

CURRICULUM OVERVIEW

PRESCHOOL

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL

Transitioning into preschool is a major social and emotional achievement for young children. Children become comfortable leaving their parents and forge connections with new adults and children as they adjust to their classroom community. Achieving independence is a key developmental task for preschool children, and the teachers consciously set up the classroom environment in a way that supports children's growing sense of autonomy. Children delight in doing things "all by myself" in preschool, from washing hands to completing a puzzle. Teachers also model for children simple ways to resolve conflicts, such as taking turns and using words to solve problems. In both large and small groups, children learn to express their feelings verbally as they attempt to resolve conflicts that may arise.

Many children come to school with some understanding of self, home, and family. As they learn how to become members of a group children begin to understand how they are alike and different from their peers. While using the family as a springboard for discussions, many children will begin to broaden their understanding of classmates to further their interpretation and acceptance of others. Open discussions around similarities and differences lay the foundation for children's self-respect and respect for others.

While teachers understand that preschool children are still developing their ability to consider other people's perspectives, they consistently encourage children to think through the impact of their actions on other people. Over the course of the school year, the children begin to realize that the choices they make often affect others, as well as themselves.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL OBJECTIVES:

- Separate comfortably from parent
- Understand the daily classroom routine
- Take risks in trying new things
- Accept redirection
- Transition from one activity to the next
- Begin to take responsibility for self-help skills
- Respect classmates and classroom materials
- Begin to share and take turns
- Identify and verbalize feelings and needs
- Attempt to resolve conflicts verbally
- Engage in independent play
- Move toward cooperative play

Learning Looks Like This:

A group of children are playing in the loft with kitchen supplies. They announce that they have built a restaurant and want to cook food for the entire school. One of the children places all of the pretend food out on the table and begins to place a little more than half of it into a shopping cart saying, "This is all mine. I am buying it at the market." Another child groans, "Hey, that was my food!" After several attempts to divide up the food, the teacher explains, "There is plenty of food for everyone. We can all use the food together and you can take turns with the shopping cart. We also need some other jobs; someone needs to set the table and someone needs to pour the milk." The children think for a minute and then one child asks another, "Can I have a turn with the cart when you're done?" The other child responds, "Sure. But first I need to go shopping." One child "shops" with the cart while the other children cook, set the table and pour milk in the kitchen. In a couple of minutes the teacher reminds the first child that it is time to give the other child a turn with the cart, and the two children readily switch roles.

Later in the day, the teacher reads a book about taking turns, noting the different jobs that the group had to do earlier to make one big meal. The benefits of taking turns are discussed, and the children become more prepared for verbal negotiation.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

The goal of the Preschool language and literacy curriculum is to build upon existing skills to create a community of active and interested communicators. Teachers model language through talking and listening, repeating, rephrasing, pointing to pictures while reading, and using props as visual or kinesthetic aids to help build children's vocabularies and listening comprehension. Read-alouds of rhyming poems and stories with predictable patterns help children develop their ability to hear the differences between letter sounds. The preschool classroom environment at Lesley Ellis is purposefully print rich, in order to foster children's pre-reading skills. Books are always available in the classroom library and a teacher is often at hand to read a story upon request. Exposure to fiction, poetry, and non-fiction literature is an integral part of each day's meeting, and children become aware of print as they recite poetry and sing songs from large posters. Pattern recognition is integrated into the curriculum as a pre-reading activity: each preschool child has a unique fabric pattern associated with his/her name, and this pattern adorns the cubbies, the child's artwork, and even their job chart and attendance cards. Children learn to "read" their own patterns and the patterns of their classmates very quickly. Children interact with the alphabet through child-centered, multi-sensory activities like name matching games, letter puzzles, alphabet collages, and alphabet shapes for use with playdough. Pre-writing opportunities are abundant as children engage in activities such as painting, drawing, and sculpting. These activities strengthen the musculature in their hands, or fine motor muscles, that they will later use for writing. When a teacher records children's words on their artwork, records children's responses to a question at meeting time, or reads a menu in the kitchen area, children become aware of the purpose of print. Children often transition to making their own "words" by a scribble, stream of letters, or even inventive spelling. Exposing preschoolers to all aspects of language helps lay the foundation for the future reading and writing readiness.

