Key 1

Embrace Kindergarten's Multiple Purposes

It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.

—Albert Einstein

The Challenges of Teaching Kindergarten Today

The implementation of standards-based accountability systems has had a significant impact on kindergarten and kindergarten teaching. Standards-based education has created an environment where many teachers feel their ability to decide what knowledge and skills to teach their students has been limited. This focus on standards has intensified the implied expectation to cover content and at a breakneck speed. It seems that standards-based education has shifted kindergarten's focus from the learning process, individuality, and developing the whole child to emphasizing learning outcomes, uniformity, academic achievement, and content mastery. But in reality, standards-based accountability systems actually left the most essential responsibilities and decisions at the heart of kindergarten teaching virtually untouched. Every day, kindergarten teachers across the country continue to thoughtfully design learning experiences that enable the specific, individual children

in our classes to make meaningful connections with a set of important, valuable ideas and skills. The particular bodies of knowledge being taught may have changed, but the decision making that takes place in order for us to help students forge connections with the curriculum is the same as it ever was.

What does that mean exactly? Just this: Regardless of the standards, kindergarten teachers always have a number of students who struggle with the content and skills presented to them, others who flourish, and still others who are on target. All successful kindergarten teachers take the time and effort necessary to make a personal connection to each student and use the knowledge gained as a tool to move that student forward. The state standards and curriculum may not always be developmentally appropriate for all students in the classroom, but the teacher makes a difference through modifications and adaptations that scaffold the struggling student, support the average student, and accelerate the more advanced student. They do this for *all* of their students, everyday, with no exceptions.

Learning-Centered Kindergarten: A Bridge Between Two Worlds

The image of the teacher as a bridge between the child and the curriculum, first introduced by John Dewey over a century ago, is a powerful metaphor for kindergarten teachers seeking to establish learning-centered kindergartens in standards-based educational environments. Dewey argued that the process of education requires an interaction between the child and the curriculum. He also pointed out that this interaction is mediated, facilitated, and supported by the teacher. In other words, for learning to occur teachers must combine their extensive knowledge of the particular needs, strengths, and interests of the specific students in their classes, their knowledge of the state-mandated kindergarten standards, and their knowledge of effective instructional practices to create experiences custom-designed to connect their students to the standards.

One of the great strengths of this model is that it grants teachers tremendous flexibility and unlimited opportunity for creativity and innovation in the bridge-building process. Rather than squeezing teachers tightly between their obligations to teach the standards and their commitment to meet the developmental needs of the students in their classes, Dewey's perspective allows teachers to be strong, competent professionals who are capable of making informed decisions about teaching and learning.

An essential step in establishing yourself as the bridge between your students and the curriculum is to know the standards fully and deeply. Detailed knowledge of your state's kindergarten standards in all content areas will assist you in identifying all the possible points of connection between your students and the information you are expected to teach, and thereby allow you to maximize your students' opportunities to learn. One way to better familiarize yourself with the standards is to discuss them with your colleagues during grade-level planning. A roundtable discussion that includes not only information about the knowledge, skills, and state expectations but also how your peers address the standards in their classroom can supply you with some very concrete applications.

If you are a novice teacher, please keep in mind that even veteran teachers do not have all the answers or teach in child-friendly and developmentally appropriate ways. Seek out the advice of a professional you trust and respect when looking for a collegial partnership. If collegial conversations do not produce the desired effect, using the standards as a guide while creating learning experiences for your students will keep you focused on what is expected as well as what is needed by your students. In Key Ten there will be a more in-depth discussion about how to accomplish this.

In the next few paragraphs, you will read the first of many Classroom Snapshots. This will illustrate how to apply the strategies from each chapter. The first Classroom Snapshot is about a teacher who manages to pull together the traditional vision for kindergarten and the expectations of the state standards in her learning-centered kindergarten classroom by thoroughly knowing both the state standards and her students.

