

THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER @ MIRACOSTA COLLEGE

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Student Participation at the Center: A Guide for Service Learners & Classroom Assistants

Mission: *The Child Development Center serves as a campus-based child development program providing both academic instruction to students enrolled in child development and early childhood education courses and early care and education to student, faculty & staff, and community families.*

Philosophy: *We are committed to the belief that every child has a right to be treated with respect, and a right to live each day with joy and self-fulfillment. As teachers, we support each child's growth socially, physically, creatively, and cognitively. We believe that children learn through self-discovery, hands-on exploration indoors and outdoors, and interaction with others; that these experiences will help them develop confidence in their own abilities; and that play is the primary medium for early learning. The environment is carefully planned to meet children's developmental needs and to provide opportunities for successful learning.*

Eligibility: *The primary criterion of eligibility for program enrollment is the child's emotional readiness to be separated from his/her parents and the parents' willingness to share the care of the child with program staff. Admission is open to all children between 18 months through five years of age (whom have not yet attended kindergarten) regardless of race, creed, color, or national origin. As a campus laboratory school, we strive to craft classroom composition that reflects the wide diversity of today's families and include consideration of student status, age, gender, language, ethnicity, and developmental needs in our enrollment decisions.*

Unlike other early childhood programs, the Child Development Center at MiraCosta College has the unique responsibility of serving children, parents, college students, faculty members, college administrators and the community in an openly observed environment. Very few early childhood programs have observation mirrors, web cameras, and microphones in the classroom! This level of responsibility requires all staff (and students) to maintain very high professional standards of conduct.

Service Learning. Students wishing to complete Service Learning hours at the Center should visit the Center Office in the 8000 Building. Bring your *Service Learning Contract*, proof of a current *TB Clearance*, proof of immunization for *Measles, Pertussis, and Influenza*, and your *Attendance Sheet* (along with knowledge of your class schedule) to arrange for the days and times you will work in one of our five early childhood classrooms. All Service Learners are expected to attend an orientation session conducted by the Center Program Specialist prior to beginning their hours. To serve our populations efficiently, responsibly, and appropriately, the following guidelines must be followed at all times:

- 1) **Arrive early** in preparation to begin working at your scheduled time. Sometimes things do not go as planned. If you do expect to be a few minutes late, call the Center Office at (760) 795-6656 to let us know of your situation. Upon arrival, sign in at the front desk and obtain a "Service Learning" badge and nametag before you go on to your assigned classroom.
- 2) **Absences:** As soon as you know you will be absent, phone the Center Office at 760-795-6656. If you are unable to contact the Office, follow the options on the phone menu to leave a message for the supervising teacher to whom you are assigned (you *will* be missed!). If you are going to be absent, you must make up the hours that you missed.
- 3) **All cell phones must be turned off** while at work. If you have an emergency, use the main office number as your means of contact. The main office number is 760-795-6656.
- 4) **Professional and comfortable attire is required.** We are being watched at all times. Please be aware of this and make sure you dress modestly (e.g., no midriffs or undergarments showing). Make sure that the shoes you wear to work allow you to run if needed. Always remember that you are a model to the children, students, and Center visitors.
- 5) Relationships are very important while working in an early childhood program. Working together daily means it is important that we enjoy being together. However, **extensive or detailed personal conversations should take place during non-working hours.** Please remember that most personal discussions are inappropriate for children's (and observers') ears!
- 6) While you are on the floor with the children, **maintain your focus on positive and respectful communication.** Get to know individual children and become familiar with the daily classroom routines (and plan on enjoying your time with the children).
- 7) Be sure to observe all health & safety procedures here at the Center. Get in the habit of **washing your hands** before, during, and after your time on the floor with young children (we'll all stay healthier).
- 8) If interns, service learners, observers, parents (or you) have any questions or need guidance in the classroom, please **refer them to the supervising teacher** or let your teacher know you need assistance. Don't be afraid to ask!
- 9) **Children and families have a right to privacy.** What you observe and learn about individual children is strictly confidential. It is inappropriate to talk to others about such matters and to press the teachers for information which may be sensitive or confidential.
- 10) **Record your field notes after you finish your service learning hours** (not during your participation time). It often helps to create a scheduled time each day to recall events, record specific behaviors and/or situations and offer interpretations and personal reflections.

