

Franklin Commons Child Development Center

Curriculum

May 2009

The Creative Curriculum for Early Childhood

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Our Philosophy

The philosophy behind our curriculum is that young children learn best by doing. Learning requires active thinking to find out how things work in the world we live in

In their early years, children explore the world around them by using **all** their senses (touching, tasting, listening, smelling, and looking).

In using real materials such as blocks and trying out their ideas, children learn about sizes, shapes, and colors, and they notice relationships between things. In time, they learn to use one object to stand for another. This is the beginning of symbolic thinking; applying symbols to things.

For example, they might pretend a stick is an airplane or a round block is a hamburger. These early symbols - the stick and the block - are similar in shape to the objects they represent.

Gradually children become more and more able to use abstract symbols like words to describe their thoughts, feelings and ideas

They learn to "**read**" pictures which are symbols of real people, places and things emotions and ideas. This exciting development in symbolic thinking takes place during the pre-school years as children **play**.

Our curriculum identifies goals in all areas of development:

Social: To help children feel comfortable in school, trust their new environment, make friends, and feel they are a part of the group.

Emotional: To help children experience pride and self- confidence, develop independence and self-control, and have a positive attitude toward life.

Cognitive: To help children become confident learners by letting them try out their own ideas and experience success, and by helping them acquire **learning skills** such

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as the ability to solve problems, ask questions, and use words to describe their ideas, observations, and feelings.

Physical: To help children increase their large and small muscle skills and feel confident about what their bodies can do.

How we teach the Creative Curriculum: Play

Play provides the foundation for academic or "school" learning. It is the preparation children need before they learn highly abstract symbols such as letters (which are symbols for sounds) and numbers (which are symbols for number concepts).

Play enables us to achieve the key goals of our early childhood curriculum. Play is the work of young children.

The activities we plan for children, the way we organize the environment, select toys and materials, plan the daily schedule, and talk with children, are all designed to accomplish the goals of our curriculum and give the child a successful start in school.

What We Do and Why

Block Play:

Blocks, the hard wood units, and some plastic, that comes in proportional sizes and shapes, are one of the **most valuable learning materials** in our classroom. When they build with blocks, children learn about sizes and shapes, spatial relationships, math concepts, and problem solving.

When children lift, shove, stack, and move blocks, they learn about weight and size. Each time they use blocks, they are making decisions about how to build a structure or solve a construction problem. When children build with blocks in the classroom, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing.

Playing with large or small blocks, a child can learn to:

- judge distances, space, and size,
- create scenes for dramatic play,
- stack blocks carefully (using eye-hand coordination and small muscle control),
- compare and sort by size and shape, and
- use words to describe a construction.

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The House Corner Play:

The house corner is a very important part of our classroom. The work children do in the house corner is called **dramatic play** or **pretend play**. In the house corner children take on a role and recreate real-life experiences. They use props and make-believe about a wide variety of topics.

The ability to pretend is very important to children's later academic success in school. When children pretend, they have to recall experiences they've had and re-create them. To do this, they have to be able to picture their experiences in their minds.

For example, to play the role of a doctor, children have to remember what tools a doctor uses, how a doctor examines a patient, and what a doctor says. In playing the role of a doctor, children have to be able to cooperate with other children and defend their own ideas.

When children are engaged in dramatic play in the classroom, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing.

Table Toys Play:

Table toys include puzzles, various table blocks, and other small construction materials such as Legos, Ring-a-Majigs, and collections of objects. When children use table toys, they learn many new skills and concepts, including:

- sorting and classifying things according to their own categories;
- judging distance, direction, right and left, up and down; and
- describing what they are thinking and doing

When children use table toys in the classroom, we encourage them to talk about what they are doing. For example, we might say:

- "Tell me about those blocks you are using."
- "How did you get those rings to fit together?"

We also ask questions that help children extend their thinking as they play with table toys. For example:

- "You grouped all the blocks by color. Can you put them together any other way?"
- "You've picked out all the shapes that are the same. Can you tell me how they are the same?"

These questions and comments are designed to help children become aware of what they are doing and **develop their thinking skills**.

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Sand and Water Play:

Sand and water aren't just fun - they're also a natural setting for learning. When children pour water into measuring cups, they gain a foundation for mathematical thinking. When they drop corks, stones, feathers, and marbles into a tub of water, they observe scientifically which objects float and which sink. When they comb sand into patterns, they learn about both math and art.

