

NURSERY SCHOOL AND PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING CENTER Principles of Teaching and Learning

The Early Childhood Learning Center at Heathwood Hall Episcopal School offers a developmentally-appropriate program that provides children with the strong foundation needed to ensure future academic success and good learning habits. Experiential learning and play are the vehicles through which basic skills are taught and reinforced for our students. This type of play does not happen by chance; rather, it is thoughtfully designed and orchestrated by teachers with years of experience and expertise in early childhood education. In the spring of 2009, the ECLC teachers developed a statement about our early childhood environment.

We strive to create an early childhood environment that focuses on:

1) Creating a caring community of learners

In this community each child is

- known *one-on-one time between teachers and students, low teacher/student ratios, staff consistency and conversation between grades, know the age/stage of current students*
- valued *communicate with families and the child in written and verbal forms, learn about interests and strengths and build upon them, asking for questions and feedback*
- recognized for his or her unique character strengths and opportunities for growth *getting to know students and families through the school experience, inquiry-based learning*
- learning how to value and care for others *classroom-created expectations, cooperative work, chapel, offerings, prayers, caring language, and “good works”*

2) Teaching and learning between and among teachers and students that

- actively engages their bodies, minds, and hearts *physical activity and on-campus trips, related arts, real-life experiences, relationships across the community, caring language and a reasoned approach*
- is experiential and connects “old” learning to “new” learning *creating products through careful process, KWL, showing/telling about learning, PLCs, Schools Attuned*
- has purpose and meaning *alphabet learning with a purpose, reading for meaning, experiential math, student-interest topics, child ages/stages learning through the Gesell materials*

3) Planning developmentally appropriate and responsive curriculum to stimulate intellectual curiosity by encouraging each child to develop the life of the mind through foundational

- problem-solving *hands-on with access to needed tools and materials, modeling and guiding to answers*
- literacy *sequential reading and writing skills, enthusiasm for the use of books and students' written work, what does a good reader do?, celebrating with Book Buddies, using a variety of media sources*
- mathematical thinking skills *NCTM curriculum focal points, real math purposes, games, manipulatives*
- habits for being a lifelong learner *establish expectations together, habits of independence and responsibility, follow interests, expand learning through discussion and projects*

This statement guides how we establish our classroom procedures and expectations and how we plan for future learning. Our engagement with the children is a key to how we teach skills in a way that they will learn.

The Literacy Journey

The goal in the preschool years is to move each child forward on a literacy journey by discovering, reading, sharing, exposing, and producing works of literature. Singing songs, doing fingerplays, rhyming, and creating our own class books are all ways to develop necessary language skills. Developing literacy skills in preschool is based on the systematic, multilevel building blocks model of language instruction: oral language and conversation, the desire to learn to read and write, visual print concepts, phonemic awareness, interesting words, and letters and sounds. The preschool developmental model has a multi-sensory approach to the acquisition of reading, language, and critical thinking skills.

During the past year, our great interest as educators has been how we can encourage children to see themselves as ones who can record their stories AND appreciate the great value of books as stories as places to discover a world of knowledge. The question, “*How can I share a story?*” is the framing question that will guide students and teachers on a year-long exploration of the ways in which the knowledge, experiences, and imaginative spirit in each of us can be captured and shared.

We will explore storytelling through the use of student-made books, artwork, music, and various forms of movement. This exploration will provide the stage for our students to reflect, problem solve, and relate to the community around themselves as they learn to communicate and value others and what they have to say.

Our goals in exploring, “*How can I share a story?*” is to give children the tools and invitation to:

- ❖ Thoughtfully approach the process of recording knowledge and stories

- ❖ Consider a variety of mediums in which to convey knowledge and stories to others
- ❖ Experiment with techniques used in conveying knowledge and stories
- ❖ Problem-solve and thoughtfully plan when choosing what to share, what medium, what techniques, etc.
- ❖ Develop oral skills in the story sharing process
- ❖ Develop a sense of sequence
- ❖ See value and permanence in their contributions

Johnston, P. 2004. *Choice words: How Our Language Affects Children's Learning*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse

Ray & Glover, 2008. *Already Ready: Nurturing Writers in Preschool and Kindergarten*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Thinking Math

The National Council for Teaching Mathematics have established three (3) main focal points for curriculum during the preschool years. In our preschool classes, we will focus on:

- 1) Developing an understanding of numbers, including concepts of one-to-one correspondence, counting, ordering, and comparison.
- 2) Identifying shapes and describe spatial relationships.
- 3) Identifying measurable attributes by comparing objects using these attributes.

Doing this within the context of solving real world problems, analyzing data, and seeing sequential patterns is a way for the young mathematician to connect ideas. We want children to enjoy and see everyday connections to mathematics.

Nursery School Units of Study:

Throughout the year, students engage in and apply what they know through units of study. By making connections to what they know, their understanding increases. In nursery school, these units provide a framework for exploration as well as those which naturally arise from student curiosity and interest:

Flutterflies: This is a study of our class mascot as we work together to develop a community of learners with routines and habits we will need for the school year.

Colors, Shapes, and Numbers: We examine these “building blocks” of learning and how they apply in our everyday world. We observe our environment to find shapes, colors, and numbers. We sort, classify, and count manipulatives in the classroom based on certain characteristics.

Celebrating Me: Children learn “all about me” through a study of the human body and our five senses, as well as focus on the unique characteristics about each individual

learner. We learn how to collect data through measuring instruments that are standard and nonstandard, including blocks, unifix cubes, measuring tapes, and scales.

Nursery Rhymes and Fairy Tales: In each child's literacy development, the exploration of Mother Goose and familiar fairy tales is important. We will retell these stories through drama, fingerplays, flannel board, and music.

Habitats of Heathwood: This is an in-depth study of plants and animals found in and around our campus. We will observe the metamorphosis of caterpillars to butterflies. As well, we will learn about and study characteristics of diurnal and nocturnal animals. We will compare and contrast the features of different plants and animals. This unit of study will culminate with a field trip to the zoo.

Holidays: Throughout the school year, we will learn about and study the characteristics of several holidays from a secular and religious perspective. These will include but are not limited to Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine's, Grandparents' Day, St. Patrick's Day, and Easter.

Changing Seasons: We purposefully notice changes in the four seasons by exploring our Heathwood campus. We will collect objects from nature that inform us about the characteristics of each season. We discuss weather and clothing changes as it pertains to the season. We graph daily weather changes and compare the data over time.

Look at Me Now: At the end of the year, nursery school students celebrate and reflect on how much they have grown. We will compare our individual growth to what it was at the beginning of the school year.

Preschool Units of Study:

Throughout the year, students engage in and apply what they know through units of study. By making connections to what they know, their sphere of acquired knowledge and understanding increases. In preschool, the units throughout the year center around these main ideas:

Heathwood and Me, Getting to Know You, A Community of Friends and Neighbors

The first several weeks of preschool allows children to become acquainted with their new friends and teachers. Not only are they developing a tiny classroom community, they are finding out about the people at Heathwood who make this a special place. The unit of study broadens at the end to allow children to explore where each child lives in the Columbia area.

Nature

Heathwood's beautiful campus and a young child's natural curiosity about the world around him or her converge perfectly during the preschool year! During the fall, we learn about the seasons and the changes that occur within nature and begin to work in our garden. During the last third of the year, we study Heathwood's environment and explore the pond, forest, fields, rivers, and the animals that live there.

Holidays

Preschool celebrates an array of special events and traditional holidays throughout the year. This gives us opportunities to celebrate various customs and traditions relevant to our classroom of students.