



Preschool Curriculum 2008-2009

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Introduction

The Heritage House houses the preschool, a large, sunny room with windows taking up much of two walls and a large aviary for Lotus and Wilmer our resident doves. This indoor space includes a housekeeping corner, one cozy house, large area for block play, an art area, water/rice table, doll houses, manipulatives, puzzles, books, musical instruments, science table with CCTV, tables and chairs, two adult rocking chairs and a large upright piano. The coatroom has cubbies for each student and teacher. Beyond the coatroom is a bathroom with two commodes and two sinks, scaled in size for the young child. A past parent painted the beautiful murals on the walls.

The primary outdoor area for preschool play is behind Heritage House. This new play area includes a playground area filled with swings, hanging bars, a sand box, and a paved area for wheel toys. Preschoolers are the youngest of the Friends School Haverford students. We give these students a supportive play environment where their uniqueness is affirmed and respected. In a joyful atmosphere, the children are involved in play that fosters skills, self-esteem and growing independence. The children are provided many opportunities for taking reasonable risks as they explore their world.

The Preschool curriculum is based on children's play. It is through play that a child observes, questions and becomes involved in problem solving. The learning becomes internalized and remains part of the child's being. Play is spontaneous and child originated. Play is imaginative, cognitive (learning about the world and the roles people play), physical (developing motor skills and self-control), social (dealing with social situations with other children and adults) and emotional (thoughts and feeling about self and others). Families have the option of choosing the additional afternoon program. The "lunch bunch" children bring a lunch from home and eat in the classroom with a preschool teacher. After lunch the children pack up their gear, brush their teeth and settle down for a nap. At the conclusion of nap children prepare for dismissal or continue on to Extended Day with its home base in the School House.

Flexibility in scheduling, a self-contained classroom experience, and a comfortable and predictable flow of activity are valued highly. The daily sequence includes a minimum of one hour of free play indoors and/or and hour of outdoor play (except days when it is raining or the cold temperatures prohibit safe play). Each day includes time for children to select books for quiet perusal and for the teachers to read aloud. Daily "circle" can include music; time for sharing ideas and feelings, introducing ideas and becoming involved with creative movement. Snack time each day is an opportunity for social interaction and for learning about new food that the children often prepare.

Children learn through their strengths and interests of multiple intelligences. This learning style is honored and supported in the preschool classroom.

Blocks

Block play is a rich source of learning for preschoolers. Blocks provide the opportunity for isolate, parallel, associative and/or cooperative play. Socially, children will try out various kinds of interactions that are based on their readiness. Children hone problem-solving skills as they share space and map out plans for their building. Gross motor skills (lifting, stretching and crawling) and fine muscle control (placing and stacking) are supported. Working with blocks spans the sheer joy of taking every block off the shelves to experiencing the size, weight and shape to putting blocks away, which refines eye/hand coordination and provides opportunities for sorting and classifying. Cognitive skills are building as children order and classify, create patterns, sequence, configure and sort. Math readiness skills such as one-to-one correspondence in stacking, adding and subtracting, the concepts of equivalents, more or less, taller/shorter, and increasing vocabulary to include technical terminology (cylinder, triangle, pillar, etc.) are inherent in block play. Making his or her own constructions fosters positive self-image as the child gains mastery. It becomes the child's own valued creation.

Visual Arts

Visual arts provide opportunities for motor activities, social interaction, expressing feelings. We value interaction with the materials for their own sake, valuing the process over the product. Crayons and markers along with blank pages of paper allow for scribbling and free movement of the child's arms and hands. Development moves from little eye/hand coordination to making circles, lines and shapes. These forms become meaningful symbols for the child. Involvement with art materials supports large motor and small motor development. Tempera paint allows for color mixing and more creative opportunities for the child. These provide an outlet for self-expression and for motor control. Painting can be isolate, parallel, associative, and cooperative in nature. The child decides where the first stroke will begin. As painting progresses ideas can be shared and vocabulary enhanced. Finger paints, rice, dough, and shaving cream are multi-sensory media providing tactile, visual, olfactory and kinesthetic experiences which are inherently valuable. Chalk spray bottles, rubbings and watercolors all provide important learning experiences. The concepts learned through creative materials are directly related to reading and writing. As a child moves the brush or marker across the page, he or she is practicing eye-hand coordination. As he or she looks at the shapes created on the paper, he or she sees figure against ground. As he or she draws a border around the paper, he or she is enclosing a space. As she or she makes lines and dots, awareness develops that symbols can be used to represent real objects. Progress occurs at each child's own pace.

