



Foundations and Goals

By: Claire Bainer

Before women officially entered the work force in 1972, when one parent stayed home to raise the children, many children went to preschool or, as we called it, nursery school. These were usually small schools enrolling about 15 to 25 children from 2 yr/9mo old until kindergarten entrance. Most of these programs were very part time, often meeting every other day and mostly lasting from 9 to 11:30am. Sometimes they offered a snack, but no lunch, no nap, no diapers, and they might look like co-ops where parents worked as a teacher aid or college lab schools that taught child development or something in between. These programs were specifically designed to help children prepare for elementary school.

In those days, teachers in elementary schools were aware that children raised at home with a parent and a sibling or two had more trouble entering the school system easily than children who had some socializing and knew how to play with other children. Soon, parents also realized this and little programs sprang up, giving parents an hour or two off and helping children learn how to get along with one another. Children need socialization and in the days when children stayed home the parents often took care of their children as they saw fit. Parenting could be, as it still is, quite different from one home to another. Most parents had limited knowledge of little children until they had them and roles of mother and father were strongly stereotyped. Psychology was somewhat poo-pooed or considered useful for only the extremely disturbed. Bigger kids took care of younger kids and younger children had play dates with a neighbor in the back yard or a friend from preschool, and sometimes young children were left for an hour in the nursery while parents were at church, the Mosque or to temple. Preschool children tagged along to Boy Scout meetings and hung out at PTA meetings. It was a very different life from the preschooler's life today.

The stay at home parents helped each other, they kept each other's children, taught each other cooking and canning and cleaning and gardening and they were all watching out their kitchen windows to be sure the children were okay as they played. It was a very different world and a different life experience for these young children (their culture of the day was different from our children's culture of today). These kids spent considerable time in the car, too, with no car seats. They climbed around over the seats waiting for sister's lesson to be done or to collect Papa from the bus stop. Children played about the life they experienced just as they do today, and just like children today, the transition into kindergarten involves moving from one care experience to another and there are new things to learn and a reaction as change is assimilated. Like moving from one job to another this assimilation takes time, and it can be stressful. For any young child with limited experience, being in a room with 20 to 30 other unfamiliar 4 and 5 year olds can be interesting and intimidating. Many children are somewhat afraid of other children their age. They like

Upcoming Events

Weds, Jan. 9

Parent Scholarship Committee/Envelope Stuffing Party
6:15 - 7:45 p.m.

Monday, Jan. 21

BlueSkies Closed for MLK day

Wed, Jan. 23

Parent Services Committee
6:15 - 7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, Jan. 29

Parent Ed Event: Security for your Digital Life
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Friday, Feb. 1

Hedco House Meeting
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

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older children and adults better because they are more predictable and easier to play with.

It was from the culture described above that Arnold Gesell, the head of the Yale Child Guidance Center, developed the Child Guidance Nursery School. His study of Child Development soon became the example of quality Early Education. The goals held for the children in these early nursery school experiences continue to be part of the goals still at play in child care centers today. Culture and trends move quickly but evolution moves slowly and, while it may be less obvious, what the developing brain needed hundreds of years ago it still needs today. This may seem less obvious today because so many other things are so much in the public eye, yet this foundational research and its basic principles continue to be important goals for quality nursery school programs today.

These principles are:

1. Teach children to talk and listen to each other
2. Help the children learn how to be a friend and how to have a friend
3. Teach children that who they are and what they do makes sense and makes a difference
4. Help children learn to balance their energy output so they don't play so hard that they get too tired and can't manage in the social classroom. Help them learn to play hard then choose a quiet activity to help them balance and regulate their energy output
5. Help the children learn how to choose, start and finish an activity and put the activity back in a way that leaves it ready for the next person to find and use it
6. Preschool teachers teach children that they can transfer the trust they have with their parent from parent to teacher
7. Teach children about how the world they live in works
8. Build confidence, attention span, and self sufficiency/independence

These tenets can get lost in the modern day push to have little children learn to read or be part of a group in circle time and do what the teacher tells you to do... all things children should learn to do in kindergarten.

There are some other things that are different or unique about the preschool experience. One is that in preschool the child learns in a smaller, safe environment where their world experience is purposefully kept small and manageable. This is to help children build successful experiences encouraging their agency.

Another unique thing about preschool education is that the job of the leadership of the school is to support the development of a happy healthy family life. Every family is different and some need more support than others, but we all know that harmony in the family supports the development of the child. Sometimes parents are surprised when Ameena or I connect with a parent about a concern or thought we have been reflecting on regarding the growth and development of their child. Unlike the elementary school principal whose job is fully focused on the administration of the school, preschool directors are also charged with holding and supporting the development of the family. We know that these first five years, as wonderful as they are, can also be surprisingly difficult for many parents as they are being asked to assimilate and change and be quite nimble as they learn to parent and adapt to their rapidly changing child. When families feel held and supported through these new and often confusing early years they are more able to set in place positive and constructive patterns of communication, building a healthy and constructive structure for their growing family. Even parents who never pop their head in the office with a worry or a helpful suggestion benefit from this service. It is a perfect example of that wonderful quote "A rising tide lifts all boats".



BlueSkies-isms

Parents often hear their children using phrases that they suspect they learned at BlueSkies. Each month's "BlueSkies-ism" will include a phrase the teachers use all the time at BlueSkies, and some context to help you use the phrase at home too.