Classroom Snapshot—Ms. Carlos Lesson: Sensory Awareness and Vocabulary Development

Ms. Carlos, a veteran teacher of fifteen years, genuinely enjoys her students and considers them "her kids." This Classroom Snapshot takes place during the second nine weeks of school. Ms. Carlos, as kindergarten teachers do, has laid the groundwork in her classroom by spending the first few weeks of school teaching her students classroom procedures such as behavioral expectations during learning centers, cleaning up work areas, how to participate in small group situations, and what to do if a question arises while Ms. Carlo is working with other students. She is also instilling a belief in her students that learning everyday is *their* responsibility and it is not optional. Because of this final expectation, each child is eager to come to school because they know they will learn *something*.

In the following scenario, Ms. Carlos is presenting a lesson about the five senses. The importance of this particular lesson was made clear to Ms. Carlos after a pretesting activity the previous week and the conversations that ensued. Using a senses game, Ms. Carlos had the students sniff scent jars to distinguish and name the scent. The scents ranged from a variety of fruity scents to soap, flowers, etc. (See the Resources in the back of this book for instructions on how to make your own scent jars.) During the activity, she realized that the many of the students used the term *bubble gum* to associate the natural fruity and minty scents. She knew many of her students were from low economic households. Was it possible they had not experienced tasting and smelling the different fruits in their natural states? She began casually asking her students (usually during snack time) about the types of foods they ate at home, trips to the grocery store, and so forth. She gathered from these casual conversations that many of her students had not experienced fresh fruits and vegetables. While they did have fresh fruit at school and many of them had the canned variety at home, many of the students did not have the developed working vocabulary to name a variety of fresh produce. From these conversations, the lesson below was created. You will see

how Ms. Carlos uses this lesson to address many state standards (listed below in detail) and meet the individual needs of the students at the same time through the learning centers that follow the whole group activity.

State Standards

Science: Scientific Process. The student uses age-appropriate tools and models to verify that organisms and objects and parts of organisms and objects can be observed, described, and measured. The student is expected to identify and use senses as tools of observation; and make observations using tools including hand lenses, balances, cups, bowls, and computers.

Science: Scientific Process. The student develops abilities necessary to do scientific inquiry in the field and the classroom. The student is expected to ask questions about organisms, objects, and events; plan and conduct simple descriptive investigations; gather information using simple equipment and tools to extend the senses; construct reasonable explanations using information; and communicates findings about simple investigations.

Math: Probability and Statistics. The student constructs and uses graphs of real objects or pictures to answer questions. The student is expected to construct graphs using real objects or pictures in order to answer questions and use information from a graph of real objects or pictures in order to answer questions.

Math: Patterns, Relationships, and Algebraic Thinking. The student identifies, extends, and creates patterns. The student is expected to identify, extend, and create patterns of sounds, physical movement, and concrete objects.

Language Arts: **Listening/Speaking/Culture**. The student listens and speaks to gain knowledge of his or her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures. The student is expected to connect experiences and ideas with those of others through speaking and listening.

Language Arts: Listening/Speaking/Purposes. The student listens attentively and engages in a variety of oral language experiences. The student is expected to respond

appropriately and courteously to directions and questions and listen critically to interpret and evaluate.

Language Arts: Listening/Speaking/Communication. The student communicates clearly by putting thoughts and feelings into spoken words. The student is expected to learn the vocabulary of school such as numbers, shapes, colors, directions, and categories; use vocabulary to describe clearly ideas, feelings, and experiences; clarify and support spoken messages using appropriate props such as objects pictures, or charts; and retell a spoken message by summarizing or clarifying.

Language Arts: Reading/Vocabulary Development. The student develops an extensive vocabulary. The student is expected to discuss meanings of words and develop vocabulary through meaningful and concrete experiences; develop vocabulary by listening to and discussing both familiar and conceptually challenging selections read aloud.

Language Arts: **Writing/Spelling/Penmanship**. The student composes original texts. The student is expected to dictate messages such as news and stories for others to write; write labels, notes, and captions for illustrations, possessions, charts, and centers and write to record ideas and reflections.

