs on shelves to guide their choices.

What if There Are Problems with Supplies?

Many kindergartners are explicit rule followers, so if they discover a broken crayon, a dried out marker, or a container placed in the wrong spot, they will most likely run straight to you. To avert unwanted interruptions, give children guidance here, too.

Have a box for problem supplies, and model for children what to do if they find something out of place (simply put it back in the right place!). Be clear, however, that they should tell you about big problems like paint spills.

Making Supplies Last

Kindergartners can quickly use up everything that you give them. Make the supplies go further by putting out only what children need for a short period of time. For instance, put out the amount of paper that you think children will need for two weeks. Put out enough markers to last for a month. Let children know if you have additional supplies and when you'll bring them out.

Although you will be focused on many things during the first weeks of kindergarten, pay some attention to the care children are taking with supplies. Do occasional "spot checks" to make sure children are caring for materials correctly and have put supplies back in the right place. And when they have done so, reinforce their efforts by letting them know that you noticed!

Classroom Displays

When I began teaching, I often covered the walls without thinking about what displays the children truly needed. It was more like decorating than teaching. These guidelines will help you avoid making the same mistake.

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Some Guiding Principles

■ **Less is more.** Kindergartners will pay more attention to displays if you have fewer of them, but they're of high quality. Both walls and shelves should have plenty of open spaces so that the classroom feels calm and orderly. Remember to take down outdated displays or those that children aren't using. Avoid hanging things from the ceiling, which can be very distracting or even overwhelming to kindergartners.

■ **Make displays purposeful.** Make sure each display serves a definite purpose related to learning. If you put up children's work, is it to demonstrate their learning to classroom visitors? Or is it to show children the wide range of ideas they had on a project? Is a reference chart something



you'll refer to often? Or is it something you just need once or twice? If you're not sure of a display's purpose, don't put it up. Thinking about displays in this way will help make the effort you put into creating them worthwhile.

- **Share the display's purpose with children.** Let children know how a display can help them in their learning. For example: "I put up everyone's connections to the story we read. Over the next few days, try to notice all the different connections we had. Look at all the artistic ways we showed those."
- **Use just a key word or two.** Many kindergartners are essentially nonreaders, so too much text can be overwhelming. Choose just a few essential words or phrases to post on displays—for instance, "Pets" could be the title for a display of children's drawings and writings about imaginary pets. Reference the words you display so that children will recognize them and their meaning.



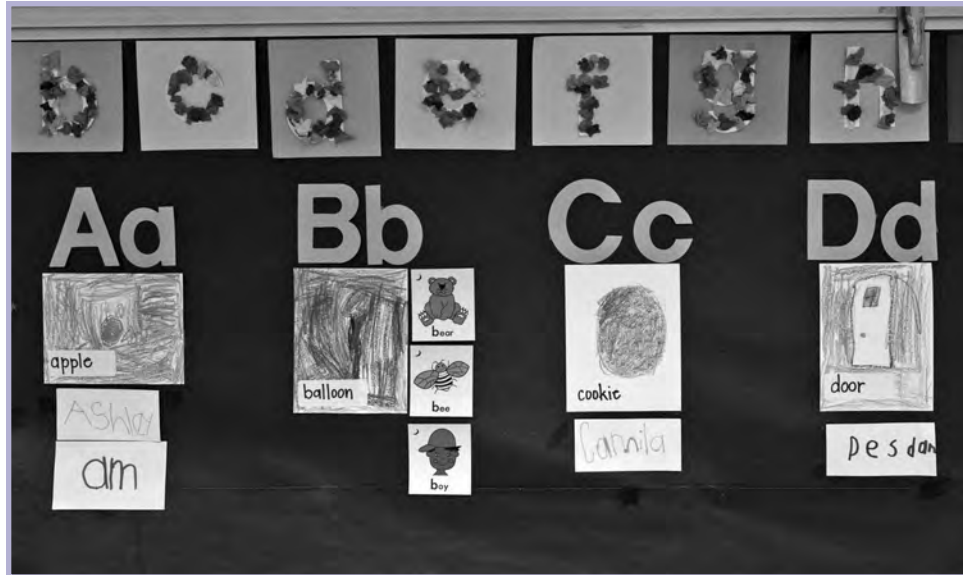
Let Student Work Dominate

While there may be a few worthy commercial products to display (such as a calendar), children relate more to displays that they helped create. Start the year with mainly blank walls and shelf tops and slowly begin displaying children's work. Doing so tells them that the room

belongs to them. (See Chapter 3, "Building Community," starting on page 65, to learn more about building community in the classroom.)

Here are some guidelines for displaying student work:

- **Avoid "cookie-cutter" displays.** Kindergartners often think that there is only one way to do something, so putting up twenty-five variations of the same thing can reinforce this thinking. Help children broaden their perspective by making displays with diverse products. This way, as children try to learn new things, they can see how to reach a goal in different ways. For example, give children a few choices in an assignment, such as to solve a set of math problems by drawing pictures, working with manipulatives, or using pencil and paper. Then display their work or photos of it.



Or let children choose which of a few different assignments they want to display.

