Curriculum expectations for Kindergarten

For Kindergarten, the holistic general capabilities in the Australian Curriculum provide a bridge between outcomes in the Early Years Learning Framework and learning area content descriptors in the Australian Curriculum that apply from Pre-primary.

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Of the seven general capabilities, the focus in Kindergarten is on personal and social competence and preparatory numeracy and literacy capabilities.

The following expectations for Kindergarten draw on findings from landmark research including the National inquiry into the teaching of literacy (Rowe, 2005), Teaching for growth: Effective teaching of literacy and numeracy (Louden, Rohl and Hopkins, 2008) and First Steps in Mathematics research.

**Personal and social competence**

Personal and social competencies are prominent in the outcomes of the Early Years Learning Framework and have a big impact on a child's ability to succeed in the school setting.

On entry to Kindergarten, children bring a range of prior experiences of interacting with other children and adults outside their families. Some are confident and socially adept while others may have formed behaviour patterns that distance them from other children and learning opportunities. All children need support to learn alternative ways to respond to the large range of new social and cultural situations they encounter for the first time at school.

Teachers and education assistants in Kindergarten are responsive to the range of prior-to-school perspectives and behaviours that children bring and, as required, explicitly teach new ways of approaching new situations.

To succeed at school, children need to acquire new skills to enable them to contribute within the classroom environment and school structures. These include how to join and participate in groups; work by themselves; 'read' and respect the feelings of others; stand up for themselves; deal with frustration and conflicts; express their needs and preferences in ways that are acceptable within the group; offer assistance; ask for and accept help; ask questions and listen to answers; start and end conversations; persevere; and express opinions and needs in ways that maintain class harmony.

Children require varying amounts of time; planned opportunities to practice new skills' modelling; redirection; and feedback to develop a productive range of personal and social competencies.

**Preparatory numeracy capabilities**

Learning programs provide opportunities for children to explore and enjoy learning mathematical ideas on their own and with others. Activities enable children to solve problems which are meaningful for them. Teachers encourage persistence, curiosity and a willingness to try out new ideas; they engage children in conversations to extend their thinking.

The emergent and subsequent phases of the First Steps in Mathematics diagnostic maps and K-7 Numeracy Net provide a useful focus for planning.

**Quantifying small collections**

Most children enter Kindergarten able to recognise 'one', 'two' or 'three' objects simply by their appearance. This skill is essential for understanding that numbers are used to quantify (that is, to say 'how many' in a collection). It is the basis of early partitioning. Playing card games such as 'snap' help children understand that the same collection can be arranged differently without changing its size. Children should also talk about whether changes they make to a collection make it bigger, smaller or the same. This is the foundation of addition and subtraction.

**Early counting**

In Kindergarten, children copy counting behaviours and try to match one number name to each object as they count to at least four. Learning programs capitalise on stories, songs and chants that include counting (for example, Do we have enough bowls for the three bears?). Teachers' conversations with children should help them understand that the 'one', 'two' or 'three' which children recognise 'just by looking' is the same quantity as the 'one', 'two' or 'three' which they find by counting.

**Regularity**

Regularity underpins many mathematical ideas. Children should have frequent opportunities to make, copy and describe patterns in drawings, music making, songs and when moving to music (for example, clap, stamp, clap, stamp...; my wavy line goes up, down, up...). Drawing children's attention to the regularity of specific routines may help them notice the repeated occurrence of these events.
Preparatory numeracy capabilities (continued)

Sorting and classifying
Kindergarten children need many opportunities to sort and classify collections of objects based on similarity and difference, and to talk about the reasons for their groupings. Activities could include selecting a matching shape from a collection or grouping objects based on their suitability for an intended purpose (for example, groups circular objects together and says 'these are all for wheels').

Shape and position
Learning activities that support the development of children's understanding of shape and position provide opportunities for children to describe and represent key features of shapes found in pictures and objects using everyday language (for example, the pointy one, the wavy side, the sharp corners). Activities include games which require children to respond to and use positional language (for example, under, on top of, behind, near, next to).