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY OBJECTIVES:

Language skills

- Repeat parts of songs and finger-plays

- Retell stories
- Articulate with increasing clarity
- Participate in small and large group discussions
- Ask questions
- Begin to differentiate between comments and questions
- Follow 1-2 step directions
- Develop an understanding of information presented verbally
- Use developmentally appropriate grammar

Pre-Reading

- Become aware of letters
- Begin to recognize letters in own name
- Begin to understand the connection between print and the spoken word
- Enjoy looking at books and being read to
- Acquire book knowledge (front and back, left to right)
- Begin to acquire phonological processing skills (rhyming, word segmenting)

Pre-writing

- Explore painting and drawing
- Attach meaning to scribbles
- Move toward using a developmentally appropriate grasp
- Begin to write letters
- Begin to write name

Learning Looks Like This:

A small group of children sit together during reading time. As they turn the pages of Brown Bear, Brown Bear, by Eric Carle, they become engaged with the rhyme, repetition, and illustrations in the book. As they continue to “read” one child suggests she will turn the pages while another states, “I’ll read this to you.” The students begin to note the relationship of colors to animals as they keep turning the pages together. By the end of the story they are simultaneously “reading” as more children join this small group of friends.

Noting their interest, the teacher decides to read the story to the entire class a few days later. With the use of several visual aides including a storyboard with Velcro characters, the teacher displays each character in front of the group. She turns each page, encouraging one child at a time to come forward and place the appropriate character on the storyboard. After the story, the children have a choice to make their own “Brown Bear” book. Each child illustrates one page and dictates words to the teacher. For example, one child described, “I see smiling friends looking at me.” At the end of the week, the book is bound and displayed in the classroom library for each member of the class to enjoy.

LEARNING

In our Preschool program, we provide children with stimulating hands-on activities that help them build skills, acquire concepts, think creatively, and develop a genuine interest in learning. Children in our program learn by actively exploring the classroom environment, experimenting with open-ended

materials, asking questions, and developing theories. The active wondering and exploration that occur in preschool serve as a powerful foundation for later academic learning.

Mathematics

Young children develop an understanding of basic mathematical concepts by engaging actively with objects and materials. When working with blocks, puzzles and other toys, children make observations about size, quantity, sequence, patterns, space, speed, and categorization. Through these meaningful activities, children to build on their existing knowledge and theories and develop problem-solving skills.

MATHEMATICS OBJECTIVES:

- Count by rote up to 10
- Begin to count with one-to-one correspondence
- Begin to compare amounts and label them more or less
- Start to understand that numerals represent amount
- Begin to identify written numerals
- Identify and label objects and describe their characteristics
- Notice similarities and differences between objects
- Sort and classify objects using one attribute
- Identify basic shapes and primary colors
- Enjoy working with puzzles
- Begin to create patterns
- Start to understand simple graphs

Learning Looks Like This:

During morning activities, a child is immediately drawn to the block corner where he finds an assortment of wooden blocks. He works carefully to construct a building and an elevator, and then divides the interior into sections that appear to be rooms. As the teacher approaches and sits next to the child, she says, “Can you tell me what you’re making?” “Oh, it’s a house,” he replies. “I noticed you used a rectangular shape for the outside,” the teacher offers. “What are those blocks on the inside?” “Those are the rooms, and here are the stairs” he says as he points to each section. He then points to different spaces and begins to count, “one, two, three, four, five, six rooms!” “Wow, who lives in these rooms?” the teacher asks. “Well, it’s for two whole families!” exclaims the child. “And that’s the elevator from the top of the house to the bottom,” he says as he shows her which direction the elevator travels.

As they continue the conversation, the teacher uses mathematical terminology to inquire about the house’s height in comparison to other familiar buildings. Other children notice the house is getting larger and ask if they can help build. As the children continue to add blocks, their use of mathematical language becomes apparent. By the end of the activity time, several more houses have been built and one child announces, “It’s a neighborhood!”

Science

Science for children, like mathematics, is an active process of inquiry. Meaningful science learning in the early childhood years happens when teachers plan activities around “big ideas” or concepts that children are developmentally primed to acquire. Our teachers create a physical environment

that supports inquiry, plan specific activities, and then support the children's own investigations. In order for children to develop a true understanding of concepts, we provide them with ample time to explore materials, make predictions, and create and revise theories. Our teachers help children consolidate and deepen their learning by encouraging them to reflect on, document, and share their experiences.

