

CURRICULUM and ASSESSMENT

Curriculum Framework

The CSDC philosophy and pedagogical approach is rooted in the traditions of constructivist theory and practice. Since the early 1990s our center has been inspired by the ideas of early educators in *Reggio Emilia*, Italy, that emphasize the social construction of knowledge, the inquiry process of long terms investigations by learners, the role of symbolic languages in developing understanding, and the importance of reflecting family and culture in our environments.

The children's program is built upon the belief that children learn best when provided rich experiences that encourage collaborative inquiry and study of the world in which they live. Our teachers seek to create a learning context that is relevant and meaningful to the lives of the children in the classroom. Diverse materials and media are provided to them to support the many ways children represent knowledge.

Our primary goal is to create a pedagogy of *collaborative inquiry* – one in which teachers, children, and parents construct knowledge in relation as processes of learning are developed that support inquiry (e.g. resourcefulness, critical thinking, problem-solving, autonomy, and deliberate attention). Consequently, we strive to create group experiences in which children will develop relationships with people, materials, and space from which discoveries can be made. It is the responsibility of teachers to purposefully create and provoke rich experiences for child discovery and to extend previous, more serendipitous experiences that occur at home, school, and the greater community. Taking an *emergent/responsive curriculum* approach, teachers act as learning partners and modify their practice in response to children's questions, theories, and misconceptions.

Reflecting Culture and Respecting Diversity

In keeping with the CSDC Diversity Mission we strive to ensure that our programs and teaching practices are both *anti-bias and culturally relevant*. Teachers are expected to review their classroom environments and curriculum to ensure that materials and activities are intentional in promoting a community that is diverse and inclusive. Anti-bias practices focus on supporting children to answer their questions about similarity and difference, develop tools for identifying and combating bias, and engaging children in social activism in developmentally appropriate ways in the classroom and community. In all classrooms, and particularly the infant/toddler rooms, we seek to reflect family and cultural values and practices in our programs and to dialogue respectfully with families when alternatives need to be negotiated because of CSDC philosophy.

Special Rights

An important goal for CSDC is to strengthen our ability to serve all families and their children, regardless of ability and we are committed to accommodate children with special rights. The Center Manager is our Special Rights Coordinator at CSDC. The focus on "rights" is borrowed from the work of early educators in Reggio Emilia, Italy where every child is believed to have the right and capability to participate and contribute.

CSDC currently accesses limited resources and specialists within the UNH system and as provided by agencies and school districts, including Occupational Therapists and Language specialists. Teachers consult with a CSDC administrator during the initial steps of identifying a potential disability and work closely with families throughout the process. Children three years of age and older are assessed and provided with a plan as needed by their local school district in collaboration with CSDC. These plans could include access to the inclusion model provided at CSDC or to specialized school district programs. Assessment can be provided anytime after birth to help identify a potential need. Families with younger children work with an appropriate county agency, again in

collaboration with CSDC, to access assessment services and develop an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) if needed.

Curriculum Investigations

Through an *emergent, negotiated curriculum* we explore, observe, and converse with children about issues and questions that engage their interest and curiosity. Investigations consist of in-depth study and discoveries about the many components of a particular topic or idea a child or children want to pursue. In addition, many of the topics emerge (with the support of teachers) from the cultural, environmental, social and historical setting that makes CSDC unique. Within this inquiry-based curriculum, multiple media (wire, paint, collage, drawing, writing, etc.) are used to further the process of learning in all areas of curriculum and development. These areas are intertwined as teachers and children travel together along this exciting road of learning. Children's autonomy is supported and encouraged, their individual strengths fostered and celebrated, and the need for nurturance and guidance always respected. Investigations work is an integral part of all the programs from infancy through kindergarten age.

Documentation

The Documentation process involves an ongoing cycle of teachers asking questions, collecting data (e.g. photos, anecdotes, conversations), analyzing, developing curriculum and sharing what they uncover with others. Drawing on inspirations from early educators in *Reggio Emilia, Italy*, we use documentation as a tool to acknowledge, respect and value the capabilities, intentions and development of children. The displays present children's work and development in a simplistic, organized, manner with the children and their work as the focal point. Displaying the documentation throughout the school helps to educate visitors and families about what we do and about the capabilities of young children.

Assessment Terms and Tools at CSDC

How do we assess children's development and learning?

Initial Parent Questionnaire:

CSDC families are asked to complete a questionnaire at the beginning of each year. The responses provide teachers with important information and insights regarding individual children and their prior experiences, family culture, and learning goals.

Observations:

Skillful, systematic observation of children engaged in play and activity throughout the year is central to our work at CSDC. Observations are often intended to identify children's questions and theories as the basis for developing curriculum investigations. Teachers record anecdotal observations of significant interactions on clip boards and then transfer them to folders or portfolios organized according to curriculum areas or individual children. Observation checklists, arranged according to typical developmental pathways, are sometimes used as a short-hand way to collect specific developmental information regarding individual children.

Documentation Cycle: Evidence of Learning

We collect a variety of documentation materials that show evidence of children's learning. These materials include selected digital photos and video, children's products and representations (e.g. drawings), and transcriptions of key conversations. Often the focus is on collaborative efforts between children that provide us with insight into designing curriculum that is relevant to the children. Documentation is more than collecting "artifacts," it includes careful analysis by the teachers in order to figure out children's questions, strengths, and

challenges. Documentation (e.g. photos) is regularly shared with children to encourage self-reflection. Teachers also create displays and binders for families to review.

Interviews and Self-Portraits:

Some CSDC classrooms interview the children on usually two occasions during the year and invite them to create self-portraits. These products provide useful insight into how children view themselves and how this changes over time.

Home- School Journals:

In our younger groups we use individual journals for creating a monthly dialogue between parents and primary teachers about each child's participation and development.

Individual Portfolios:

Our full-time programs use a portfolio structure to collect information regarding children's development across the year. A portfolio is typically organized by areas of development (e.g. physical) or learning domains (e.g. literacy) and include representative samples of children's work collected at set intervals through out the year. In our older classrooms, children are often engaged in selecting examples of their "best work." Portfolio entries often include written reflections by the teacher and/or learner.

Classroom Teaching Team meetings:

Classroom teachers meet weekly to discuss and analyze their ongoing documentation of children's learning and plan future curriculum. Teachers often decide on what area of development or which children will be the focus of observation and documentation for the coming week.

Developmental Narrative Assessments and Parent-Teacher Meetings:

Based on the various assessments collected during the year, CSDC teachers write narratives regarding each child's overall development on one (nursery programs) or two (full-time programs) occasions during the year. These reports, intended to provide a detailed story about the child, (along with portfolios) form the basis for further discussion and sharing of information with parents. Teaching teams formally conference with parents/guardians on two occasions during the year.

Developmental Screenings and Diagnostic Testing:

Based on their ongoing informal assessments, CSDC teachers, in collaboration with families, may identify the need for more formal assessments and testing. CSDC teachers never diagnose a developmental delay or concern, but are trained to identify indicators of developmental problems and variations from typical development. Appropriate intervention specialists from the school district, county or other agency conduct an initial screening and, if indicated, proceed with further assessments and standardized testing (most often involving observation of children performing specific tasks). Results are used in conjunction with ongoing CSDC teacher and parent assessments when making decisions.