Whole Group Activity

The children sit on the carpet, "crisscross, applesauce," and almost all eyes are on the teacher. Ms. Carlos is at the front of the classroom sitting in her oversized rocking chair with a large, colorful bag beside her. The students eagerly wait to find out what is inside. "Who's ready to learn?" she asks. All hands shoot up into the air. Some students lift onto their knees to get a closer look. A boy sitting next to Ms. Carlos tries to peek inside the bag. Ms. Carlos smiles at him. "Nice try, but not quite yet." The boy smiles back. He knows whatever is in the bag will be fun.

"Look at my bag. Using what you know about the world around you, predict what you *think* is in the bag."

Immediately, all hands shoot into the air. Some students are making a sound of excited urgency to be called upon. "Jonathan, tell me what you think is in the bag and why you think so."

"Well, I think it is a video game," Jonathan states confidently. "The bag is big enough to hold it, 'cause I have one and I know how big they are."

"That's a pretty good prediction based on what you know." Other children are called upon and share their predictions. They are as varied as the students themselves—some predictions more possible than others. As the students share their ideas, Ms. Carlos gives them more information as to what could be in the bag.

"Let me give you a clue. All great scientists work from clues and make predictions from their clues. The first clue is this: There is more than one item in the bag. With this new information, what do you think is in the bag?" The students continue to make predictions and Ms. Carlos gives another clue—something you can find on a farm, in a grocery store, and something the Very Hungry Caterpillar would like. Within a short time, a child guesses fruit. Indeed there were a variety of fruits in the bag. Ms. Carlos takes out a blindfold and tells her students that they will be using their senses to help them describe the fruits. She has purposefully chosen some fruits the children are familiar with as well as exotic choices. She calls Anthony, the class "scientist," up to sit beside her. She blindfolds him and explains that he will taste the fruit and describe it using his sense of smell and taste. (Important note: Ms. Carlos previously reviewed health cards to check for allergies.) She pulls an apple out of the bag. She hands Anthony and the other children a piece of the apple. She has instructed the students that they are not to give any hints, but they can experience it with him.

Anthony smells the apple slice but cannot describe the apple. He then tastes it and knows that it is an apple. Ms. Carlos writes the word *apple* on chart paper and draws an apple beside the word.

"How did you know that it was an apple?" she asks.

"It tasted like apple."

"Describe how it tastes and feels in your mouth."

"It is crunchy and good."

Ms. Carlos writes *crunchy* and *good* on the chart paper. "Okay. What else?"

"It is a little bit sweet, but a little bit sour."

Ms. Carlos takes the blindfold off the student and writes the words *sweet* and *sour* on the chart paper. "Anthony, the words sweet and sour are opposites. Can you explain how the apple can be both sweet and sour?"

"It was sweet when I first tasted it, but when I bit it, it was a little bit sour."

"That is excellent work! Who would like to add some descriptive words?" The students share their descriptions and Ms. Carlos adds them to the chart—*wet, juicy, hard.* After a few minutes of sharing, she continues the process through the choices of fruits: pear, papaya, banana, strawberries, oranges, watermelon, and grapes. The students have an opportunity to try each and give a description. Not all fruits are accepted with the same eagerness, but Ms. Carlos encourages the students to try them and compare the tastes and textures "in the name of science."

As the children taste, Ms. Carlos questions them about prior experiences: Have you tasted this before? Where in the world do you think this fruit comes from? What type of plant do you think it grows on? The discussion provides the students an opportunity to share what they know, experience problem solving situations, and share personal information with their peers, thus building a community in the classroom.