Manipulatives

Children learn by interacting with the world through firsthand experiences. Pegs, blocks, beads, puzzles, water toys, dress-ups, pots, Unifix cubes, nesting toys, Legos, and Duplos allow the child to twist, turn, screw and thread. These reinforce concepts of shape, color, space, and matching that are directly related to reading and writing.

Modeling Materials

Modeling materials provide a stimulating experience valuable for their own sake as well as for molding shapes. The child has the chance for fine motor, eye-hand, language and social development as the young child pounds, pats, presses, pushes, pulls, pinches and squeezes the clay or dough. The child acquires strength while working with the resistant clay or dough. The child creates by using large and small muscles of the

shoulders, arms, hands and fingers. The child creates rhythms by patting and pounding. As children work they notice the rhythm patterns of each other's pounding. Children begin to recreate these rhythm patterns. Molding with play dough and clay can be a positive outlet for aggressive feelings. Working with these materials can clarify concepts such as shape, size, and weight. Dramatic play is supported as children become bakers, selling cookies and talking about their creations. This dramatic play extends into others areas of the room where children can learn about life and people's roles by acting them out and gaining control and understanding.

Paste and Collage

Paste and collage is an opportunity for children to make choices about shape, size and color. The child can cut or tear paper, sort, arrange and overlap a variety of materials of differing textures. With no two collages alike, the children are encouraged to use their imaginations as they reflect on the interesting shapes and patterns of each collage.

Sand

Sand provides a rich tactile experience. Sifting sand through fingers, pouring it over skin, imprinting with wet sand, transferring sand from one container to another, sand drawing, digging a hole, tunneling and making roads are wonderful experiences for a child. Sand helps the child to experience weight, volume and texture. They enhance language skills as children talk about their work with others nearby. Problem solving can occur as many children use one space. Various kinds of sand play from solitary to cooperative can take place in the same enclosed area. Digging tunnels, making cakes, planning and mapping towns are just a few of the activities that spring forth from the children's work. Using their whole body and their imagination, the children are engaged in a rich and meaningful activity.

Water Play

The water table in the classroom and the puddles on the playground provide a wellspring of learning opportunities. Equipment includes water table, spray bottles, sinks, watering cans, brushes, pumps, cups, funnels tubes and siphons. Activities include participation in and/or observation of pouring, making tracks and footprints, spraying, and evaporating, washing toys and doll clothes, floating/sinking, freezing/melting, pumping, and drinking. Children discover that water is wet, colorless, has weight, changes forms and reflects images. Food coloring, soap, scents and ice often enrich water play. Water play supports emerging social interaction between children. Water also has the power to soothe and relax a child.

Food

Each day, the children eat a snack together. They nibble at pretzels to create animals, objects, letters, numbers and faces. Crackers become a lesson in fraction as they are broken into smaller pieces. The children describe the flavors of salty and sweet and the different colors of fruit juices. Frequently the children prepare their own snack. This is a rich medium for learning in every area of the curriculum in addition to being fun. Popping corn off the cob, rutabaga (raw and mashed) corn bread, butter, yogurt shakes, soup, waffles, grilled cheese, gingerbread, pasta, fruit parfaits, pizza, muffins, vegetables and dips, fruit salad, applesauce, potato pancakes, rice and soy sauce, gelatin, scrambled eggs, lemonade, popsicles, ants on a log (celery, cream cheese and raisins are some snack we prepare during the year. It is important in planning that we are sensitive to dietary restriction of children for health or religious reasons. We encourage family input to reflect the tastes and specialties of the children in the class. The sensory experience of food preparation is rich. Waiting expectantly to hear the first kernel of corn to pop, feeling

the warmth from the waffle iron, smelling the apples as they cook, feeling the sticky mass of popcorn balls and tasting the difference between sweet, sour and salt are all important experiences for the young child. Conversation during preparation includes describing ingredients, naming equipment and ingredients, predictions, sequencing, measuring, and counting. Children experience the effect of heat and cold on various foods. Classifying food groups, questioning the origins of ingredients, steps in food processing and the cultural origins of food enrich this activity. Motor development (large and small) is encouraged through stirring, chopping, sprinkling, spreading, and churning. Children's positive self-concept grows with a sense of accomplishment. Children taste new foods and broaden their experience and appreciation of nutritious food. We emphasize cleanliness of work area, personal hygiene and good nutrition each day.

