

A BRIEF NOTE ON THE CURRICULUM

Introduction:

A question that we often encounter from parents is –“What is my child really learning at the pre-school, whether he/she is playing and enjoying all the time?” Let us try to understand how children learn at the pre-school and what we expect them to learn in these years. As educators and parents, we share similar goals of achievement and excellence for our children. It may happen that the methods in which we try to reach those goals differ, which creates a misalignment between school and home expectations. We want all children at Redbricks to undergo great learning experiences helping them to reach such goals through deep, life-long and practical hands-on learning.

We believe that it is fair to have high expectations from our young children. The question is what are these high expectations for? Do we want them to learn to read, write and do math early? Do we want them to write spellings 10 times and learn them by heart? "Preschools which expose children to very structured and rote learning at an age, when they are not developmentally ready for it, create unnecessary stress for the child." (National Focus Group on Early Childhood Education Position Paper-NCERT).

Therefore we surely want to have high expectations from our children. These high expectations should not be at the cost of their freedom and the right to develop optimally. These high expectations should be about reaching optimal development, which is maximally possible. We want children to be proud of their uniqueness and develop their potential at their own pace and in the way they feel most comfortable.

Academic program

Our School caters to the overall development of each child through our developmentally appropriate program. The unique guiding philosophy of Redbricks is a culmination of precise knowledge from selected schools of thought ie. Developmentally appropriate program, Montessori Approach, Multiple Intelligences Theory, Play-Way Approach, and Teaching for Understanding Principles.

Early years (Birth to eight) are important as they are the Foundation years for all domains of development – physical motor, social, emotional, cognitive, creative and language. This is the time that brain development is at its peak. For brain development children need appropriate experiences. If children are pressurized, given inappropriate experiences, it will hamper the development of brain. Since this age period is important for all domains of development, it is vital that preschool program have a holistic approach that would address children's all areas of development.

Curriculum Content- What do Children Learn?

"The curriculum is the sum total of all the experiences available to the child, and cannot be reduced to a syllabus. It has to be constructed to suit the child's requirements in different contexts, and should be in tune with the age, needs and abilities of the child" (National Focus Group on Early Childhood Education Position Paper-NCERT).

Children are learning important knowledge, skills and attitudes in the program-

- Knowledge includes all the important topics, concepts and facts needed to learn in Maths, English, Social sciences, Science and the Arts at their age level.
- Skills include the know-how and the practical application of knowledge learnt in above subjects as well as skills across all important areas of development such as physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, language and creative. It also includes life skills like problem-solving, decision-making, communication, thinking, etc.
- Attitudes include the values and behavior regarding social interactions with peers, teachers, and other close adults as well as self-related attitudes like confidence, self-esteem, interest and curiosity for learning, study and overall habits, etc.

Yearly Developmental Goals for each class are developed for the children to develop by the end of the year, with inputs from child development experts and research, guidelines of various examination boards, comparing with similar quality peer schools and drawing from high quality textbooks.

Pedagogy- How do Children Learn?

All children are ready to learn from the time of birth. Learning is a complex process. Learning is all the changes that take place in an individual.

Children's learning is due to:

- Self Potential
- Social environment
- Availability of Resources and methodology

All children learn through;

- Active, hands-on learning
- Observation. Conceptual learning that leads to understanding along with acquisition of basic skills
- They learn by thinking things out, observing changes, and try new thoughts practically
- Meaningful, relevant experiences
- A broad range of relevant content, integrated across traditional subject matter divisions. New knowledge has to be integrated with prior knowledge and understanding

All these activities should be in an environment which is encouraging, motivating, where children feel comfortable. The teacher in this whole process is very important.

Children's learning moves from:

- Simple to complex
- Familiar to unfamiliar
- Concrete to abstract

Role of adults in children's learning

- Understand children's developmental levels
- Observe and interpret actions of each child in terms of developmental principles
- Understand how children learn
- Support learning-use multiple teaching methods
- Attend to what children learn
- Create environments for learning
- Empower them to take control of their learning
- Be conscious participant observers
- Observe and interact with children to discover how each child thinks and reasons
- Recognize each child's participation in terms of abilities/ offer appropriate support and challenge
- Establish climate for positive social interactions
- Encourage children's intuitional actions, problem solving and verbal reflections
- Plan experiences according to children's actions and interests

An Excerpt from National Focus Group on Early Childhood Education Position Paper-NCERT

“One of the complaints voiced most often about a play-based curriculum is the absence of emphasis on the teaching of the Three Rs— Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic. It would be unfair to young minds at this stage to expect them to grapple with the abstract. Yet learning the vocabulary of quantity— heavy–light, more–less, few–many— and understanding the difference through activities would clarify pre-numeracy concepts.

