

Chapter 1:

Kindergarten in Manitoba: Past and Present

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A Brief History of Kindergarten in Manitoba

Kindergarten began in the nineteenth century. It means “a garden for children,” a place where children are nurtured and allowed to grow at their own pace.

Some Kindergarten teachers are surprised to learn that Manitoba’s Kindergartens have a robust play-based history that stretches back well over one hundred years, although in their early days they operated as social welfare initiatives rather than as part of the public education system. A goal of early Kindergartens was to promote the assimilation of newcomer children to life in Canada, and they provided clothing, meals, and even shelter.

Records show that the Winnipeg Free Kindergarten Association opened a free Kindergarten in a storefront as early as 1892 (Prochner, “A History” 23–24). The Association consisted of upper- and middle-class women who believed in the “reformative” power of Kindergarten to provide relief to the city’s disadvantaged children. Winnipeg’s free Kindergartens became the best known across Canada. In their earliest days, Kindergartens in Manitoba employed trained teachers who were educated in Chicago and who followed the play-based pedagogical approach promoted by Friedrich Froebel, the founder of Kindergarten. In Froebel’s view, “play . . . is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul” (Froebel 50).



Free Kindergarten, Swedish Lutheran Church, Winnipeg, 1899.

Source: Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg—Schools—Free Kindergarten 1 (N5814). Reproduced with permission.

In the early twentieth century, there was no compulsory school law, so Association members believed that Kindergarten would instill a love of learning in young children that would keep them engaged in the years after. Therefore, Kindergarten was available for children six to eight years of age. After Manitoba’s compulsory school attendance legislation was passed in 1916, Kindergartens were open to children four and five years of age and might have as many as 70 children per session. Following the First World War, some of Winnipeg’s Kindergartens became more influenced by John Dewey’s education pedagogy and grew more structured and theme-based (Prochner, *A History*). The Association, which was renamed the Kindergarten Settlement Association in 1915, resisted the movement away from play-based learning. The Association rented

several classrooms from the Winnipeg School Division in the early twentieth century to house additional Kindergartens, but they operated autonomously of the board.

A number of churches also opened Kindergartens as part of their mission work, especially in Winnipeg's North End. Their teachers were also trained, and many worked both in mission schools and for the Association.



All People's Mission Kindergarten, Winnipeg, 1904.
Source: Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg—Churches—All People's Mission—Maple Street Church 3 (N13261).
Reproduced with permission.



Source: Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada. Peretz School Kindergarten, morning class, Winnipeg, 1925. Reproduced with permission.

What was the Manitoba Kindergarten experience like in those early days? In 1922, the *Manitoba Free Press* described Kindergarten as follows:

“There is a garden in every childhood, an enchanted place where colours are brighter, the air softer, and the morning more fragrant than ever again” (Lawrence 24).

Taking the circle as a symbol of Unity, the school session is begun each day with the chairs placed in a circle: See the bright picture presenting itself when each small chair is filled with a tiny person wearing an eager, expectant smile. The session begins with each little head bowed to sing their good morning prayer—the child's simple thank you for God's care; next a burst of song, greetings to all, for they dearly love to sing good morning to the sunshine, flowers, animals, etc. The kindergartner [teacher] now plays the piano, several songs of the trade world, nature and home are sung with gestures in a cheery manner. Rhythms follow for about ten minutes, marching like soldiers, front and side skips, imitations of galloping, etc. By such exercises to music the children develop grace and poise of body and self-activity. A chord on the piano tells the children to take chairs to the tables. Here, in groups of ten or so, they are soon as busy as bees. Some make paper flowers, others draw, while others build wonderful castles out of blocks—crude, perhaps, to the adult eye, but praised by the teacher for the effort more than the result. Then comes the story time. Seated on the floor with the smaller children in the front everyone is “all attention” while the teacher expounds the mysteries of fairyland. Games come next. These are for the purpose of developing the sense of sight, hearing, smell and taste. It is now 12 o'clock and the children march out to the singing of “Goodbye, Dear Teacher, Goodbye”.