Measurement attributes
Most Kindergarten children compare the size of objects by looking at their overall appearance. Planned, play-based activities should challenge children to distinguish between different forms of general bigness. This could include selecting appropriately matched sized containers to hold food for a teddy bears' picnic or deciding whether a piece of material is big enough to be used as a blanket in the doll's pram. Conversations with children include responding to and using the language of the attributes (for example, thin-fat, heavy-light, tall-short).

Preparatory literacy capabilities
Learning programs provide rich opportunities for children to expand their English language skills, knowledge and understandings, building a platform for future literacy learning. It is important for this learning to occur in an environment that engages children with a wealth of literature and enjoyable language and literacy experiences.

Research shows strong links between children's oral language, phonological awareness, vocabulary and print awareness and their success in learning to read and write. It also shows learning programs are most effective when they are tailored to children's pre-existing capacities - stretching those who are ready for greater challenges and supporting those who need more time.

Oral language
Literacy grows from a solid oral language base. Children entering Kindergarten have a wide range of oral language skills and varied experiences of English language and literacy. Teachers build on these language resources as they engage children in meaningful experiences that extend their learning of, about and through English language.

For children whose home language or dialect is not Standard Australian English, starting Kindergarten may be the first time they are immersed in an English speaking environment. Many such children go through a 'silent period' while they begin to acquire English language skills. These children need English teaching programs that specifically address their second language acquisition needs, including explicit teaching of key English language features, vocabulary and usage. Without explicit teaching, the effective acquisition of English may be delayed.

Phonological awareness
Before children can learn to read and write independently they must develop the capacity to distinguish individual sounds within words. This includes the capacity to identify rhyme, syllables, first, last and middle sounds; and identify 'same' and 'different' sounds.

Not all children develop these skills before the end of Kindergarten but learning programs are planned to provide children with every opportunity to do so, and each child's progress is systematically monitored. For advice about developing phonological awareness go to the online resource Words, sounds and letters: Kindergarten (det.wa.edu.au/k12resources).

In any Kindergarten group, there is a range of pre-existing phonological awareness. Children with limited experience of word-and-sound play may require more time to develop these important skills and understandings. Delayed progress may also arise from impaired hearing. Daily 'breathe, blow, cough' routines help to clear blocked ears. It is important that teachers are alert to children who cannot distinguish sounds and arrange for hearing test referrals. This ensures that cases of conductive hearing loss are identified early and appropriate program adjustments can be made.

Vocabulary
As a broad and varied vocabulary is a strong predictor of future literacy development, programs must provide rich and varied experiences that give rise to a wide range of words and ideas. Experiences and activities should capture the interest and imagination of children - taking the lead from things individual children are already interested in, or literature or events - and provide a stimulus for children's reasoning and concept development through extended conversations with educators and each other.

An important aspect of vocabulary development is learning the words that are used to talk about language - 'metalinguage'. There needs to be a lot of talk about talk in the classroom, where language itself is discussed as an object of fascination. In culturally diverse classes, this includes discussing different words and phrases used to mean the same thing in different languages and in non-standard varieties of English.

Families of children who speak a language other than English or a non-standard variety of English need to be assured that their children are learning English at school, but that their continued use of their first language/dialect at home is important. This is because children are still learning their first language/dialect so its continued use at home contributes to their overall concept development, sense of belonging and cultural identity.

Concepts of print
In parallel with phonological awareness and vocabulary, learning programs need to develop children's concepts of print. This includes the knowledge that printed words remain constant; written English goes from left to right, top to bottom; words are separated by spaces; individual letters have a name and a common associated sound, have upper and lower case forms, and can look different across various fonts; and (later) that individual letters and groups of letters can represent several sounds depending on which letters are with them. Extensive advice about developing children's concepts of print is in the First Steps in Literacy resources.