

## PART 4

# Teaching to Enhance Each Child's Development and Learning

## Effective Teaching Strategies

Like selecting a tool from a toolbox, kindergarten teachers draw from a number of effective practices to support diverse learners, depending on the learning goal, specific situation, and characteristics of the child. Here are some strategies to add to and draw from your toolbox.

Examples of Effective Teaching Strategies		
	Description	Example
<b>Encourage</b>	Encourage persistence and effort rather than praise or an evaluation of what the child has done (e.g., "Good job", "I like it").	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "That wasn't easy, but you stuck with it until you zipped your jacket all the way to the top."</li> <li>■ "You <i>observed</i> the worm very carefully and drew the parts that you saw. I see the mouth, pairs of setae, and the clitellum."</li> </ul>
<b>Use behavior reflections</b>	Offer nonjudgmental statements that describe the child's actions, drawing attention to certain aspects of an experience to increase the child's self-awareness and maintain focus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "You are looking carefully at the veins of that maple leaf so that you can draw them on your paper."</li> <li>■ "On this ten-frame, you saw four on top and two on the bottom. You moved one from the bottom to make five. You knew five and one more is six."</li> </ul>
<b>Provide specific feedback</b>	Be specific with your feedback. Avoid general comments that don't describe what occurred.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "You are trying to make a rectangle with the two triangles. You turned your blue triangle in different ways. Try turning the green triangle as well."</li> </ul>
<b>Ask questions</b>	Move beyond recall questions ("What color is this?," "How many triangles did you use?") and ask questions that encourage the children to explain, justify, reason, reflect, and draw connections.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "What do you think would happen if you tried it again? Do you think it would float again or sink this time? Why? Why not?"</li> </ul>

## Examples of Effective Teaching Strategies

<b>Use environmental cues</b>	Use visuals to illustrate clear expectations, such as tasks to complete upon arrival, hand washing, and whole group expectations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>[Pointing to the poster board with images depicting each] "Let's check to see if you completed each of the steps. [Pointing to the first picture] Did you put your take-home folder in the basket? [Pointing to the next picture] Let's look at the next picture to see what comes next."</i></li> </ul>
<b>Provide information</b>	Give children facts, verbal labels, and other information that they might not be able to discover on their own.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "You noticed that the rooster has something red dangling below its chin. Let's look at the diagram in the book we read this morning to see what it's called. <i>[Looking at the book]</i> Oh, it's called the wattle. Wattles are two thin, flexible flaps of skin that hang under a rooster's beak."</li> </ul>
<b>Give assistance</b>	Offer a hint, prompt, or a cue to help children gain deeper understanding about new vocabulary or content. You might also use a hand signal, gesture, or facial expression to increase understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "Let's look at this picture carefully. <i>[Pointing to photo in the book]</i> The doctor also needs what <i>[gesturing with hands and providing a curious facial expression]</i> to help her patient feel better?"</li> </ul>
<b>Scaffold</b>	When children begin and/or practice new challenges, provide the least amount of support necessary to help them achieve independence at higher levels of skill. Reduce support as the children begin to acquire the new skill or understanding. Scaffolding includes integrating a variety of teaching strategies, such as modeling, giving assistance, and asking questions.	<p>A child has tried to form a small ball of playdough into a shape that floats in the water, but each time, it sinks. When the child asks you for help, you respond by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <i>Asking questions</i> about what the child has already done ("Tell or show me what you tried that didn't work")</li> <li>■ <i>Offering encouragement</i> for trying different strategies and persevering ("You've tried three different ideas that didn't work; yet you are sticking with it to figure it out!")</li> <li>■ <i>Providing assistance</i> with a prompt ("Each of the strategies you tried keeps the playdough in a ball. What if you shaped the playdough . . . ([in a way that isn't a ball])?")</li> </ul>

## Learning Formats

In addition to the different teaching strategies you use, incorporate a variety of learning formats to provide meaningful and relevant opportunities for your kindergarten students to engage in joyful learning. Different formats are used for different purposes.

### Large Groups

Large group settings provide an opportunity for all the children and adults to come together for a shared purpose—to support social skill development, provide children an opportunity to talk to a group, listen to one another, ask questions and present ideas, work cooperatively, or use and process new information. Large groups can be helpful

when you want to introduce all of the children to a new concept or skill at the same time; later, provide ample time for that new concept and skill to be further developed in small group and individual experiences. Use caution with large groups. If you are doing most of the talking and thinking or if the children are passively sitting for long amounts of time, you probably need to move the content, topic, and/or learning experience to small groups, centers, or stations so that each child remains engaged, challenged, and actively learning.

## Small Groups

Small groups allow you to observe the children carefully and provide individual attention, support, and challenges that are tailored to the children's individual levels. Small groups provide you an opportunity to introduce or revisit a new concept, reteach a specific skill, intervene as needed, provide time for practice, and accelerate learning for those who are ready. This is why small groups are the bulk of the learning formats you use each day in kindergarten! These groups may be both self-chosen by the children or formed on the basis of a need as determined by ongoing assessment information. They may include a mix of children with different strengths so that they can learn from one another. Small groups are also the primary grouping means for learning centers and learning stations.

## Learning Centers

In kindergarten, learning centers, or playful learning areas, offer students a range of options for small group engagement, choice, and mature play. Each center offers children a variety of carefully selected materials from which to choose. Often learning centers include shelves and materials surrounding the area with places to sit and work, creating a protected space where children can work independently or with others. Common kindergarten centers include art, blocks and manipulatives, dramatic play, reading (books and listening), math, writing, and puzzles and games. During this time, the children develop a sense of agency over their own learning as they make choices, practice new skills in meaningful ways, and integrate new concepts and ideas within their play. They also refine critical social skills such as cooperating with others; entering established play situations; waiting and taking turns; sharing materials; resolving conflicts without hitting, hurting, or retreating; and listening to other people's ideas. Furthermore, the time children spend engaged in purposeful learning center experiences provides opportunities for them to practice and further develop emotional competence and their executive function skills. For example, they use words to describe emotions; use constructive means for expressing and managing emotions; learn from a mistake or failure, adjust actions, and try again; and demonstrate care and respect for classroom materials. No wonder learning centers are a powerful learning format that can be used daily within a kindergarten program!

## Learning Stations

Sometimes learning stations are used when you want children to complete particular tasks and activities. While children might work on these tasks in various parts of the classroom, the station itself is a singular task to be completed with a specific purpose, goal, or standard. Some teachers use centers and stations at different times during the day for different purposes as strategies to ensure that children are actively learning. Many teachers use learning stations to have children practice specific literacy and math tasks, as required by learning standards.

## Routines

Much valuable learning also occurs in daily routines such as arrival, departure, room cleanup, hand washing, snacks and meals, and transitions. During these times you may choose to reinforce a particular idea or concept through conversation, songs, games, and other transitional activities.

Effective teaching includes a toolbox with many tools. Strategically and intentionally using multiple learning formats and teaching strategies enables you to respond to the diverse and unique needs, abilities, interests, and characteristics of your kindergarten students.