Developmentally Appropriate Communication Techniques

- *Be alert to dangerous situations.* Broken equipment should be repaired, toys should be put away when not being used, and open doors should be watched.
- *Tell children what to do instead of what not to do.* Say, "Put the bead on the string," instead of "Don't put the bead in your mouth."
- *Know what children are capable of at each age level.* We expect 3-year-olds to often play alone or side-by-side. The 4- and 5-year-olds often play in small groups.
- *Avoid situations which encourage competition.* To suggest being the "first one through" or painting the "best picture" is poor procedure.
- *Let the children play in their own way.* Instead of making pictures for them, or showing them what to draw, paint, or build, we encourage them to do these things for themselves. We want them to develop initiative, imagination, and self-reliance.
- *We may show disapproval of a child's actions, but never of the child him/herself.* You may say "That is not a good thing to do," but never "You are not a good boy (or girl)."
- *Children need your reassurance.* If a child is in disgrace for hurting another child or destroying something, reassure that child of your continuing love and trust.
- *Be alert to individual differences.* No two children are the same. There is rarely a standard method that applies to all children in all situations.
- *Be consistent.* If more than one person is responsible for a child, try to see that they all set the same standards for that child.
- *When children show you their art work, say, "Tell me about this,"* instead of "What is it?" This gives children the opportunity for self-expression by telling a story about their pictures.
- *Try to see the situation through the child's eyes.* When talking to children, it is good practice to sit beside them or stoop to their eye level.
- *Never discuss children's behaviors or appearance in their presence* or within their hearing.
- *When children play together, be slow to solve their problems.* Let them try to reach a solution themselves. Learning how to play is a step in social adjustment.
- *Provide encouragement for the type of behavior you wish continued.* Encouraging a child's desirable behavior emphasizes it and the undesirable will gradually drop out of sight.
- *Redirect negative activities* and aggressive/violent play whenever possible.
- *Give a child a choice of two courses of action when feasible.* Asking, "Would you like to park your trike by the door or in the shed?" often brings more successful results than a command. It gives the child a personal interest in the situation and develops independence and initiative.
- *Be sure to offer children a choice only when you are prepared to accept their answer.* If a child must do something (there is no choice), then tell them to do it. (You can say, "Let's do ..." or "It's time to do ...") If you ask the child whether or not they want to, you must be ready to accept either no or yes as an answer.
- *Allow children plenty of time to perform their activities and to change them.* Small children become confused and anxious when hurried (warn for transitions). Forcing a child to perform too quickly or to turn abruptly from one activity to another often causes conflict.
- *Children fare best when their activity is constructive,* when they can create and direct their own play, and when they discover the knowledge and meanings inherent in their environment. Allow them the opportunity to explore and experiment

⌘ Interest Centers in the Learning Environment ⌘

In the **ART AREA**, *children...*

- ❑ Build language through talking about how and what they are creating.
- ❑ Build fine motor skills through picking up and manipulating collage materials, paint brushes, crayons, glue, scissors, etc.
- ❑ Build science concepts when they see different colors mix and/or learn the different properties of different types of art media.
- ❑ Develop social skills through working together and commenting on each other's artwork.
- ❑ Develop emotionally by feeling good about what they made!
- ❑ Build self-help skills by getting out materials and returning them to the shelf when they are finished (and when they wash their own hands).

In the **ART AREA**, *adults...*

- ❑ Observe the children creating artwork.
- ❑ When children ask for help, encourage them to do their artwork on their own. Seeing an adult doing artwork may put pressure on children to make their artwork look like yours.
- ❑ Comment on how the children are making their artwork and on the effort they are putting into the piece.
- ❑ Listen to the children.
- ❑ Write the child's name on their artwork after asking them if they would like their name written. Refer to the class list for spelling and sound it out while you write.
- ❑ Remind children to put materials back when they are finished.
- ❑ Try to think of something specific to say about the artwork besides, "That's nice" or "It's pretty."
- ❑ Avoid asking a child, "What is that?" Sometimes a child just wants to create without pressure that it must look like something. Also, sometimes it doesn't look like what the child says it is, but to them- that's it!

