

## Early Years Are Learning Years - The RBCPC Approach

By: Director, Patti Hunter

As we welcome your family to our program, we want to share with you clearly how we approach early childhood education in our program. Many of you, as you were researching programs, discovered that there are different approaches in early childhood education. Parents often ask themselves, "Should an early childhood education program focus on an "academic" approach or should programs promote a "developmental" approach?"

Many of you have heard me say that I am baffled by this discussion. It leads one to think that both must be mutually exclusive, that programs need to be either "academic" or "developmental". We describe our program as developmental. Does that mean that we do not promote your child's intellectual or cognitive development? Does that mean we do not provide opportunities for your child in concepts that are considered academic? Absolutely not!

Basically, the focus and responsibility of both developmental and academic programs is for the provision of opportunities that enrich a child's intellectual or cognitive growth and development, as well as their social, emotional, spiritual and physical development. The difference may be the way the child is engaged in these activities. Do the learning tools consist of worksheets, deskwork and direct instruction or are there a variety of manipulative and learning materials for the children to explore and experiment as they gain knowledge and experience with traditional academic concepts?

In our classrooms, teachers strive to create an environment where the concepts are addressed in meaningful ways for the children. Our developmental approach is based on the concept of a "purposeful environment". For instance, for the concept of counting and one to one correspondence the children count the number of children in their class in preparation of setting the snack table. They then set the appropriate number of places at the table by counting out napkins and cups. During clean up time teachers may ask the children to sort the toys, putting the like toys in the same bin.

Blocks are wonderful tools for learning. Three dimensional block shapes involve tactile learning as children handle them to combine and change shapes while building. They learn about relationships between shapes such as putting a pyramid shaped block over a cube to make a house. Estimating can be explored by adults asking open-ended questions; "How many jellybeans do you think are in the jar?" Dice and domino games help children with numbers and counting. They provide occasions to learn which numbers are bigger or smaller than others.

In our classrooms we find opportunities for the children to participate in informal measuring, such as creating matching piles of sand, counting when we sing songs like "five Little Monkeys", and comparing sizes and shapes with puzzles and manipulative. We compare objects to learn the concepts of bigger/smaller, taller/shorter, heavier/lighter, more/less, sooner/later, near/far.

Writing and print is all around. Mailboxes for the children, writing tools and materials are easily accessible; dictation is taken both individually and with a group. Read, read, read! Reading quality books helps children to expand vocabulary, understand the concept of print communication, begin to recognize symbols as letters. Decoding the symbols to letters to sounds is a progression of understanding that comes with experience

and growth. Songs, poems, rhymes help children tune into the sounds and begin to identify the sounds with letters.

In our classroom we strive to provide exposure and opportunities for your children. We respect each child's own abilities and pace of understanding and development.

So "academic vs. developmental", it's truly all about learning and growing. It's about being intentional with the opportunities offered to children, so when they interact and "play" with these opportunities they are encouraged to explore, experiment and discover. Children learn about their world through play. Different types of play lend themselves to many different discoveries.