The present kindergarten has an enrolment of 63 children and is supported by the school board, under the directorship of Miss Edith Deacon and an assistant teacher.*

* Source: *Manitoba Free Press*. “Kindergarten Settlement Association Organized Thirty Years Ago Is Doing Splendid Work.” *Manitoba Free Press* [Winnipeg] 21 Oct. 1922: 10. Available on the *Winnipeg Free Press* Archives website at <<http://archives.winnipegfreepress.com/winnipeg-free-press/1922-10-21/page-10?tag=kindergarten&rtserp=tags/kindergarten?ndt=by&py=1922&pey=1922>> (21 Nov. 2014).

During the 1920s, play was considered the child's natural occupation, necessary for physical and psychological growth; Kindergartens, therefore, existed primarily for socialization. Children were left largely on their own, with time, space, and materials for experimentation. The teacher encouraged self-motivation and self-help and provided suggestions for physical, mental, and sensory activities.

During the 1930s and 1940s, new insights into personality development illustrated the importance of allowing children to express their emotions freely. While play remained the most important activity for children, it also became the vehicle through which emotional growth could be stimulated. The need for children to be dependently secure before they could be independently secure was recognized.

The Free Kindergarten Association worked for decades to secure a place within the public school system for Kindergarten (Prochner, "A History" 37). The official history of the Winnipeg School Division (Chafe) shows that trustees were unreceptive to an appeal made in 1914, but after a second appeal in 1920, the board agreed to pay the salary of a teacher for one term, an arrangement that was renewed annually through the 1920s. It was not until the 1940s, however, that Kindergarten was made an integral part of the system (Chafe 99). The history attributes the slowness of the board to sponsor Kindergartens on a larger scale to concerns about its experimental nature, the shortage of trained Kindergarten teachers, and overcrowded schools. The situation changed with the Second World War, and the number of public schools with Kindergartens in Winnipeg grew from four in 1943 to 37 by 1948 (Chafe 99). By 1958, there were Kindergartens in all schools in the Winnipeg School Division (Prochner, "A History" 38).

In the 1930s and 1940s, the emphasis of Kindergarten changed as more became known about the development of intelligence. Teachers adjusted their approaches to give added attention to language and conceptual growth. Emphasis on sensory and motor development was retained.

The Manitoba government provided grants for Kindergarten children for the first time in 1967, thereby encouraging all school divisions to establish such programming. In 1968, Manitoba Education issued the first Kindergarten curriculum guide, with the following educational philosophy:

The kindergarten provides a carefully planned program of learning experiences based on knowledge of the common characteristics and needs of this age group, and on the unique potentialities and needs of each child. The program is different from that of the nursery school or the more formal grade one. It is one in which the numerous informal learning experiences help to develop readiness for the various school subjects but it does not include the formal teaching of any one of these.

Basic factors in developing such a program [include] . . . a well-arranged environment that invites exploration in a number of different centres of interest and with a variety of media, toys and material [and] a variety of activities which provide all children with the opportunity of doing something at which they can succeed. (Manitoba Education, *Kindergarten* 7)



Source: Manitoba Education. *Kindergarten*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education, 1968. 6. Photo: By the Photographic Section, Department of Industry and Commerce, Manitoba Government.

In the early 1970s, the government established an Early Years Program Review Committee, and in 1976, its members determined to revise or replace the Kindergarten curriculum guide. The committee requested that Manitoba Education develop a major resource for the teachers of Manitoba's young children to assist them in providing a rich and stimulating environment for growth and learning. In 1979, the International Year of the Child, Manitoba Education published *Early Childhood: A Time for Learning, A Time for Joy* (written by Betty Gibson).

