

# Learn from, Grow with ... and Connect to Our Curriculum

By Brooke Amo, Director of Education

How does one go about finding an all-in-one curriculum that is so dynamic that it fits their school, teachers, students, philosophy, and mission statement? How do you take the beautiful moments that the children experience in each day and fit them into a little box or teacher manual? The truth is you can't. In early childhood education, curriculum involves and integrates each aspect of the child's day. Each experience, whether it is completely organic or purposely designed by a teacher, can be used to achieve learning goals. Although so much of what children learn can sometimes "just happen," it is essential to have an educational framework to use as a guide. This will help each child construct knowledge and lead them towards reaching their potential.

Curriculum development is a process that is ever changing. Staying up on current research, trends, and practices is important to ensure children receive a quality balanced education. The process to create and implement effective curriculum begins with theory, then planning, followed by implementing/execution, and lastly assessment and reflection.

The theoretical aspect of curriculum mostly examines intelligence, theory, and curricular content (Hirsh, 5). Intelligence has been defined by many, however Howard Gardner best explains it as "a biopsychological potential to process information that can be activated in a cultural setting to solve problems or create products that are of value in a culture." (Gardner, 1999, p. 34) Gardner sees intelligence as various entities: social, linguistic, kinesthetic, artistic, mathematical, body, and musical. At CJP, we embrace this theory as well as many others to create a well-balanced environment that fosters the growth of the whole child. We know that children not only learn differently, but at different schedules. We base a lot of our daily structure around Gardner's theory. Our teachers know the importance of providing an environment that facilitates all of the students' intelligences. Areas in our classroom are designed to facilitate the multiple intelligence experience. Each day children experience centers that are artistic, cognitive, kinesthetic, mathematical, etc. These areas are student-centered and provide children with learning opportunities that are engaging and multi-disciplinary to reach the whole child.

Our content is organized into nine domains: social, emotional, physical, literacy, language, mathematics, science, cognition, and Judaica. Within each of these learning domains, there are specific learning goals that help teachers guide their students and set them up for learning.

How do we get there? Creativity, hard work, careful planning, and engaging execution is what it takes. Every teaching team at CJP has a planning session once a

month with our Director of Education. We come together with all of our knowledge and ideas to share best practices and marry them to developmentally appropriate and stimulating activities. This kind of regular planning promotes consistency and teamwork throughout the school. Teachers take the goals and skills that they need to teach and weave those skills into our themes.

CJP uses thematic units for many reasons. A common theme keeps student learning focused on a broader concept while touching on specific goals and skills throughout. Teaching thematically is motivational for both children and teachers. A common theme allows both teachers and children to delve into a content area, making it more exciting for teachers to teach and students to learn. Our delivery through themes integrates content areas in ways that make sense to children. This in turn provides them with a more



rich understanding of a subject and has more meaning. Furthermore, teaching thematically hits a student's multiple intelligences, linguistic, logical-mathematical, naturalist, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, and interpersonal. Teachers are given the opportunity to showcase their natural ability to differentiate their instruction for the class. This approach ensures we provide an optimal way to help all children reach their potential and have a meaningful impact on their learning.

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TEL: 704.523.2202 ♦ FAX: 704.496.2716

MGOLDSTEIN@MGOLDLAW.COM ♦ WWW.MGOLDLAW.COM

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