After the lesson, Ms. Carlos explains the work the children will be doing in each of the learning centers. She walks from center to center, explaining and reviewing the expectations and procedures from each area. Ms. Carlos uses the learning centers to spiral skills and experiences previously taught to the students in a new and novel way, as well as to provide a time for her to work in small groups or independently with students. The students are called to learning centers today by shirt color. Each child is allowed to choose where he or she will work. They collect a list of centers that they can mark off as they complete each one. (See the Resources in the back of this book for a description of procedures for successful centers and for examples of center checklists.) As in many kindergarten classrooms,

Ms. Carlos uses a thematic approach to teaching her students. Today, fruit is the vehicle by which the teacher continues the theme from her whole group activity to provide varied and novel experiences in all subjects. The following describes how Ms. Carlos modifies each center to meet student needs and abilities.

Learning Centers

1. **Scented play dough.** This center provides students an opportunity to use and develop fine motor muscles while benefiting from other sensory experiences. The students enjoy creating fruit shapes and "cookies" using cookie cutters. (See the Resources at the back of this book for a scented play dough recipe.) Conversations are lively and enthusiastic as language development abounds. The students discuss the fruity scents of the play dough—not just "bubble gum." Success!!
2. **Scented painting.** The students attempt to draw a still life of fruits using scented paint (or scented markers) and color their drawing with the same scent as the fruit. Learners begin by drawing fruit shapes with pencils and then filling in the shapes with paint. Scented watercolor paint consists of unsweetened fruit drink powder mixed with water. Use less water than directed to intensify the color and provide a thicker consistency.
3. **Patterning with fruit**. This math activity revisits a skill using fruit as a novel way to increase interest for students. Ms. Carlos uses a parent volunteer at this center, but if that is not available to you, the teacher could monitor this center to ensure the fruits were managed in an acceptable way and to facilitate conversations. The students are allowed to create fruit kabobs using fruits from the morning activity. Students must create a pattern and duplicate the pattern visually on a recording sheet. The difficulty of the pattern will depend upon the ability of the student. Students are also given a choice in how to represent

the pattern on the recording sheet as well as justifying their choices. Each fruit kabob is placed on a paper plate, marked with the appropriate student's name, and put into a refrigerator to be consumed by the creator during afternoon snack. This center will be replaced on day two with fruit-shaped stamps so students can create patterns without the need for replenishing fruits each day. All students will need to participate in this center on day one if the kabobs are going to be used as afternoon snack, or the teacher must allow the students an opportunity to create one during snack time.

4. **Fruity graphs.** This math activity allows students an opportunity to create a graph using fruit-shaped erasers. Graphing is not a new skill or concept for these children, but the spiraling of this skill provides problem solving experiences in a familiar way. In this activity, each child takes a handful of erasers and draws the corresponding number of each fruit on the graph. This activity can be modified for students with learning challenges by using a buddy system, parent volunteer, or adapting the materials: using fewer choices of fruit shapes; allowing for fewer of each choice; allowing students to use fruit-shaped stamps or stickers instead of drawing on the graph; or finding fruit-shaped clip art for students to cut and paste onto the graph. As students become more proficient at graphing, problem-solving questions can be added to the activity—for example, how many fruits were from trees? How many more fruits had covering that need to be removed than fruits with covering you can eat?

5. **Journal writing**. Journal writing is a learning center activity that is a constant in Ms. Carlos's room. The students must come to this center daily. Using different writing prompts or props to inspire their writing—sometimes using tracers, stickers, or ink pads and rubber stamps to help draw the picture which provokes a writing topic—the learners grow and develop a sense of self through writing. The writing expectations Ms. Carlos has for the students' journal follow the developmental stages of the individual student.

She allows and accepts their writing attempts, while encouraging them to grow and develop. Today's writing prompt is a response to the learning activity in whole group. The students write about something they learned and share their opinions about the different fruits they tasted. They begin by drawing a picture and then write about the experience. When they are ready to move to the next center, they bring their journal to Ms. Carlos and explain what they have written. For students who are in the pre-writing stages, Ms. Carlos takes dictation for them. Some students use the words written on the chart from the lesson to help them write the words they need. (See the Resources in the back of this book for a sample writing prompt.)