During the 1980s, Kindergarten and play-based learning were of increasing interest to both the Manitoba government and the Manitoba Teachers' Society (MTS). In 1982, MTS published *Kids! A Study of Manitoba Kindergartens: Programs and Services*, rejecting "the prevalent trend towards hurrying children away from the enriching aspects of play and into the narrower confines of 'real work'" (ix). MTS also rejected "the anticipatory notion held by some teachers of preparing children at every level for the one that follows. This practice never allows children to focus on the now, upon the wonders of today and living

it to its fullest" (ix). Instead, MTS promoted an early childhood philosophy based on the needs and interests of the child, centred on play, group activities, an informal atmosphere, and lots of language (ix). In 1984, MTS published *Kindergarten and Nursery Teachers Needs Assessment Report*, which identified pre-service and in-service needs of early childhood teachers.

In 1985, the Manitoba government conducted a Manitoba Kindergarten Assessment, which examined Kindergarten classrooms in English language, French immersion, and heritage language programs, as well as classrooms in Franco-Manitoban schools. Recommendations included increasing the size of Kindergarten classrooms; focusing room decorations on children's work rather than on commercial or teachers' work; locating washrooms in Kindergarten classrooms; ensuring children had direct entrance to the outdoors and to playground space; and ensuring regular access to the library, music rooms, gymnasium, and so on (Manitoba Education, *Manitoba Kindergarten Assessment*).

Both MTS and the provincial Early Years Program Review Committee advised that class size should not exceed 20 students and that the department develop a policy on this issue. (In 2012, the Reduced Class Size Initiative did just that, capping Manitoba Kindergarten classes at no more than 20 students.)

Whether Kindergarten was offered on a daily half-day basis, or on alternating full days, the key advice in 1985 was to build in flexibility in order to respond to teacher observations of children’s development and learning needs. Teachers were advised to avoid time-allocated “lesson plans” and to broaden the use of themes to ensure integration of material from all areas of the curriculum, as suggested by the curriculum guides of the time. The use of stencilled worksheets and workbooks was discouraged in Kindergarten.

In-class observations and surveys conducted as part of the 1985 Manitoba Kindergarten Assessment showed that too much time was being spent on whole-group instruction and not enough time on play activity sessions. The report recommended a minimum of one hour of uninterrupted free-choice play in a half-day class, and reminded teachers that Kindergarten children learn best through play and must be given adequate time to pursue self-initiated activities. School divisions were advised to provide professional development opportunities in the use of play.

Manitoba’s Early Years Program Review Committee subsequently requested an update of and an expansion to *Early Childhood: A Time for Learning, A Time for Joy*. In 1986, Manitoba Education published *The Early Years: A Time for Learning, A Time for Joy: A Sourcebook for Kindergarten, Grade 1, and Grade 2* (revised by Karen Botting), followed in 1992 with *A Time for Learning, A Time for Joy: A Sourcebook for Grades 3 and 4* (Manitoba Education and Training).

In 2008, the department published *Listening and Speaking: First Steps into Literacy: A Support Document for Kindergarten Teachers and Speech-Language Pathologists*, which referenced the earlier sourcebook, asserting that

the Kindergarten classroom in Manitoba has a longstanding tradition of being a place for *a time for learning, a time for joy*. This philosophy of learning and teaching, based on theories of early childhood, is still the basis of today’s Kindergarten English language arts curriculum. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth 5)

Kindergarten Today

As you reflect on the history of Kindergarten in our province, you may smile at some of the obvious differences between the past and present, but also at some of the similarities. Today, every school division across Manitoba offers Kindergarten, and most children attend Kindergarten.

The following chart provides a little more detail about the state of Kindergarten at the time this document was developed.

Key Characteristics of Manitoba Kindergarten and Enrolment*	
Basis of attendance	Optional
Age eligibility	5 years by December 31
Hours of instruction	468 hours in 2014/2015
Delivery format	Varies by school board
Class size	Limit of 20 for Kindergarten to Grade 3 by September 2017
Enrolment	14,307 (as of September 30, 2014) (93% in public schools and 7% in funded independent schools)*
*Note: The enrolment figure excludes Kindergarten enrolment in First Nations schools administered under educational agreement by Frontier and Park West school divisions, in non-funded independent schools, and those children who are home schooled. Approximately 86% of Manitoba's population of five-year-olds (on-reserve and off-reserve) attend Kindergarten in public and funded independent schools. Approximately 96% of Manitoba's population of five-year-olds (off-reserve only) attend Kindergarten in public and funded independent schools.	