SCIENCE OBJECTIVES:

- Ask questions about objects and events they observe
- Conduct simple investigations
- Communicate observations through discussion
- Explore properties of objects and characteristics of organisms
- Begin to notice seasonal cycles
- Understand the difference between living and non-living things
- Gather information using all their senses (when appropriate)
- Experiment with motion by pushing, pulling, throwing, spinning, twisting
- Show respect and care for living creatures and the environment

Learning Looks Like This:

While taking a walk on an autumn day, the children are asked to collect fall treasures. They begin picking up pine needles, acorns, leaves, dried grass, and pieces of mulch. Placing the items into the teacher's basket, two children ask, "Can you take some pictures?"

The teacher replies, "What would you like to remember?" One child says, "The gray sky." Another shouts, "Those squirrels over there. On the branch!" Finally, another child suggests, "How about the falling leaves?" The teacher takes a few photographs, gathers the basket of collections, and leads the children back to their classroom.

Sitting together, the children are asked to help sort the items they have just collected. While sorting, they are encouraged to notice a few things that are similar and different about each "treasure." For example, one child describes, "Look how spiky the pine-cone is!" While another child states, "The grass doesn't feel smooth like the really green grass I've seen before." The teacher suggests placing the items into categories. The children come up with words such as pointed, straight, curvy, and plain. The teacher labels the top of the posterboard with these words and draws four lines to separate each category. Each child is then given a piece of tape in order to attach one item to a piece of posterboard. A few children revisit the posterboard during choice time to draw pictures of their autumn treasures.

Arts

Creative expression through the arts is an integral component of our preschool program.

Throughout each day, children have various opportunities to paint, draw, create collages and other creative projects, sing, dance, and engage in dramatic play. We encourage children to experiment repeatedly with basic art materials so that they gain proficiency and confidence. We focus on the process of creating art, rather than what the end product looks like. Children participate in singing and music every day during group times and often during classroom transitions, such as singing a "clean up" song. Children develop rhythmic awareness by using percussion instruments, dancing to music, and participating in directed movement games. There are abundant opportunities for dramatic play; children "cook" in the child-size kitchen set, take care of baby dolls, dress up in

dress-up clothes for a “party,” practice using the doctor’s kit, and more. Through their pretend play children process concepts from their daily lives and develop abstract thinking skills.

ARTS OBJECTIVES:

- Develop basic proficiency with using paint, glue, crayons and markers
- Explore the properties of various art materials through experimentation
- Listen to and participate in class singing activities
- Develop an awareness of rhythm, as explored through percussion instruments and movement to music
- Initiate basic pretend play scenarios

Learning Looks Like This:

A few children gather around the art table, examining the various objects that are laid out: a toothbrush, a hairbrush, a whisk, a fork, textured rolling pins, a sponge, and more. The teacher points out the trays of red and yellow paint that are on the table and gives each child a large piece of paper. The teacher encourages the children to paint with the objects. Tentatively at first, the children dip the objects into paint and make marks on their paper, examining the unusual patterns that the objects create. Within a minute, the children have gained confidence and begin to experiment with the objects. A child dips the toothbrush into the red paint and makes a light mark on the paper, and then immediately dips the toothbrush into the yellow paint and paints heavily over the red marks. “I made a different color!” the child exclaims. “I see that!” responds the teacher. “How did you do it?” “I mixed red and yellow...and it made orange,” says the child excitedly. “I want to try!” enthuses another child, who then tries mixing red and yellow paint on a piece of paper using the whisk. Pretty soon the children’s papers are covered in an array of red, yellow and orange patterns. The teacher makes comments on each child’s paper as he/she works. “I see that you are making circles with the sponge and lines with the hairbrush,” the teacher says to one of the children. “Yes,” the child replies as her brush strokes become more rapid, “It’s a hurricane, and it’s getting stronger!” The next day the children arrive at school to find their “gadget paintings” hanging proudly on the wall.

ANTI-BIAS

Children are aware of and affected by human differences from an early age, and our community is based on respecting and appreciating the similarities and differences found within our school, neighborhoods, and throughout the world. This strong emphasis on anti-bias education promotes a sense of belonging for all students and builds a sense of connection between people.

The goal of the anti-bias curriculum is to challenge the impact of bias on the students’ social and intellectual development by helping them acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to live respectfully in a diverse community.