Housekeeping/Socio-Dramatic Play

This important area has materials and equipment that are familiar to the preschooler and are important activities for role identification and clarification. A child can role-play members of a family and community. He or she can take on a role and find how it feels to make dinner or to go to work. They broaden language skill while learning new vocabulary from each other. Problem-solving skills are an integral part of this play as children make observations and create change. Classification and sorting are part of the play as children work with dishes, pots, plastic food, container, dress-ups and dolls. This imaginative play helps the child gain competence and confidence in new situations and new relationships.

Music/Rhythmic Movement

Through play, children naturally create their own rhythms. Children will begin to chant or move to rhythm. As children rock in a wooden boat on the playground, they point out the rhythm of the boat rocking on the pavement and often will result in song. As children pound play or pegs, they recognize rhythms. Each day there is child originated and teacher produced music. The piano signals clean up time. As children move to put toys away, the teacher can accompany the activity of the room with music. The piano can reflect the tempo and activity of the children as the pace changes. Rhythm sticks are used to accompany the rhythm of words in nursery rhymes and in songs. Folk music can be flexible and changed to meet the mood of the children. Children sing accompanied by piano, guitar, autoharp or very often a capella. Children may direct the music and children are encouraged to be good listeners. We play classical music throughout portions of the week, either for quiet listening or to accompany movement or art activities. We are fortunate to have a sturdy turntable, a cassette player and CD player for a large collection of recordings. Movement to music is a safe outlet for silly movements and for a wide range of emotions and feelings. Singing enhances pronunciation and articulation as well as being inherently valuable. Learning lyrics enhances memory and plays a role in developing an ear for differentiating sounds.

Physical Development

There are provisions for physical activity indoors and outdoors. Physical activities are noncompetitive. A child's self-concept develops positively as he feels a sense of accomplishment in controlling his own movement, pitting his skill and strength against outside forces. A child develops good judgement about what tasks can be safely attempt independently. Graduated height bridges, balance beams and slides are included in the equipment available as well as playground equipment for climbing, balancing and gaining upper body strength. Emotional release is possible as the child alternates between subdued and rigorous activities. Jumping, climbing, running and pedaling can develop large muscles as well as lead to dramatic play. As imagination soars, so does the growth of vocabulary to meet the situation. Children will learn about relationships between body and space by fitting into a variety of spaces such as cardboard boxes, tunnels and wagons. Boards, sawhorses, ladders, boats, and flexible, portable equipment are accessible each day.

Tricycles, wagons, wheelbarrow and carriage are stored in Nancy's House. Outdoor play teaches the child about weather changes and the kinds of clothing and gear that are appropriate. Self-dressing is encouraged. Rather than leave a child to struggle with stubborn shoes or snow pants on his or her own the teachers provide encouragement and point out the accomplishments of independent dressing. Other children also enjoy helping a classmate with dress-ups and are asked to share their new abilities to button, snap and zip.

Pre-Reading

Many books are readily accessible to the children. Classroom bookshelves are stocked with an assortment of picture books (fiction and non-fiction). These books are rotated regularly to reflect the activities and topics of the week as well as the issues that might be of concern to children in the classroom (birth of a sibling, death of a grandparent, night fears, etc.). Each day includes a time for quiet books. During this time children choose a book and look at the pictures and re-tell the familiar story to appreciative classmates. At this time teachers may also read to individual children or small groups of children. Children are taught to handle books respectfully. They also learn about author, illustrator and dedication page. The local libraries are a valuable resource for excellent children's picture books. As books are read to the children, the children are encouraged to predict what might happen next in a plot and they are asked to wonder how characters are feeling. Children are read to daily. Children are encouraged to dictate their own stories to accompany their paintings and drawings. The tape recorder can be used as a way of recording children's ideas. Group storytelling provides children the opportunity to control a story line. Working together and listening to others ideas are part of creating a story. Books are also used as a springboard for dramatic play. During quiet rest periods short stories and poetry are sometimes read aloud by the teacher. Recorded stories may also be played at this time.