"I don't know what you want when you say "No." Tell me what you do want."

It is easy for children to get into the habit of saying "No." It is a powerful controlling word. It is also a dead end. Once you've said "No" there is nowhere to go, so helping children tell you what they do want rather than what they don't want can help parents and children avoid getting stuck in a power struggle. Children are much more likely to do what they say they want to do than to do what you suggest. If they are in the habit of saying no, every option you offer may just elicit the word "no" over and over again. Asking the child to name what she does want breaks the cycle; with younger children though you may need to limit options (e.g., if you want your child to be able to choose her pants, be sure the drawer only contains pants you're willing to have her wear to school.)

THANK YOU!

We love what we do! We enjoy this work - it stretches our minds and bodies, and we get to spend our days with your wonderful children - but we don't do it for the pay! Your generosity at the end of the year means so much to us and provides us with extra cheer for the holidays.

Thank you so much!
The BlueSkies Staff

comings & goings

Welcome!

Rei in the Baby House
Elliana in the Baby House, joining
big brothers JB and Lev
Simone in the Wobbly Walkers
Laszlo in the Playroom

Head Teacher Tiffany in the Baby House

Farewell!

Teacher Carlina in the
Nursery School

Staff out in January

The following staff will be out this month:

- * Maria S 1/2 - 1/8
- * Shardae out 1/2 - 1/4
- * Tianna out 1/17 - 1/18
- * Spencer out 1/25 - 1/28

Snapshot in the Schoolroom

Watching two groups of children play side by side in the schoolroom this morning, I found myself chuckling at how different the play was and how exactly right it was also. In the large block area, two of the youngest four year olds were kind of rolling around among a pile of toys they had been playing with and had run out of ideas about what to do with. Next to them, in the unit block area, four of the oldest children in the group were working on several large floor puzzles. They crawled around, discussing the subject matter of the puzzle, and traded pieces to work out the completion of the puzzles. The teacher moved inconspicuously between the two groups encouraging the children and asking leading questions and occasionally setting a limit in the case of the younger two. "Before you dump that basket of wooden trees on the floor tell me what your plan is. How will you use them?" Ari and Lake giggled as Ari drove a plastic car over a doll and Lake dumped just a few wooden trees on the floor as the teacher "helped" move the basket back to the shelf. Ari began digging in one of the dress-up drawers and pulled out a toy cell phone. The teacher was ready and wondered if there was another cell phone for Lake to use so they could call each other if the dolly needed to go to the hospital. The other four, Casey, Drew, Blain and Cameron, had finished their floor puzzles and were sliding their bodies across the smooth flat puzzles. "Here you go, Cam and Blain", says the teacher, handing one box for each puzzle to the children. They get busy putting the puzzles away. Just as a road side emergency has Lake and Ari on the phone to the police "yeah my car broke down and we need to get this kid to the hospital". "No problem I'm on my way, Lake." "Where are you, Ari?". "Well I'm not at home". What road are you on?". "Street or something. Come get me, I have your phone number."

Back in the unit block area the puzzles are on the shelf where they belong and Casey calls "I'm getting the ocean". Grabbing a remnant of a blue shag rug, she says "here it is" Out it goes across the floor. "Good, good" says Drew, "quick grab a fin and get this baby shark back in the water!" They grab Cameron who seems to be dead on the floor by the elbows and knees and drag him onto the blue rug. "Oh no!" calls Blain "Big sister, come on we have to rescue Casey and get her in the water too. Quick, she can't breath! Emergency emergency, Drew, help!" Smiling, the teacher says, "first you made those marine biology puzzles and now you are being marine biologists rescuing the sea animals. What a good idea."

The teacher smiles and says those two young ones are just learning how to be friends. First, they need to discover that it is fun to talk to one another, then the next piece is to actually try listening and sharing ideas - playing and all the fun that brings with all the challenges of compromise and reciprocity. The older children in the unit blocks were full of ideas and plans, all they really needed from me was "moral support" to help them not get too excited or too silly and derail their play. They need me to help them have a successful play experience. I didn't need to bring them ideas. If the older kids playing in the unit block area were chaotic and messy like the younger two in the big blocks I'd have quietly cleaned up around them as they played their game. For those older children the play was the most important thing happening. Those four children played with each other and a piece of a blue rug as a prop. This play was going on primarily in the children's imaginations...they really did not need any toys at all. With the younger two in the big block area it was a more delicate touch and go situation. Either one of them could have just walked away but the teacher wanted to help them find each other as potential playmates. The teacher was being careful to let those two novice players be in charge of their environment. She was hoping that might help them if the environment they created felt like a messy bedroom or family room. This was an introduction, so actually playing was not that important at this point. The teacher was suggesting these children, who of course knew each other, might discover that they could be friends and learn about each other. The teacher used the environment to signal to these young fours ease - no pressure, no expectations of the children. She wanted the environment to say "do what you want to do here."

In the Wobbly Walkers classroom, the children are so distractible that a messy, disorganized environment can be over stimulating. At that age each toy they come across is an invitation to play. One year olds need to learn to commit to something they like and focus on it. By four-and-a-half, the child is less distracted by toys and should be more interested in other children. The teacher's goals for the one year olds are different from the teacher's goals for the four year old. In this snapshot the teacher was helping two young four year olds learn to be friends while also supporting four older, more sophisticated children who were well on their way down the road to being competent friends.