While keeping the children’s developmental level in mind, the anti-bias curriculum introduces children to challenging vocabulary, reflective topics, and brings abstract ideas into real practice. The curriculum builds upon itself, encouraging the students to move along a continuum from knowledge to understanding to tolerance to acceptance to respect and inclusion. Throughout all of their learning, the students are encouraged to develop and actively participate in lessons to end the cycle of bias. The anti-bias curriculum focuses on, but is not limited to, eight major areas of bias. These

include racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, religious intolerance, and size discrimination. Through direct, pro-active instruction, as well as using everyday events within the classroom and the larger world, the curriculum is integrated into all aspects of the students' school experience. Monthly events, such as all-school assemblies are often springboards for further learning experiences.

Above all, we are working to instill in the students a respect for themselves, their classmates, and their community, while providing each child with strategies for actively improving the social conditions of all of those around them.

ANTI-BIAS OBJECTIVES:

- Help children develop a sense of self-identity
- Participate in a caring community where sharing is highly valued
- Establish a feeling of openness, comfort, and safety in the classroom
- Help children feel comfortable with people from diverse backgrounds
- Be able to label and identify actions as fair and unfair
- Gain an understanding of the many differences in the world through literature, puzzles, pictures, and other daily classroom materials
- Discuss inclusion/exclusion based on race, gender, class, age, ability, and family structure
- Discuss gender identity while exploring and challenging traditional gender roles
- Identify differences and similarities of skin tone and describe own skin color
- Learn about scientific basis for skin color
- Explore differences between concepts of want and need
- Recognize and identify different ages (infant, child, etc.)
- Recognize differences and similarities of age related abilities
- Recognize own personal abilities and limitations
- Recognize similarities and differences with regard to people's abilities
- Recognize that there are a variety of family structures
- Recognize that there are families that are similar to and/or different from one's own, but the common factor is that they all love each other

Learning Looks Like This:

Several students are called over to the art center. They notice several bottles of paint, rectangular strips of paper, paintbrushes, and empty glass jars. A teacher asks the children to take a look at the bottles of paint and decide which color best matches their skin tone. As one child makes her choice, the teacher carefully places a dot of paint on that child's hand and asks if it is a good match. At first the child exclaims, "Yes," but after taking another look at the colors she suggests, "No, I think we should mix two different colors of paint." The teacher and the child mix the paint together and place a new dot of paint on the child's hand finding that it blends in just right with her skin tone. This new shade is placed into an empty jar, and the child is asked to use her skin tone paint to cover a rectangular strip of paper.

After the students have each created their skin tone and the strips of paper have dried, the teacher reads a book called The Colors of Us by Karen Katz, which celebrates all types of skin tones. The teacher shows the children the strips, and they notice that some strips are similar and some are

different, but none are exactly the same. Later in the week the children begin to use their jars of paint to create self-portraits.

PHYSICAL

At Lesley Ellis children have many opportunities to engage in movement activities both indoors and outside. On the playground children run and climb, developing strength, balance and coordination. In the classroom, movement and dancing activities help children gain a sense of their bodies in space. Using the materials in the writing, art, and math centers helps develop children's fine motor skills. Over time, as children's fine motor skills and abstract thinking skills grow, scribbles become representational drawings with increasing detail. We help children become more independent by encouraging them to wash their hands, open their lunch containers and put on their coats by themselves.

OBJECTIVES:

Gross Motor

- Runs and walks with increasing coordination
- Climbs stairs and basic playground equipment independently
- Jumps with two feet
- Balances on one foot

Fine Motor

- Begin to hold writing implements with an appropriate (tripod) grasp
- Begins to show preference for using a dominant hand
- Cuts with scissors on a line
- Can manipulate and assemble small toys; can string large beads

Self-Care

- Washes and dries hands independently
- Puts on clothes or coat with minimal help
- Opens lunch containers with minimal help

Learning Looks Like This:

The teacher notices a child sitting at the writing table holding scissors with two hands, trying unsuccessfully to cut paper. The teacher approaches the child and asks, "Have you tried holding the scissors like this?" while gently guiding the child's fingers of one hand into the proper places on the scissors' handles. The teacher then holds the paper toward the child and says encouragingly, "Try again. And remember to keep your thumb pointing up toward the ceiling." The child looks at the scissors for a moment, takes the paper from the teacher and tentatively makes a snip with the scissors. The paper cuts easily. The child, surprised, looks up at the teacher with a delighted smile and then spends the next ten minutes practicing this exciting new skill.