Social Studies

Fostering positive self-esteem is central to the experience at Friends School. As children gain self-esteem and grow in autonomy they become more able to separate from family. Learning to become part of a group requires that children begin to delay gratification and begin to see themselves in relation to the larger group. Children begin to accept limits, stand up for themselves, negotiate peacefully and to respect the views of others. Children learn about themselves, family relationships and the local community. Children begin to see themselves in relationship with others. The child will learn the language of taking turns and will be encouraged to use language to resolve conflicts and to express feelings. Children will become aware of others' needs and will begin to see themselves as part of the School community. Children will begin to identify their strengths and will be encouraged to share their diverse talents with the group (helping others zip, cleaning up as a group effort, helping each other with puzzles, pulling others in a wagon, telling a joke, etc.)

Service projects will include the collection of outgrown children's winter gear that will be given to local children in need. The preschool attends many school assemblies. Being a valued segment of the school community is an important responsibility for the preschool child. Sitting on the familiar classroom rug which is transported to the multi-purpose room the children enjoy front row seating at all-school functions. Through the year children move increasingly from solitary play to associative and cooperative play. Children may begin to see themselves as leaders as well as followers. Children will be exposed to a variety of means of communication (telephone, child mail, intercom, U.S. Postal Service, computer). The written word, beginning with a child's printed name, reading back the dictated stories and recognizing numbers are all tools for communication in the life of the preschooler. Modes of transportation will include the study of walking, biking, baby carriages, cars, trains and airplanes.

Children will begin to understand themselves as producers as well as consumers. Responsible use of consumable resources will be encouraged (use both sides of drawing paper when appropriate, and take only what you need) Dramatic play incorporates various roles of community services. Children will "sell gas" to children on bikes; real coins, pieces of torn paper or fallen leaves can act as currency. People who provide services will be introduced (e.g. the custodians, pediatricians, food handlers). Children see themselves as caretakers of their environment as they participate in cleaning up the classroom or planting seeds. Our behavior will reflect this concern (e.g. wearing warm clothing indoors during cold weather to keep the room at a cool temperature, recycling juice cans, shopping bags and paper, observing rather than killing insects and bugs, feeding the birds indoors and outdoors.)

Classroom celebrations will reflect the diversity of our community. Rather than voting, children will begin to understand consensus building and creative problem solving when making decisions. All voices will be heard and respected. Children will become aware of time and distance in ways that are meaningful to their experience. Fall is marked by collecting leaves, planting bulbs, making applesauce and pumpkin bread. Sequencing the daily schedule will foster a sense of time. Walks to the climbing tree are broken down to segments marked by meaningful landmarks. The child will have the opportunity to make decisions such as during free play, and will work independently to enjoy success as well as hard work. Birthday celebrations will include the chance for peers to appreciate the celebrant for his strengths and talents. These reflections will be written on the child's birthday crown that may be taken home. Homes of people and animals will be explored through observing our environment as well as through fiction and non-fiction books.

Communication

The atmosphere of the classroom provides an informal, relaxed setting where children and adults are actively involved in listening as well as talking. Materials include the housekeeping area, block area, markers and paper as well as a piano, guitar, harp and tape recorder. These enrich communication skills. Dictation of the child's ideas and feelings is an important part of the program. Each child contributes an illustration for the school publication Spider Web. Auditory discrimination activities include participation in music class, listening for clues given by the piano as well as discriminating pitch, volume and rhythm patterns. Listening for and following directions are an important part of the daily routine and attention is given to tone, pitch and volume of speaking voices. The rhyming of sounds is encouraged by nonsense rhymes as well as words. Children become aware of ending sounds of words. Songs that allow children to plug in their own sounds or words are part of each day. Free play allows the child to select activities that are meaningful so he or she can use language with purpose. During circle time, discussion includes reflecting back on what occurred during the morning as well as talking about what the rest of the morning holds. Children have the opportunity for speaking in a group as they talk about their new haircuts or any other topic that has importance to them.