In 2011, Manitoba Education established the Early Childhood Education Unit (ECEU) to provide leadership and support to school divisions in the area of early learning for children up to the age of eight years. Through a collaborative approach, the unit partners with school divisions, other government departments (provincial and federal), Manitoba Early Learning and Child Care, educational stakeholder groups, and parents to promote developmentally appropriate programming and services that help prepare children for successful school entry and optimal learning in the Early Years.

In 2012, Manitoba's Minister of Education and all the provincial and territorial counterparts endorsed the *CMEC Statement on Play-Based Learning* (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada). This important document validates the playful approach to learning that was present in the earliest days of Manitoba's Kindergarten movement.

By September 2017, school divisions in Manitoba will be required to cap their Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms at 20 students (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, *Smaller Classes*). Smaller class sizes contribute significantly to improving Kindergarten children's achievement, as students do better when they receive more one-on-one time with their teachers (Finn, Suriani, and Achilles).

Today, there are diverse approaches to Kindergarten across Manitoba school divisions. Some Kindergartens operate the full day, every day, while many in rural Manitoba operate the full day, on alternate days. Some operate at 0.6 time, and others have multi-age classes, blending Kindergarten children with younger peers or with those in Grades 1, 2, and 3. However, the majority of Manitoba's Kindergartens operate half days, five days per week.

Manitoba's Kindergarten curriculum is outcome-based and organized into six subject areas: arts education, English or French language arts, mathematics, physical education/health education, science, and social studies. English as an additional language is also considered curriculum. Each subject-specific curriculum framework document identifies student learning outcomes. Four required foundation skill areas are also incorporated into the curriculum: literacy and communication, problem solving, human relations, and technology.

Curriculum outcomes are best achieved in Kindergarten environments where principles of developmentally appropriate instructional practices (such as attention to the diversity of learners), child-centredness, purposeful play, and inquiry are the foundation of all learning experiences. Kindergarten teachers facilitate optimal student learning by being reflective practitioners who use planned observation and a range of assessment strategies to provide instruction that is appropriate for each child. These big ideas are more fully explored throughout the remainder of this resource.

Nursery School and Junior Kindergarten

Across Manitoba, some school divisions offer a preschool option for four-year-olds. This option may be called junior Kindergarten, nursery school, or *prématernelle*. The rationale for offering school-based learning for four-year-olds is common across school divisions and is typically seen as an early intervention program and/or as a way to ease children's transition to Kindergarten and the school experience.

Currently, Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning does not mandate nursery school for four-year-olds and does not stipulate a specific curriculum for use with this age group. Some school divisions have developed their own curricular resources for use in classrooms for four-year-olds. The department suggests that teachers use a play-based approach congruent with what is recommended for Kindergarten-age children. Teachers of pre-Kindergarten children can use all the content within this support document as well.

Multi-age Classrooms

In some school divisions, due to philosophical choice or demographic necessity, Kindergarten children may be grouped with younger children (as in combined classes of four- and five-year-olds) or with older children in Grades 1, 2, and 3. This grouping is known as a multi-age or multilevel classroom:

A [multi-age] classroom is one in which the developmental range is wider than that in a single-grade classroom. . . . Children’s developmental diversity is celebrated, valued as part of a natural community of learners, and is harnessed in subtle ways to support learning. . . . It is not a classroom where a (for example) “second-grade” curriculum and a “first-grade curriculum” go on simultaneously. All children may work on the same topic but in different ways or at their own individual speed. (Bingham et al. 6–8)

Bingham et al. define some of the beliefs held by teachers of multi-age classrooms, and these are highly congruent with those of early childhood educators. These include shared beliefs about the essential nature of active, concrete learning for young children, the importance of community to children’s learning, the value of continuity in the school setting to young children, and the role of the teacher as a co-learner along with children.

Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning believes that *in multilevel classrooms, diversity and time are not challenges to be overcome but assets and resources to promote learning*. Figure 1.2 reflects Manitoba’s outcome-based curricula grounded in social constructivist underpinnings and current brain-based research. (You will read more about these ideas in Chapter 3.)

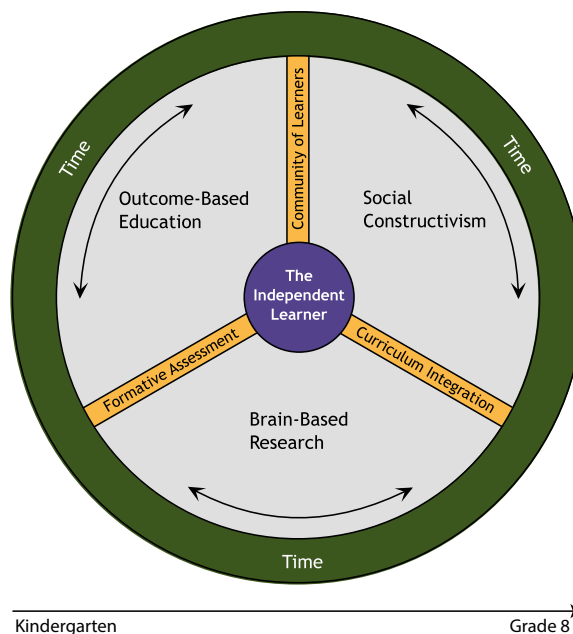


Figure 1.2:
**Continuum of Learning in the
Multilevel Classroom***

* Source: Manitoba Education and Youth. *Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003. vii. Available online at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/multilevel/index.html.

When planning learning experiences for, and setting up, your multi-age classroom environment, remain mindful of developmentally appropriate practices for your youngest students. Note that the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) promotes this approach not only for Kindergarten children, but also for children in Grades 1 through 3. To learn more about developmentally appropriate practices, brain research, and constructivism, as well as Jerome Bruner's ideas about the spiral curriculum, see Chapter 3. Inquiry-based planning supports are discussed in Chapter 4.



Animate and Inanimate

Children whose first language is Ojibwe or Cree may understand the concepts of “animate” and “inanimate” differently from children whose first language is English. Keep this in mind, particularly for instructional activities that address the concepts of living and non-living things. For example, in Ojibwe, “feather” is animate and “river” is inanimate” (Native Languages of the Americas).

Multilevel classrooms may explore topics from various grades that relate to each other to form an overall theme. In this way, the learning outcomes from several grades can be addressed at the same time. A Kindergarten to Grade 3 teacher may, for example, create a Living Things theme incorporating the four Life Science clusters (Kindergarten—Trees; Grade 1—Characteristics and Needs of Living Things; Grade 2—Growth and Changes in Animals; and Grade 3—Growth and Changes in Plants).

Wherever you are in Manitoba, and regardless of the makeup of the class you teach, Kindergarten-age children have many of the same needs. Children's first school experience is of paramount importance, and they are sure to thrive when your play-based environment and holistic approach to teaching and learning are intentionally designed to meet their developmental needs and the Kindergarten curriculum outcomes.

Summary

This chapter discussed the historical context for Manitoba's play-based Kindergartens. Information about the types of Kindergarten settings available to young learners gave you an opportunity to consider your own place in the history of Kindergarten. Chapter 2 introduces the play-based approach to Kindergarten.



Continue Your Learning

For more information and resources on the topic of multi-age classrooms, see:

Manitoba Education and Youth. *Independent Together: Supporting the Multilevel Learning Community*. Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003. Available online at <www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/multilevel/index.html> (5 Feb. 2014).