

### **“Is this program academic or play based?”**

Literature, math and writing are all taught with a developmentally appropriate approach. Rather than studying numbers or letters specifically as a class, the teaching is intertwined with the activities children engage in, as well as being made personal to each child.

Howard Gardner wrote the theory of Multiple Intelligences; each person has different strengths in the way in which they gain knowledge. For some it is stronger in linguistics, others logical and mathematic, there are those who are bodily kinesthetic learners, and children who learn through music, spatial relations, nature, interpersonal, or intrapersonal experiences. By infusing our whole program with thematic knowledge, children are able to acquire knowledge in whichever way best suits their knowledge acquisition. They can learn about the planets through songs, pictures, dramatic play and art. It is strengthened through the teacher language used when guiding play and asking open questions.

If a child is into building blocks, math will be incorporated with their design. We might measure the height of a construction, count the total amount of blocks used, count how many different types of blocks are used, compare it to another child’s creation – is it taller, wider, are there more blocks? This is the foundation for an understanding in math, enabling children to grasp concepts such as categorizing, counting, one to one correspondence, estimating, comparing, and matching. These concepts are incorporated through many different play scenarios, and materials. To many adults, the learning may not be immediately apparent, but building a relationship to math around the play children are engaged in, has more meaning, and make more neural connections than having them count bead chains and learn that 10 strings of ten beads makes 100; not that there isn’t a place or age where that is appropriate, but at Children’s House we recognize that building the concepts behind “Why?” needs to take precedence.

Symbolic play, the ability to take an object and give it a new abstract meaning, is the foundation behind learning that a written symbol can also represent something and have meaning. The Storybook Journey revolves around literature, and the classroom is always rich with books and stories. Children experience books being used as a part of play, when a teacher has children act out the stories while reading the book. They begin to understand that written words have meanings, and see that the pictures in the book relate to those words. When children have heard a story repeated, acted it out playing different roles, and seen the illustrations, they often will pick up the book, and turning pages, will retell the story based on the illustrations. This is the first stage of learning to read, pretend reading.

As children grow, and acquire knowledge about the alphabet and sound-symbol correlations, they begin to apply this knowledge to actual reading. I had a child come up to me and proudly say, “I know the alphabet!” He then proceeded to sing me the Alphabet Song, which we all learned as children. I then showed him various letters, and asked if he knew what they were. With each different letter came the same answer, “Yes, I know, that’s A.B.C’s”. Alphabet knowledge is incorporated through our play, songs and art, and is made significant by being personal to each child. As children’s fine motor skills develop, and drawings move from scribbled lines, to identifiable lines and circles and representative pictures, they are showing us that it is time to start learning how to

write. Mary will learn through art how to write the letters that make up her name. This is reinforced by seeing her nametag every morning, with those same letters, and a picture of her face next to them. She then gets to learn the sounds each of those letters make and how to apply them to other words. After painting a picture of the moon, the teacher can help her label what she has painted, and will point out the correlation of sounds, "It starts with 'mmmm', that's the same sound your name begins with, what letter would you use?" In a letter rich environment, she will then get to see those same letters in the classroom. There could be a sign up for the 'market' and she will get to see how the letters in her name are applied to different words. Having a low student - teacher ratio allows us the time to have one-on-one

Children's House has been using this approach to teaching for the past 2 decades. One parent who was an educator from Korea commented that she couldn't believe the amount of information her child would come home with. The child did not speak English, yet was able to tell her parents about all the facts that we were teaching in school. Parents often come to us commenting about how much information their children come home with and share. Children learn facts that adults aren't aware of, and display it in many different ways. One child visited the Butterfly Pavilion, and asked about whether there were butterflies in the Arctic. The tour guide explained that there wasn't; yet the child had seen one in a book at school. She told her parents that it didn't seem right, and then investigated it when she got home. At five years old, this child had faith in the knowledge she received at school, and began her first research to answer her own question. Another child set up a play scenario where a whale was taking all the arctic animals to the Antarctic to go and see penguins. He knew that penguins only lived in the southern hemisphere, and that whales were the only animals that existed both in the north and south. He built it into his play, and later, when talking to his aunt who has been to Antarctica, she commented about the extent of knowledge he had about the Arctic and Antarctica. This shows us as educators, that we are being successful in our approach with how children learn.