February 2005

Junior Kindergarten Newsletter

Dear Parents,

The Junior Kindergarteners are still fascinated with the concept of "how things connect." In the Art Area, they have created houses, airplanes, busses, and cars using old boxes, paint, glue, and construction paper. Check out the bulletin board and see your child's masterpiece. In the Science Area, the children have discovered magnetic force as a way of making connections and have charted these findings. These discoveries may have sparked the creation of inventions in the Block Area as well. The children have been making machines out of blocks that are able to do all sorts of fantastic things. Look at the bulletin board in the room for updated pictures of one of these machines. This month we will be focusing on "animals as our pets." We hope to visit the Turks and Caicos Vet Clinic while exploring this topic.

The Jr. K's are enjoying their love of books by sharing their favorite stories with one another during circle time. As a class, we are looking at storybooks individually and retelling the story with puppets and arts and crafts activities. Along with sharing with you the latest language and literacy activities in our classroom, it is also important to share research in early childhood development on this subject.

Language and Literacy in the Classroom

We know that 90% of the physical brain is developed in the first five years of life and that a good early childhood program supports this important neurological development. We know that early literacy is based on experiences with language in all its forms and that success in a lifelong love of reading is not based on early acquisition of decoding skills (ABC's), but on early experience with language. We know that approaching academics stress free keeps the body and brain from producing chemicals that prevent learning and that early pressure to perform academically can lead to long-term stress related problems. We know that making preschool more academic isn't developmentally appropriate and in the long term, isn't effective in producing smarter kids. We know that play offers appropriate learning and development in ways children naturally embrace and thrive on.

A Playful Classroom

Children actually begin learning academics from birth by making sense of the world around them through their daily interactions and experiences. Children learn the foundations of academic concepts in an appropriate manner through active concrete play experiences. As children learn basic concepts, they use what they've learned to understand more complex concepts. As children explore and discover, their curiosity is heightened, and they are motivated to learn.

Children learn by doing, through active play. Play is instinctive to children and it encompasses nearly all of the time in a young child's day. Play comes so natural to children and must be nourished by adults. Play serves very important purposes. It shapes the mental, emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development of children. Play promotes significant mental capacities and stretches the attention span while building vocabulary. Play is the child's way of beginning to organize ideas, planning and engaging the thought process. During play, children practice intellectual thoughts, their "ideas". Play is also an emotional outlet for children, by providing a "cushion" against the realities of life. Play forms children into social beings, and provides the first steps in becoming a friend, and contributor.

We can promote play at home and school by providing ample room for play, playmates, rich hands-on sensory experiences and materials like play-dough, sand, outdoor play, paints, dress-up clothes, blocks, home-made sensory materials, love for books, etc. it is our responsibility to allow children to play out their own ideas, and be available for extending their play when appropriate.

Tips for Extending Play

Observe what children do and show your interest by describing what you see.

Follow children's lead without taking over.

Offer assistance when needed.

Ask open-ended questions to find out what the child is thinking.

Open-ended question starters...

What do you think will happen?

What do you think about...?

You have been working with blocks for a long time. Tell me about what you are building.

Tell me about...

Tell me more about...

Why do you like...

Tell me how it tastes.

Tell me how it smells.

Tell me how it feels.