⌘ Interest Centers in the Learning Environment ⌘

In the **BOOK AREA**, *children...*

- ❑ Build language through hearing the words of the book read to them.
- ❑ Develop literacy skills by associating print with the pictures and spoken words, and learning to read from left to right and front to back.
- ❑ Build fine motor skills through turning the pages of the book.
- ❑ Build critical thinking and problem solving skills by trying to solve the problems in the story.
- ❑ Develop social skills through reading together.
- ❑ Develop emotionally by hearing stories that are relevant to their own experiences.
- ❑ Build self-help skills by returning the books to the shelf when they are finished reading them.

In the **BOOK AREA**, *adults...*

- ❑ Listen to the child(ren) tell a story.
- ❑ Ask the child(ren) if they can read the book to you.
- ❑ Ask the child(ren) about the pictures.
- ❑ Ask the child(ren) what they think might happen next.
- ❑ Ask the child(ren) to turn the pages.
- ❑ Remind children to put the books back when they are finished reading.
- ❑ Try to think of ways to extend their learning (e.g., “What was your favorite part of that story? Could you draw a picture about that part?”)
- ❑ Cuddle with children.

⌘ Interest Centers in the Learning Environment ⌘

In the DRAMATIC PLAY AREA, *children...*

- ❑ Build language through talking together during play and trying out different roles.
- ❑ Build motor skills through moving their bodies in different ways.
- ❑ Build critical thinking and problem solving skills by interacting with others and negotiating rules of the pretend play.
- ❑ Develop social skills through playing together and through taking on different roles.
- ❑ Develop emotionally by being able to role-play events that they do not fully understand and through expressing different emotions.
- ❑ Build self-help skills by learning to put on dress up clothes, pretending to clean the dishes, and by putting toys away when finished, etc...

In the DRAMATIC PLAY AREA, *adults...*

- ❑ Observe the children playing together.
- ❑ Comment on what the children are doing.
- ❑ Listen to the children.
- ❑ Ask the children questions about what they are doing.
- ❑ Remind children to put materials away if they leave the dramatic play area. However, sometimes props travel around the room for a reason- see if they are using the materials purposefully elsewhere before you call them back.
- ❑ Try to think of ways to extend their learning (e.g., “You are a mommy? What does a mommy do?”)

⌘ Interest Centers in the Learning Environment ⌘

In the **PUZZLES & MANIPULATIVES AREA**, *children...*

- ❑ They build language through talking about the process and the puzzle's picture.
- ❑ They build fine motor skills through holding and fitting the pieces.
- ❑ They build math concepts and problem solving skills by visualizing space and learning how shapes fit together.
- ❑ They build social skills through helping each other finish the puzzles and the manipulatives.
- ❑ They develop emotionally by building self-esteem regarding their accomplishment and learning they can "do it!"
- ❑ They build self-help skills by returning the puzzle (or manipulative) to the shelf when they are finished.

In the **PUZZLES & MANIPULATIVES AREA**, *adults...*

- ❑ Provide children with assistance by helping them figure out the puzzle instead of doing it for them (support their efforts by *scaffolding*). Help the child think about which pieces go where (e.g., "Where does the street go? At the top or the bottom?"). Suggestions such as, "Here's a corner piece," can really help.
- ❑ Encourage children to work together if appropriate.
- ❑ Observe the children making puzzles and completing manipulatives
- ❑ Comment on what the children are doing.
- ❑ Listen to the children.
- ❑ Remind children to put puzzles and manipulatives away if they leave the area.

⌘ Interest Centers in the Learning Environment ⌘

In the **BLOCK AREA**, *children...*

- ❑ Build language through talking about what they are building.
- ❑ Build fine motor skills through picking up and manipulating blocks.
- ❑ Develop gross motor skills by using big blocks.
- ❑ Build math concepts and problem solving skills by visualizing space and learning how different shape blocks stack.
- ❑ Develop social skills through building together.
- ❑ Develop emotionally by feeling good about what they constructed and feeling that they can make what they want!
- ❑ Build self-help skills by returning the blocks to the shelf when they are finished.

