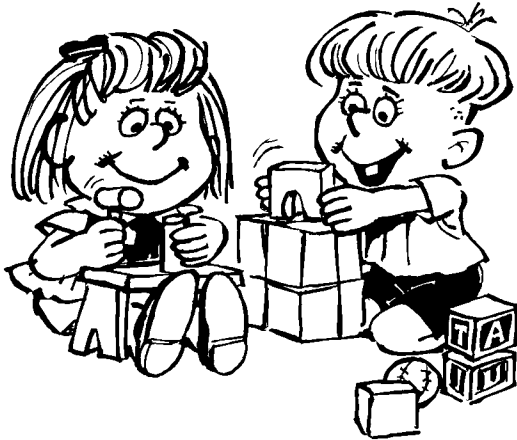


Preschool...It's the New Kindergarten!



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I know what you're thinking after reading the title- 'Can't we just let kids be kids!' My answer is yes- and our pre-school teachers are doing an excellent job of letting it happen. As a former Head Start teacher of five years in Manchester, I can state it was the hardest job I've ever had. It was also the job that I learned the most valuable lesson- Children learn best through play. Why? Because when you are relaxed, feel safe and given time to explore- you are receptive to everything in your environment. How do you know if your preschool teacher is meeting all the state requirements, while still keeping the environment a fun place to learn? Good question- and the following paragraphs will give parents some suggestions of what to look for in their child's preschool. Aren't you glad you kept reading past the title!

The Connecticut Preschool Curriculum Framework was developed from resources, which include, but not limited to, the National Education Goal One Panel, Head Start Program Performance Standards, Connecticut Department of Education curriculum frameworks and the Connecticut Mastery Test Grade 4 objectives. It is organized by using four areas of development: personal and social development; physical development; cognitive development; and creative expression/aesthetic development. A preschool teacher should be familiar with these areas of development, the goal of the preschool program and the activities/experiences necessary to master the goals/standards of the state curriculum. The preschool staff may share their curriculum/lesson plans during open house, curriculum night, registration, parent-teacher conferences and/or newsletters.

The program goal of Personal and Social Development is for the preschooler to demonstrate a sense of self as a learner; sense of responsibility to oneself and others; and effective functioning, individually and as a member of a group. This end of preschool goal is accomplished by providing opportunities to exhibit curiosity, creativity, self-direction and persistence in learning situations; describe themselves using several basic characteristics; demonstrate awareness of one's own and others' feelings; participate in and exhibit self-control in group situations; interact appropriately with peers and familiar adults; use age-appropriate conflict resolution strategies; and recognize similarities and appreciate differences in people.

The program goal of Physical Development is for the preschooler to demonstrate control, balance, strength and coordination in gross motor tasks; demonstrate coordination and strength in fine-motor tasks; participate in healthy physical activity; and practice appropriate eating habits, hygiene and self-help skills. This end of preschool goal is accomplished by engaging in a wide variety of gross-motor activities that are child selected and teacher initiated; using a variety of materials that promote eye-hand coordination and small-muscle development; demonstrate spatial awareness in both fine and gross-motor activities; choose nutritious meals and snacks; and practice basic hygiene and self-help skills.

The program goal of Cognitive Development is for the preschooler to demonstrate the ability to think, reason, question and remember; engage in problem solving; use language to communicate, convey and interpret meaning; and establish social contacts as they begin to understand the physical and social world. This end of preschool goal is accomplished by providing opportunities to express wonder, ask questions and seek answers about the natural world; recognize and solve problems through active exploration, including trial and error and interacting with peers and adults; organize and express their understanding of common properties and attribute of things; communicate their experiences, ideas and feelings by speaking; listen with understanding to directions, conversations and stories; exhibit interest in reading; and use different forms of writing such as drawing, letter-like forms, invented spelling and conventional forms.

The program goal of Creative Expression/Aesthetic Development is for the preschooler to use different art forms as a vehicle for creative expression and representation; and develop an appreciation of the arts. This end of preschool goal is accomplished by providing opportunities to explore how materials function and affect the senses; create works that express or represent experiences, ideas, feelings and fantasy using various media; represent fantasy and real-life experiences through pretend play; engage in musical and creative movement activities; and describe or respond to their own creative work or the creative work of others.

When visiting your child's preschool classroom, observe if the centers, wall art and/or newsletters reflect the goals of the preschool curriculum. Your child's teacher can explain how her/his observations of each child's performance in the classroom is an assessment of whether or not mastery of the content standard of each goal has taken place. How, Why, When and Where these goals are accomplished are all questions a parent may ask and an informed teacher will professionally explain until the parents' are comfortable with their child's preschool experience.

The best advice for any parent of a preschooler is to stay informed and involved in their child's school experience: be aware of any changes in your child's behavior at school and/or at home; seek answers to all your questions/concerns; keep a file of your child's assessments and have the preschool forward their file to the kindergarten teacher; and always remember- you are your child's best advocate! Still have questions or in need of an early childhood consultant? Please contact me for the many services L&M Educational Consultants can provide at the preschool level.