6. **Listening center.** The listening center is another constant in Ms. Carlos's room. At least weekly, the students listen and respond to a story on tape. Ms. Carlos gives the students a different purpose for listening each week, which revolves around language development, concepts in print and phonemic awareness, and reading comprehension. This week's selection, *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, is a classroom favorite. The students record the sequence of events in the story using pictures and words when possible.

7. **Science exploration**. The children compare attributes and elements of each fruit using their senses and a hand lens. Using a recording sheet to document their findings, the students share their observations about the size, shape, color, smell, textures, and seeds of each item through invented spellings and drawings. Today, Ms. Carlos assists the students by taking dictation of their observations and comments as well as guiding them through thoughtful discussions about the fruit and the use of their senses. She will use these observations as part of an assessment of the whole group activity.

8. **Grocery store**. In the housekeeping area, students use old cardboard boxes, plastic food, plastic jars and food containers, and other items to create a grocery store.

Ms. Carlos leaves plenty of newsprint and markers in the learning center so the students are able to create sales flyers and signs. Ads from the local Sunday newspaper add environmental print and a real-world connection to this learning center; this also facilitates and encourages writing. Baby dolls, dress-up clothing, and a toy shopping cart complete the area for an enjoyable language and cultural experience.

9. **Computers**. The students always enjoy using the computer. Another way standards are met in Ms. Carlos's room, the computer allows students to practice skills, create products such as books or pictures, read stories, or learn through interactive videos to reinforce skills learned in class. Today, Ms. Carlos chose a site (http://www.dole5aday.com) where the students can play educational games or listen to music and watch a video about the benefits of eating five helpings of fruits and vegetables a day.
10. **Sand table.** The sand table is another favorite in the classroom. Today the students compare and explore the capacity of jars and containers. This center is used daily and the information and skills gained from this experience resurface when Ms. Carlos discusses measurement later in the year.
11. **Blocks.** Blocks are another staple in Ms. Carlos's classroom. The blocks are for pure student enjoyment, development of spatial relationships, problem solving, creative and vocabulary development, as well as developing social skills.

Reflection on the Classroom Snapshot

Teaching the standards in a developmentally appropriate way is an obvious solution to the challenge of integrating the standards into our existing kindergarten practices. As illustrated by the Classroom Snapshot, Ms. Carlos utilizes her depth of knowledge about her students—the discussions and discovery of her students' inexperience and lack of knowledge about real fruit—and her knowledge of the standards to create a lesson that is developmentally appropriate

for all students while meeting the state expectations. Ms. Carlos frequently reads the state standards when she is creating lessons and discusses them with colleagues during grade-level planning meetings. It is the time and effort spent to understand the state standards and her students that helps her align the lessons to meet her students' needs.

As illustrated in the Classroom Snapshot, thorough knowledge of the standards and a deep understanding of students' abilities allow teachers to take a proactive stance and help others, such as administrators, parents, and colleagues, see the outstanding opportunities for meaningful learning experiences. Newsletters to parents and other public forms of communication that deliberately highlight the specific standards being taught in child-centered, play-based lessons are a way to communicate that the standards are an explicit and visible part of classroom life. A classroom or hallway bulletin board becomes more than a way to share student work; it becomes a billboard that demonstrates the connection between the standards and students' work, especially when they include labels designed to highlight that important information. (This is discussed further in Key 9.)

Beginning kindergarten teachers—whether novices just entering the profession or experienced teachers moving to kindergarten from another grade level—are fortunate to be able to weave the standards into their kindergarten practices from the start. Though they need time and guidance to develop the skills necessary to teach young learners effectively, beginning kindergarten teachers have the opportunity to lead the way in establishing a professional perspective in which deep knowledge of the standards and a strong commitment to meeting the varying needs of their students are understood to be inseparable partners.