Visual discrimination begins by recognizing and sorting shapes and sizes in the environment. Games and puzzles in the room and on the computer software provide rich opportunities for learning about attributes of color, size and shape. Native American symbols are part of the curriculum. Children learn to read these symbols for words. As children express themselves they are conveying meaning. Teachers take care not to correct imperfections. Rather, teachers serve as models using correct grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Communication skills are valued for the positive self-worth that results when a child engages in socializing. These skills will allow the child to develop skills important throughout life.

Science

Science begins with observation. The child uses all five senses to observe the environment. Science activities are concrete, real and relevant to the life of the child. Walking to the playground or to the climbing tree at Haverford College may be marked by the discovery of growing tulips, ice on the bird bath, ants trailing across our path, the pungent aroma of ginkgo berries, animal tracks in mud or snow, forsythia blossoms, solar heat on the school wall, shadows or bird song. Each walk is a serendipitous science adventure. Throughout the day the child makes observations about the world. From ice that has formed on puddles on the playground, to dead bugs or wriggling worms found along the sidewalk the child is encouraged to be thoughtful about these discoveries. The child begins to classify and measure in ways that are appropriate to development. Whether using magnets, water, ingredients for a recipe or sand the opportunities for classification and measurement are endless. Life cycles of animals and plants, ecology, hygiene, cooking, magnets, light, water, hot and cold, habitat, physics (block building) and weather are all part of what the preschooler observes and experiences throughout the year. Observing ants and bees in the fall and their reemergence in the spring provides a meaningful lesson for the preschooler. Planting bulbs in the fall, sunflower seeds and grass seed in the spring in addition to propagating spider plants from the mother plant in the classroom are hands-on projects. Observing the growth and changes which occur in plants as well as watching the newly hatched chicks each winter as part of the Fourth Grade project hold special interest for the child who himself is undergoing such growth.

The Preschool CCTV, acquired in January 2006, is an amazing science tool, magnifying ordinary objects to make extraordinary.

Pre-mathematics

Through play, the child discovers mathematical concepts. Through concrete experiences with blocks, Legos, and counting objects the meaning of number and number relationships develop. Math materials include snack (crackers, pretzels, fruit, juice, napkins, etc.), blocks, paint pots and brushes, music, sand, clay, pegs, colored cubes, beads and puzzles. The child begins to count by rote and many will begin to understand one-to-one correspondence. Setting the snack table with chairs and napkins to match the number of children each day is a practical application of one-to-one correspondence. Patterns in the environment will be pointed out as children become more aware of the order that exists in the world. Sets and subsets will be used throughout the day as children will group according to those who are wearing shoes, those who are wearing white shoes, those who are wearing white shoes with laces, and so on. Endless opportunities exist for classification, making comparisons, and the use of ordinal numbers. Spatial relationships will be tested as we discover how many children can fit inside a cardboard box, who can step over a block structure, and how many children can play comfortably in the sand box as well as a myriad of other opportunities. Geometric forms will begin to have meaning as the child works with wood blocks, clay and dough. Volume and area will be experienced as children work with materials such as sand and water. Measurement may occur through the classical means of measuring with measuring cups, spoons and balance scale as well as through more inventive and meaningful ways of using body parts as yardsticks. Weight can be measured by a child's own limits to carry objects.

Conclusion

An important part of a child's success at school must include family involvement and frequent communication between the school and family. During second semester, parents are invited to spend a morning in the classroom; the children treasure these visits, proudly hosting their adults. Regular newsletters, preschool web pages, informal contacts, parent participation and three formally scheduled parent/teacher conferences are included in this communication. We are fortunate to have the services of a school psychologist who is

able to observe the classroom and to make recommendations concerning strategies for group dynamics or individual children's needs. The school psychologist is a valuable parent resource. As the year draws to an end a narrative report is written for each child. This contains developmental landmarks and a recommendation for the next year's placement.