In the **BLOCK AREA**, *adults...*

- ❑ Observe the children attempting to make the structures.
- ❑ When children ask for help, find ways to help them solve their problem without solving it for them.
- ❑ Comment on how the children are making their block structures.
- ❑ Listen to the children.
- ❑ Ask the children questions about what they are doing.
- ❑ Remind children to keep block towers only as tall as they are and to make sure it doesn't topple down on anyone.
- ❑ Try to think of ways to extend their learning (e.g., "You seem to need a road. How could we make a road?")

There are many additional ways to interact with children here at the Center. Start by becoming familiar with daily routines, by establishing positive relationships with children and adults, and by remaining open to learning... together!

How Young Children Learn

Children Are Good Observers

Children learn from actively investigating the world around them. Coming upon a construction site, for instance, a four-year-old will be curious about the activity. The adult with the child should take the time to stop, really look at what's going on, and direct the child's attention to the details. "Let's watch and see what happens while that dump truck unloads dirt. See how big the wheels are?"

Children Respond Well to Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions encourage children to think and reflect. "What made the shovel move like that?" "What do you think the driver is going to do now?" "Did you hear the motor make a noise? I wonder what will happen next." Giving children time to come up with their own answers, even misconceptions, starts them on the road to constructing explanations and building theories.

Children Are Researchers

Assisted by adults, children have numerous ways to explore their interests. A child intrigued by construction vehicles can look in books at home or at the library. Sand box toys such as shovels, containers, and vehicles can give the child a chance to replay experiences and act out observed roles in order to construct his or her own knowledge. Revisiting a construction site will help the child track the progress of the work, gain more information, and clarify misconceptions. With a sketchpad and pencil, the child can draw what he or she sees. The adult in tow can jot down the child's statements to help further the experience at the next opportunity.

Children Benefit from Positive Models

In a natural, almost unconscious, process, children follow the examples set by others, modeling both behavior and the accompanying emotional tone. When children see their parents reading regularly, they want to read and be read to. When they see disrespectful or violent behavior, live or on television, they are just as likely to imitate it.

Positive Suggestions Guide Children

Responding to children positively helps them interact effectively with others. Often an adult's first response to a child's undesirable behavior is negative, controlling, emphasizing what the child cannot do: "Don't throw this ball here." But usually a more effective approach suggests what the child can do: "That's a good place to throw the ball."

Children Learn Through Play

Play is the child's work, perhaps the child's most important way of learning. This learning process occurs even when it may not be obvious when children actively explore their environment and act on their inborn curiosity. Adults can contribute to this natural process by encouraging children's interests and efforts, talking to them about what they are experiencing, and helping them elaborate and extend their play.

Children Learn from Their Peers

When children play with siblings and friends, they learn from each other. As questions, challenges, and conflicts arise, they learn how to solve problems. For example, three-year-old Sarah is in the block area trying to balance a structure and bridge the gap to "put a roof on my house." Her more experienced four-year-old playmate Lakisha suggests, "Let's try the longer block. It looks like it might fit better." This mixed-age play in particular allows children to learn in two ways, both by modeling the behavior of older children and by "teaching" younger children.

Children Learn With Support

It doesn't work just to tell children "You must share." At best, such orders are effective only temporarily while adults are present. However, when adults guide children through the process of taking turns or waiting for a turn, the children can internalize those strategies and use them the next time. For instance, a two-year-old wants a turn pushing a wagon, but both wagons are in use. A teacher says so that all can hear, "Jason is really waiting for a turn. He'll be ready as soon as you're done. Let's see what you can do, Jason, until they're finished. You can help put some more leaves in the wagon. Here's a rake to get another pile ready." This approach helps the child have a role and a way to enter the play. Such emotionally supportive language also helps children view adults as their advocates. It helps them solve problems rather than turning the situation into an adversarial struggle. Often, when asked first how they could solve a problem, children think of the best solution.