Guiding Principles and Practical Strategies

When reflecting upon your teaching and practices in a learning-centered classroom, it is important to shift your professional focus from accountability to responsibility. Accountability may be the official term preferred by administrators and legislators, but this word fails to capture the deep ethical and interpersonal engagement that is fundamental to teaching kindergarten. Rather than being driven by a need for accountability, kindergarten teachers are motivated by a commitment to responsibility to the students in their classes, to the students' parents and families, to the students' futures, and to the

democratic goals and purposes of public school. Positioning the need to teach the standards as a professional responsibility rather than a bureaucratic obligation will help us to find a comfortable place for the standards in our caring, learning-centered kindergarten classrooms.

Strategy: Form study groups to look closely at the standards.

Collaborate with kindergarten teachers at your campus or schools in your district to deepen your knowledge of the standards and to focus on the relationship between the standards and your curriculum and practices. Your study group might want to

- figure out how the standards fit into your established kindergarten programs;
- develop innovative ways to enrich existing units by incorporating additional standards;
- find ways in which the expertise and knowledge in your students' families can be utilized to strengthen your standards-based lessons; and
- brainstorm ways to modify and adapt lessons to meet the needs of all students.

Remember that your goal is to move your students toward mastery of the knowledge and skills contained in the standards. For teachers faced with the pressure to cover a great deal of content in a short period of time, following your district's scope and sequence or pacing guide—perhaps even checking off the skills that you taught the students and activities you completed with them—can easily become a daily goal. Do not lose sight of your responsibility to the students and their learning. Truly, your daily goal is to move all of the students in your class toward mastery of the standards in a way and at a pace that provides for meaningful learning for each child. The students' learning is the bottom line of teaching.

Strategy: Utilize assessment tools frequently to maintain a strong understanding of your students' growth and learning.

These tools can range can from casual conversations and teacher observations to performance assessments and rubrics. You should use any method available to gain information about each child's interest and growth. Strengthening your knowledge about your students as learners enhances your connection to them, improves your effectiveness in teaching them, and keeps your professional focus on the best, most

satisfying part of kindergarten teaching: developing and sustaining meaningful relationships with young children. When evaluating your students' academic progress, don't stop with the screening tools and standardized assessments selected by your district. Make regular, ongoing use of informal, teacher-developed assessment tools that focus more broadly on students' developing competencies, on their beliefs about themselves as learners, and on their growth in the social, emotional, and physical development domains. Here are just a few suggestions.

- Anecdotal observations—kindergarten teachers are masters of observing and diagnosing the needs and strengths of their students. With the current focus of standardized and state or district testing, teachers sometimes question the value or reliability of this important tool.
- Reflective notes—these differ from anecdotal observations in that the teacher is reflecting upon the lesson and overall impact upon the learning community. This exercise provides the teacher with insights of what teaching practices are effective with his or her students.
- Documented conversations—this assessment practice is where the teacher simply transcribes (or records) the conversations of students in a learning situation. The depth of information gained through these conversations can be very powerful: The teacher learns what the students know, what they are interested in learning, how well they problem solve, and the complexity of language development, just to name a few things.
- Learning photographs and video footage—visual documentation of students who are problem solving and working through learning opportunities. A picture *is* worth a thousand words.
- Work samples with supporting documentation or work portfolios—while samples of student work are very valuable, the additional supporting documentation (teacher notes about what was occurring during the assessment) creates a clearer picture of what the student was thinking and the learning process. Organizing the assessment in a way that provides a way to easily collect the data and relay the information to parents and families is vital.

Use Your Professional Knowledge Base to Guide Your Practice

Your professional knowledge base is your number one tool for helping your students master the knowledge and skills presented in the standards. Using the professional knowledge you have acquired in a responsive, creative way will ensure student success. This includes using activities, strategies, and materials that will allow your students to engage with the standards in meaningful and powerful ways.

Strategy: Raise your expectations for your students' achievement far beyond the limitations of the kindergarten standards.

