



Early Childhood Philosophies/Program Types

Developmental/Play-Based: Play based learning does not mean that the children just do what they like all day. There will be times when the children come together as a group where they will learn to listen to each other, share information, follow rules and partake in group activities. Play based activities don't replace intentional teaching, rather complement and enhance it! In a play based learning setting children will be provided with long periods of uninterrupted play time. They will have the opportunity to follow their own interests. They are encouraged to initiate activities and be self directed with the support of their teachers.

They learn to take ownership of their work. They will be gently moulded into independent children with initiative and the confidence to take risks, knowing that there is no right or wrong way. Open ended play based learning focuses on the process not the product. It is the learning that is taking place that is the all important factor. There is a strong emphasis on social skills and getting along with others by sharing, taking turns, and resolving conflicts with words instead of crying or hitting. Teachers facilitate these skills by helping kids negotiate who gets to play with a toy or which role each gets to assume in make believe play.

Friends School (Quaker): foster the ideals of community, spirituality, responsibility and stewardship. A hallmark of the Quaker school experience is the basic beliefs that we are all teachers and learners and that each child has unique gifts and talents. Students are called upon to discover their own voices and interests. The foundation of the educational experience is built upon the ideal that students' quality of character – what kind of people they are becoming – is as important to their lives and to the world as their intellectual growth and exploration.

International/Language Immersion: In a language immersion or bilingual preschool, the class is conducted partly or entirely in a foreign language. You can find preschools that teach French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Italian, and Japanese, among others. Children learn languages easily at a young age and these preschools are designed to take advantage of that window. In a language immersion classroom, the teacher only speaks the language and rarely, if ever, translates, though she may demonstrate what she means when speaking. At a bilingual school, English and the other language may each be spoken about half the time either throughout the day or on certain days of the week. If you're not ready to commit to a language immersion program, there are also preschools that expose students to a second language through singing and storytelling, or through optional after-school enrichment classes. When touring schools, keep in mind that each individual school may interpret a particular educational approach in their own way. Some programs also combine philosophies, taking ideas from several to create their own approach. Be sure to read each school's mission statement carefully, and talk to the director during your visit to see how she personally describes the school's philosophy.

Montessori "play is a child's work": Montessori is centered on establishing independence, self-esteem, and confidence while fostering learning at a child's own pace. While these preschools focus on academics, the goal is to let learning happen naturally at the child's own pace and to foster independence by allowing children to make their own choices and teaching them skills that foster self-sufficiency.

This self-paced education is accomplished by changing the role of adults in the classroom from teachers of a whole class into that of "guides," as they are often called, for the students as individuals. According to the American Montessori Society, guides have four principle goals, which encompass what the Montessori method hopes to achieve. The guide strives to:

- awaken your child's spirit and imagination;
- encourage his normal desire for independence and high sense of self-esteem;
- help him develop the kindness, courtesy, and self-discipline that will allow him to become a full member of society;
- help him learn how to observe, question, and explore ideas independently.

The guide may introduce a lesson to the class as a whole, but will then focus on working with students in small groups as they investigate topics on their own in a carefully prepared classroom environment. This individualized attention means children with special needs — whether they are gifted or delayed — often do well in a Montessori environment.

Parent Cooperative: If you can't afford a traditional preschool, or can't find one with a philosophy that meshes with your own, consider looking for or even founding a cooperative school. These parent-run programs are usually less expensive than other schools (because of the sweat equity that parents contribute) and allow participating families to help decide what kids will learn and how.

Co-op preschools are run by parents, who do everything from assisting in the classroom and editing the newsletter to managing the

finances and washing windows. There is typically a paid, professional teacher who leads the classroom and sometimes also acts as the director. Otherwise, everything else is done by the parents. For parents with flexible schedules, a co-op can be a great, affordable option as the “sweat equity” keeps the tuition cost low. These preschools are usually child-centered and play-based, and operate on a part-time schedule. For more information, go to the California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools at www.ccppns.org.

Reggio Emilia “project-based curriculum”: Many experts have hailed the Reggio Emilia approach as an exemplary system for helping children develop strong thinking skills. The primary goal of this method is to create learning conditions that help children develop these abilities through exposure to all matter of expressive, communicative, and cognitive experiences. Four guiding principles work together to meet this objective:

- **Emergent curriculum:** Topics for study are built on the interests of the children, determined by discussions with the class and their families, and by areas that fascinate many children, such as puddles and dinosaurs.
- **Projects:** Children participate in in-depth studies of concepts, ideas, and interests. Such projects are often explained to the children as adventures, and can vary in duration from a week or two to the entire school year.
- **Representational development:** Teachers present new ideas and concepts in multiple forms, such as print, art, drama, music, puppetry, etc. This variation is considered essential in making sure that all children (who have many different styles of learning) have the chance to understand what is being taught to them.
- **Collaboration:** Groups both large and small are encouraged to work together to solve problems using dialogue, comparisons, negotiations, and other important interpersonal skills. Each child's voice should be heard within the group to promote the balance between a sense of belonging and a sense of self.

Religious: If you want your child to receive age-appropriate religious instruction in preschool, you might want to look at a school that is affiliated with a church, synagogue, or other religious organization. A religious-affiliated program incorporates some degree of religious content through stories, songs, etc. Most schools welcome students from all backgrounds, though some give strong preference to children within that particular faith and whose families are members of the congregation.

Waldorf: Waldorf programs strive to stimulate kids' bodies, spirits, and souls with a nurturing, homelike environment that engages all five senses. Rudolf Steiner, who founded the first Waldorf school in Germany in 1919, believed that small children learn best by imitation and their physical surroundings. Creative play is the most important means of learning in a Waldorf classroom, with a heavy dose of teamwork and togetherness. If your child attends a Waldorf school for many years, he will remain with the same teacher from preschool through 8th grade! The result is a deep, close relationship, one in which your child's needs are better understood from year to year. Toys used in the classroom are made of natural materials such as shells, rope, beeswax crayons, and wooden (never plastic) toys. Parents are encouraged to skip TV and computers at home. To learn more, go to the Association of Waldorf Schools of North America at www.whywaldorfworks.org.

Other:

Academic: This is a more structured approach focused on formal reading and math readiness skills. The idea is that preschoolers benefit by preparing for the rigors of kindergarten and beyond at an early age. Similar to what children can expect to find in kindergarten, there is a daily schedule of planned activities that is closely followed so each day is consistent and predictable. Play takes place during recess outdoors or perhaps during a free-play period, but classroom time is devoted to developing skills such as identifying colors, time measurement, problem solving, and other reading, writing, and math skills.