Children can grasp these notions through games, worksheets, and other sensorial sources such as play with objects or dramatic acts. Pre-literacy involves play with shapes and sizes and learning to master fine motor skills to be able to gain mastery of neuro-muscular functions. Art activities converge with pre-literacy tasks. Children need to participate in as many activities that will promote familiarity with labels and help them identify sounds and words. Listening to stories and poems, going on field trips, looking at charts and posters— These activities are all basic to initiating an interest in reading and writing.”

Math Learning

Math is all around the young child from day one. How old are you? In one hour you will go to school. You were born on the 2nd. Arithmetic deals with shape, space, numbers, and their relationships and attributes by the use of numbers and symbols. It is a study of the science of pattern and includes patterns of all kinds, such as numerical patterns, abstract patterns, patterns of shape and motion. Various situations can be set up that encourage mathematical reasoning. For example, a child may be asked to bring enough cups for everybody in the class, without being explicitly told to count. This will require them to compare the number of people to the number of cups needed. Other examples include dividing objects among a group fairly, keeping classroom records like attendance, and voting to make class decisions. When children learn basic math skills and can associate it with daily life experiences they are able to learn the abstract math later on very well.

Language Learning

Children start to learn language from the day they are born. As they grow and develop, their speech and language skills become increasingly more complex. They learn to understand and use language to express their ideas, thoughts, and feelings, and to communicate with others. Children learn to ‘read’ very early on. When a baby can identify his/her milk bottle, when she looks at a picture of a woman and says “mumma”, she is ‘reading’. Children see and interact with print (e.g., books, magazines, grocery lists) in everyday situations (e.g., home, in preschool, and at daycare). Parents can see their child's growing appreciation and enjoyment of print as he or she begins to recognize words that rhyme, scribble with crayons, point out logos and street signs, and name some letters of the alphabet.

The experiences with talking and listening gained during the preschool period prepare children to learn to read and write during the early primary school years. This means that children who enter Grade I with weaker verbal abilities are much more likely to experience difficulties learning literacy skills than those who do not. One spoken language skill that is strongly connected to early reading and writing is phonological awareness—the recognition that words are made up of separate speech sounds, for example, that the word dog is composed of three sounds: d, aw, g. rhyming and alliteration are two such activities. . Children learn to talk, read, and write through observing adults

or older children using books and other literacy materials, including magazines, markers, and paper. Simply put, early literacy research states that:

- Language, reading, and writing skills develop at the same time and are linked.
- Early literacy development is a continuous developmental process that begins in the first years of life and a healthy interactive preschool language program promotes interest in reading and writing
- Early literacy skills develop in real life settings through positive interactions with literacy materials and other people.

In fact, research also says that learning only through rote memory, repeatedly writing spellings again and again, writing before learning, not having good vocabulary actually leads to poor reading and writing skills and therefore poor academic performance in later life.

Assessment- How do we Know what they have learnt?

Young children exhibit their learnings in natural situations at school and home. They may not be able to answer questions verbally on demand or in writing, but they can show in a variety of ways about the knowledge and skills that they have gained.

At the school, teachers have a Checklist (Rubric) based on the yearly goals of what children should have learnt. Based on the classroom interactions and natural observations of that child throughout the week, teachers record ongoing observation notes of each child every week. Periodically, teachers combine these observation notes and fill in the checklist for each child, to evaluate how he/she is developing in each of the areas.

These are also shared with the parents in the form of report cards and child's profile reports. The child's works like drawings, clay models, worksheets, created stories, poems, etc, also indicate the level of the child's development. Selected works are thus shared in the portfolio to help teachers and parents see the child's developing skills through these works.

Parents and the School are partners in the odyssey of children's education and we believe that the right kind of experiences and stimulations are incomplete without parents support.

Useful Websites for Parents to Refer:

1. www.naeyc.org (refer the Position Statements section)
2. www.ncert.nic.in (refer the Position Paper of National Focus Group on Early Childhood Education)
3. www.cbse.nic.in (refer the "Report of the committee on pre-primary and preschool education in Delhi")
4. www.OECD.com
5. www.childcareresearch.org
6. www.eric.ed.gov