Read more about accommodations recommended for gifted and talented learners and use those strategies in your class to provide intellectual enrichment for all students. Teacher materials by Johnson, Polette, and Kingore suggest high interest, critical thinking and learning opportunities for students of varying ability levels (see "Helpful Readings to Strengthen Your Knowledge Base" at the end of this book). Providing a rigorous curriculum for all students will not diminish the quality of opportunities and experiences you provide for your gifted students. Having time to work with intellectual peers and having choices in topics and activities will challenge more advanced learners and enhance and individualize their learning experiences.

Opportunity for Professional Growth

The obligation to teach the standards can feel like an overwhelming burden to endure; however, it can provide teachers with a wonderful opportunity for professional growth and renewal. Use the new expectations as a springboard for revitalizing your curriculum, refreshing your practices, developing your professional knowledge base, or learning new content.

Strategy: Think outside of the box.

Teachers can use creative methods to teach the standards. The following are good starting points.

- Develop interdisciplinary connections or thematic units across the content areas. In the Classroom Snapshot, Ms. Carlos used a thematic unit on the five senses to make connections across content areas. Fruit was not the focus of the lesson, but it became a vehicle by which the students were able to discover and develop new skills and concepts. By using a multisensory approach, she provided interest and novelty for knowledge and skills being revisited and offered new learning opportunities not yet experienced by some of her students.
- Integrate the arts into your curriculum. Research shows that the arts enhance and enrich the core curriculum for all students, giving them deeper understanding of the content, better problem solving and critical thinking skills, and a more complex lens through which to view and appreciate the world around them (Deasy, 2002). Yet in many school districts the arts—music, drama, and visual art programs—are being cut. Teachers are being asked to provide adequate coverage of this content as well as the content of core subjects. As states focus upon the core subjects in the upper elementary grades, the academic discourse of shoving more into the curriculum of the early childhood grades leaves teachers feeling that the arts are fluff that should be discarded. Putting the arts back into the curriculum adds elements of interest and creativity into normally mundane and repetitive tasks.

- Find ways to move the kids and the learning outdoors and bring real-world applications to concepts learned in the classroom by forming partnerships with community members. Field-based instruction, frequent theme-based walks in the neighborhood, and parades that celebrate learning can all be a part of learners' academic experience. Field trips do not need to be lengthy or costly to provide optimal learning opportunities—simple trips to the local grocery store, walks in the neighborhood, or even around the school can provide numerous teachable moments on a variety of academic levels.
- Partner with an upper-grade teacher to create mixed-age lessons that allow the older and younger students to construct meaning together in activities designed to draw on your knowledge of child-centered, hands-on practices and the upper-grade teacher's knowledge of more complex levels of the skills and concepts being taught.
- Explore the possibilities of using the technology available at your school campus—or technology you use readily in your personal life—in new and exciting ways in the classroom: a digital camera to create books focusing upon a new concept or a presentation for open-house, a video camera to create a movie written and performed by your students, Web pages, podcasting, or e-mail.

Pulling It All Together

When creating a learning-centered classroom, the teacher

- understands that the implementation of standards-based education has changed certain aspects of kindergarten, but that many key features of learning-centered kindergarten teaching remain the same;
- serves as a bridge connecting the students and the curriculum;
- makes informed decisions about teaching and learning based on thorough knowledge of the standards;
- knows more than just the standards, including how students learn and in-depth knowledge about his or her students;
- develops lessons that teach the standards while also addressing the needs of the whole child; and

- is creative and integrates standards from different content areas in a single lesson or revisits prior knowledge and skills to provide students with practice and reinforcement.

Reflection . . .

- How well do you know your students?
- Do you have daily conversations with them?
- How often do you use the information gained from casual conversations with your students to create lessons that are meaningful and interesting to them?
- How do you modify the lessons and activities so that all students can learn?
- How well do you know your state standards?
- What part do standards play in guiding your instruction and creating engaging work for your students?
- How do you communicate the connection between the practices in your classroom and the state standards to others?
- How does your school's curriculum connect to the standards?