Children Learn by Using Basic Materials

Young children learn by doing. Helping with cooking, chores, and other real work is of tremendous interest and value to them. This hands-on learning is also encouraged with open-ended materials such as the following:

- Materials for drawing, writing, and constructing: paper, pencils (thick primer ones are best for young children), crayons, scissors, glue, and tape. Commonly found materials such as cardboard boxes, which offer children many opportunities to represent their ideas.
- Easel paints and water colors for painting.
- Water, sand, playdough, and clay for sensory experiences.
- Building blocks (hardwood unit blocks are best), Legos, and puzzles for building and manipulating.
- Dress-up clothes, hats, and props for taking on roles - even better if children can make their own costumes.
- Dolls and doll clothes, so children can play out roles they have experienced.
- Some simple musical instruments and opportunities to listen to music.
- The outdoors for investigating nature and for running, climbing, and other active play essential for large motor development.

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

The orientation of the Child Development Center at MiraCosta College draws heavily from the psychodynamic theory of Erikson and the cognitive developmental theory of both Piaget and Vygotsky. The establishment of trust and support of autonomy are cornerstones of our program's philosophy, while an emphasis upon a sensorimotor base of active exploration and experimentation serves as the basis for our curriculum development. In organizing our activities, there is an attempt to bridge the theoretical-practical gap and include a wide range of developmental concepts. Children, parents, and students are viewed as active learners, each contributing to overall program success as well as individual child and family progress. The following assumptions are drawn from theories of development and learning which integrate behavioral biology, cognitive developmental perspective, humanistic psychology, and psychodynamic theory:

Behavior Biology (Ames, Gesell)

- A child is born with unique genetic potential that influences her temperament, learning style, and rate of maturation and development.

Cognitive Development (Piaget, Vygotsky)

- A child's innate capacities in conjunction with her environment produce qualitatively different stages of learning and development.
- A child's thinking differs both qualitatively and quantitatively from that of an adult.
- A very young child learns through concrete experience; exploration of her world grows to include non-physical mental action.
- A child grows optimally when her own ideas and inventions, curiosity, initiative, and creativity are encouraged and supported by adults.
- All areas of development - including physical, social, emotional, and intellectual - are interrelated.
- Learning is a lifelong process, not a product, and occurs at different rates and in different forms throughout the lifespan.

Humanistic Psychology (Rogers, Barth)

- Each child is a unique individual with her own perceptions, feelings, and capabilities.
- A child learns best when she has a positive self-concept.
- Positive self-concept allows a child to take risks and challenges, to accept and learn from her failures, and to work towards behavioral and developmental change.
- Self-initiated learning involves the whole child - her feelings and intellect - and is the most pervasive and permanent mode of learning.
- A child is learning to value and respect others people's feelings and to experience life as interesting, significant, and worth living.
- A child needs opportunities for interaction with peers, adults, younger and older children in order to begin to develop significant lasting human relationships, respect for differences among people, and a sense of mortality.

Psychodynamic Theory (Freud, Erikson)

- A child learns best in a safe, secure, and supportive environment.
- Each child is dealing with issues of trust, sex-role identity, attachment-separation, adaptation, autonomy, initiative, adequacy, self-control, and relatedness.
- A child's emotional, social, and moral reasoning is qualitatively different from adult's and produces qualitatively different stages of development.
- Play provides the vehicle for children to indirectly or symbolically reveal the conflicts they are feeling, to try out different roles, and to act out potentially aggressive or destructive feelings.

Core Components of the Reggio Emilia Approach

- **Image of the Child:** All children are respected and have potential, are capable, and construct their own learning.
- **Sense of Community:** Children, families, teachers, parents, and community have dynamic interactions and share in mutual discovery and learning.
- **Interest in Environment and Aesthetics:** School and classrooms are beautiful places for learning.
- **Collaboration among Teachers:** Teaming, partnering, working together, sharing information, and engaging in projects.
- **Time Framed by Meaningful Activity:** Respect for children's pace, individual timetables, consistency in staffing, and continuity in relationships.
- **Emergent Curriculum & Projects:** Child-centered, followed and supported interests, planned possibilities, revisiting to add new insights.
- **Environment as the "Third Teacher."** Encourages focused activity, involvement, discovery, and the use of a variety of media.
- **Documentation:** Observing, recording, reflecting and exhibiting children's learning.