We encourage children to experiment with these materials and as they do, we ask questions that encourage them to think about what they are discovering:

- "Why do you think the wet sand won't turn the wheel?"
- "How did the water change when we added the soap flakes?"
- "How many of these measuring cups of water will it take to fill this quart pitcher?"

Outdoor Play

Outdoor play is an important part of our curriculum. When the children are outdoors, they like to run, jump, climb, and use all the large muscles in their bodies. They need space to work out and let off steam. They can race around, breathe the fresh air, look at the clouds, or catch a ball or a bug. They not only satisfy their physical need for large muscle activity but also develop a sense of wonder about the miracles that take place in nature.

When we take the children outdoors at school, we talk about the things we can see, hear, touch, and feel so that the children become aware of changes in the weather and the seasons, the growth of plants, and animals. We help the children notice changes by asking them what is different about the trees, the caterpillars, or the sky. They lie on the ground and look up, or they climb the jungle gym and look down. We point out the many kinds of birds that fly overhead, butterflies, mosquitoes, milkweed seeds, falling leaves, and rain as it begins. We wonder aloud where all these things come from.

By playing outdoors, your child can learn the following:

- to notice changes in nature;
- to discover what happens to people, animals, and plants when it is cold, hot, dark, or light, outside;
- to use his or her body in increasingly skillful ways; and
- to be a good observer.

Art

Art is an important part of our curriculum. Every day, children find a variety of art materials available on our shelves. Drawing, painting, cutting, pasting, and playing with play dough are not only enjoyable but also provide important opportunities for learning.

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7Children express original ideas and feelings, improve their coordination, develop small muscle skills, learn to recognize colors and textures, and develop creativity and pride in their accomplishments by exploring and using art materials

When children are engaged in art activities, we talk with them about what they are doing and ask questions that encourage them to think about their ideas and express feelings. For example, we might say:

- "I can see you like the new colors we put on the easels today."
- "You made a lot of pictures. Which one do you want to hang up?"
- "You worked a long time with the clay today. What did you like doing best?"

As you can tell, we like to focus on what children are doing - not on what their finished art work looks like.

The Library

The library area is an essential part of our program and of your child's life. It's where children gain the foundations for reading and writing. It's also a place where children can relax and enjoy the wonderful world of children's literature.

We encourage children to use the library on their own. We invite them to look at books, to listen to taped stories, and to scribble and "write" throughout the day. We also work with children one-on-one and in small groups. Sometimes children dictate stories to us, which we record in "books."

Every day we read stories to the children. We read books to introduce new ideas, to develop pre-reading skills, to help children deal with problems, and mostly to develop a love of books. Here are some of the things we do with children as we read:

- We look at pictures together and ask children questions: "What is that silly cat doing?" We encourage children to predict what will happen next: "What do you suppose will happen now?"
- We encourage children to repeat words, rhymes, and phrases they've memorized

Music and Movement

We do a lot of singing and creative movement in our program. Singing and moving to music give the children a chance to move freely, practice new skills, and feel good about what their bodies can do. The children love our daily time for singing together, and it helps them develop the ability to cooperate in a group. Here are some of the things we do to encourage a love for music and movement.

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- Sometimes we take a tape recorder outside and play jazz or folk music, and the children dance and act out the songs.
- We give the children colored scarves and paper streamers to use as they move to the music.
- We play musical instruments, some of which are homemade.
- We use chants to help us get through the daily routines, such as clean-up time.
- We have a comfortable listening center with a wide variety of tapes for children to listen to on their own.

Computers:

In our program we have a special activity where children "play" with computers. While this may sound like a strange way of describing what children do with computers, this is in fact what goes on. The children experiment, using programs that help them develop in many exciting ways. Here are some of the things that children learn when they use computers:

- math skills and concepts such as counting and numerical relationships,
- beginning reading concepts,
- how to express creativity, and
- how to solve problems.

We encourage children to work at the computer in pairs. This helps them learn from each other and develops their social skills at the same time. While the children are working at the computer, we ask them questions such as these to help them think about what they're doing:

- "What made you decide to choose this program to work on?"
- "What do you suppose will happen if you press the escape key?"
- "What printouts did you decide to make today?"

By working with children in these ways, we not only encourage their growth and development but also help prepare them for a future in which they will need to know how to work with computers.

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