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- **Include everyone.** Because the range of abilities in kindergarten is wide, it can be tempting to display only the work of those who write clearly recognizable words or produce “clean” drawings. Resist this temptation. All children need to feel valued by having their work displayed.
- **Give children a say.** Displays also have more value to children if they help decide what goes up to represent them. You could create a display area in your classroom with one square for each child. Add a small photo of each child along with his name to a corner of the square. Then let the children decide what gets displayed in the rest of their square and when to change things.
- **Include photos.** Kindergartners pay close attention when they see photos of themselves or classmates posted. Take photographs of children being kind to one another, working at activities other

Put Displays at Eye Level

Whenever possible, put displays at the children’s eye level. Kindergartners generally focus on objects close at hand. They may pay little attention to displays high up on a wall.

than pencil-and-paper tasks, playing cooperative games, or even sharing a peek at a new tooth.

- **Plan for three-dimensional displays.** Kindergartners love to save their work with Legos and other hands-on materials. Use the tops of bookshelves or countertops to display such work. These displays also encourage children to notice different ideas and techniques for using materials. If you have limited shelf and countertop space, use photos instead. Help children make labels (and include their names) for their saved work.

Other Displays

- **Yearlong charts.** You may want to have certain displays up all year long, such as class rules, a class calendar and birthday graph, and child-made alphabet and number charts. Avoid



letting these become mere wall art, however. For example, refer to these displays often and teach children how to use them. If you find that no one is really using a chart, take it down.

- **Current teaching tools or content.** You likely will need “anchor” charts for some lessons—for instance, a list of children’s names can be used to display various letter sounds. Displaying anchor charts shortly after a lesson may be effective for learning as long as you demonstrate

Save Money—Avoid Commercially Made Charts

School supply stores and catalogs have thousands of charts for sale. However, not only are children more interested in displays that they made, but commercially made charts can get expensive.

If you want some anchor charts, such as an alphabet chart or a number poster, invite the children to help make them. Once I started doing this, I noticed the children paying a great deal more attention to these charts.

how to use them and then check that children are actually doing so. You can also group several anchor charts together on rings and hang them where children can review them.

Remember, it's easy to overdo anchor charts. Keep in mind that kindergartners primarily notice what is close to them and that they can get overwhelmed by visual clutter.

Technology

Kindergartners will most likely have a wide range of technology experience. Some may know more about computers than you do, while others may have little or no experience with using technology. However, even those with experience need to know the rules and expectations, such as which applications they can use and what to do when things go wrong.

Explicitly teach and model the use of all technology that children will encounter during kindergarten. Then give children time to practice what you show them so that they can become more independent and skillful in their use of technology.

Here are some guidelines for using technology, whether old (a tape player in the listening center) or new (computers and tablets):

- **Focus on the basics.** Model and practice each step of how to use a computer, tablet, or other device. For example, demonstrate how to sit up straight at a computer station (children who learn poor ergonomic habits may develop health problems). Model how



Learn More about Classroom Setup at
www.responsiveclassroom.org

Classroom Spaces That Work by Marlynn K. Clayton (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2001).

to use the mouse and keyboard. Show children which buttons and keys they can press and which ones are off limits. Once they have the basic skills down, teach and model how to use a few developmentally appropriate applications.

- **Use students as “tech helpers.”** Despite the best teaching and modeling, some children may need more individual coaching when learning how to use technology. If you lack time for this, choose a child who is more comfortable with technology and invite her to help classmates.
- **Share the technology.** Make sure all children, not just those who finish first or need an extra challenge, get to use these resources. Assign days or time slots, or invest in a software program that can randomly assign children to a device. Then post children’s names when it’s their turn to use the device.
- **Supervise carefully.** Kindergartners need close monitoring, especially when they first use a resource. Try to station yourself close by so that you can monitor them. Or assign this task to a classroom aide or parent volunteer. Let children know what to do if they have a problem: Should they interrupt you, read in the book corner until you’re free, or ask a designated adult or classmate for help?

Digital Cameras

You may want to have a digital camera both for your use and, if you’re comfortable with it, for students’ use, too. You can use the camera to create icons for displays (for instance, photos of students following the rules to go with each rule listed). Students may want to take photos on field trips or record other memorable moments in the classroom.

Yes, It’s Cool. *But Do We Really Need It?*

New technology can be exciting, and we want children to be up-to-date. But if you have a say in what equipment goes into the classroom, exercise caution. Put technology in perspective with respect to everything else kindergartners need.

If you don’t have enough books at an appropriate reading level, that might be a better place to start than a cool device that kindergartners use infrequently.

- **Set boundaries on Internet use.** Know your school’s policies about children’s Internet use, what blocks your school has in place, and what websites you’re comfortable having children visit. Then teach children these boundaries.

- **Consider accessibility issues.** For instance, a child who uses a wheelchair might need certain accommodations when working at a computer station. Work with the experts in your school to ensure that every child can access the technology resources you plan to use.

Closing Thoughts

How you arrange and organize the classroom will have a powerful influence on how kindergartners learn and behave. A well-organized, uncluttered, and interesting classroom invites calm and focused learning. Children will thrive in a classroom where they have space to come together as a whole group; areas where they can work on their own; materials to spark their interest and imagination and meet their developmental needs; and displays that show their learning and progress. The time you put into setting up such a classroom, selecting supplies and other materials, and planning displays will help you and the children all year long.

