

What will your child learn at M.A.C. Preschool and Childcare?

Benefits of our play based learning curriculum.

Music /Creative Movement/Circle Time

Children enjoy both listening to music and making their own. Whether it's a group sing-along, marching in a percussion band, playing a triangle, or making up new lyrics to old favorite tunes, music is the universal language. Creative movement, learning to move their body through space, in time to the music or while pretending to be a falling leaf, is a creative way to tap into a child's imagination and artistic side.

In circle time during music, the teacher may begin with a specific topic for discussion. It may be a topic related to the theme the class is studying, or it may focus on a specific skill. For example, in the beginning of the year, the music teacher may "get to know you" games to help the children learn the names their classmates.

What's Learned~ Music helps children connect the outer world of movement and sound with the inner world of feelings and observations. Playing games or moving to music is a powerful first experience in the artistic process. Children learn music the same way they learn language--by listening and imitating.

Listening to music also teaches important pre-reading skills. As youngsters use small drums or other percussion instruments and play the rhythmic pattern of words, they learn to hear the differences between fast and slow, loud and soft, one at a time and together, etc. When they try new instruments, they notice how each variation changes the music.

Creative movement expands a child's imagination. It's also a fun method of physical fitness--an important goal of child development.

Finger play promotes language development, fine-motor skills, and coordination, as well as self-esteem. Young children are proud when they sing a song and can do the accompanying finger movements.

Art Projects

Most of MAC's art projects are another way by which children learn in our thematic teaching program. For example, as part of the seasons' curriculum, the children might gather pine cones, leaves, and acorns during a fall nature walk. They will later use them in art projects, such as to make leaf rubbings, to assemble in collages, or to use as decorations for picture frames.

What's Learned ~ A good art project teaches a child that his creativity is limited only by his own imagination. By transforming everyday objects, such as empty paper towel rolls and egg cartons into sculptures, imaginary bugs, or spyglasses, a child discovers that he can create a world of play.

Using materials in an art project reinforces and expands on the information a child has already learned in other contexts. For example, let's assume that the art project of the

day is to make rubbings of leaves collected during a nature walk the day before. If from a pile on the table, the child selects a dry leaf that crumbles easily, the youngster learns, in a concrete way, about life cycles in nature. Through trial and error, just like the scientist in a lab, the student might find that green leaves or shiny leaves hold up better for this art project.

Another art project might have the youngsters create a fall mural by pasting leaves, pine cones, and acorns on a large roll of paper. They might organize the project by sorting and classifying the leaves, by color, shape, and size. These are pre-reading and pre-math skills--as well as fun! In this same project, the group also learns social skills such as cooperative and group dynamics. Do the three-year-olds know this as they happily create a fall mural--probably not, but our teachers certainly do.

Art projects are also excellent for developing a child's fine-motor skills. It takes small-muscle control in order to manipulate clay, cut with scissors, paint with a brush, and color with markers or crayons. As these skills are practiced, they help a child gain mastery to cut with a knife, button their own shirt, and print their name.

Art projects build a child's self-esteem. The finished product, on display on the refrigerator, validates a child's sense of worth. It's another opportunity for a child to say "I can do it!"

The process, not the product, is the most important element of the children's art projects at MAC.

Outdoor Play

Running, swinging, climbing, jumping, hopping, biking, digging in the sand; outdoor fun is one of the favorite parts of any young child's day. Our playground has enough space and sturdy equipment for children use their imaginations while exercising. For example, the dome structure has connecting bars in the shape of triangles which make it look like a spider's web. Children pretend to be spiders catching their prey. We also have tunnels to crawl through, swings to swing on, slides to slide down and bikes to ride. Children use multiple skills and create dozens of scenarios as they play in our back yard. We also have toys for digging, hauling and building.

What's Learned~ Outdoor play refines a child's gross-motor (large-muscle) skills. The cross-lateral movement (right arm/left leg and vice versa) involved is critical to a child's later success in reading and writing. Playground time is also an opportunity to explore and manipulate a different environment.

Youngsters also love outdoor play because they can let loose their imaginations while getting physical. They can turn the jungle gym into a rocket ship, a castle, a firehouse--anything they choose.

Cooking

Children enjoy cooking. Sometimes they like the product, but even if they don't, they always appreciate the process. It's fun to do something that is a grown-up activity and discover that they can do it too!

At MAC, we tie cooking projects into our themes. For example, in the fall, a class may take a pumpkin and use it in a variety of ways. For a large pumpkin, the class may first decorate it with markers and use it as a centerpiece on the table. Later, the teacher will cut open the pumpkin and the students can see and feel all the seeds. The class can also roast the pumpkin seeds for snack, and finally bake pumpkin bread.

What's Learned~ Since cooking is a basic life skill; it fosters a sense of competence and independence when a child can do it. Math skills are also an important part of the process as cooking required counting and measuring ingredients. Cooking also refines small-motor skills as a child stirs, dices, and adds ingredients. Another attribute is that cooking can teach a child about nutrition. Science is also taught with cooking. A child will discover how things change if you alter the environment: liquid batter becomes a cake when baked; juice cups become popsicles when frozen. Cooking also helps a child's reasoning ability. The learn cause and effect. "If I don't put the juice cups in the freezer, they won't become popsicles."

Snack and Lunch Time

What do you remember as the highlight of your own school day; lunch time and recess? Snack times and lunch times are important parts of the preschool experience. It is a time to share and communicate. It can also be an opportunity for children to try new foods.

What's Learned~ Snack time is an opportunity for a child to learn social skills as she chats with her friend in the seat next to her. Passing out the snack and distributing a napkin and cup to each child teaches one-to-one correspondence and counting skills. Pouring milk or water from a small pitcher to an individual cup requires small-motor control. Cleanup time after snack is another educational opportunity. Again, a child's sense of competence and independence are reinforced. Snack time is also an opportunity for a child to associate mealtime with pleasant feelings.

Free-Play Activities

Free play sounds vague, but is very much a planned activity. At MAC, children have the freedom to choose among many different activities. Free play is not time off for our teachers. On the contrary, they are paying close attention to the children, interacting with them, offering guidance and help when necessary, noting progress and difficulties.

Here are some activities that a child may choose during the free-play:

Building with Blocks

Building with blocks is lots of fun--and it teaches many skills that children will use later. One study indicates that many of the concepts learned from block building are the foundation for more advanced science comprehension. For example, children learn about gravity, stability, weight, balance, and systems from building with blocks. Through trial and error, they learn inductive thinking, discovery, the properties of matter, and the interaction of forces.

What's Learned~ Blocks help children learn scientific, mathematical, art, social studies, and language concepts; use small-motor skills; and foster competence and self-esteem. Building with blocks also teaches life skills. Just putting away your groceries in the

cupboard is using the same concepts of spatial relations, stability, and balance that is learned in the block corner.

Besides the scientific concepts, blocks also are important in developing math skills. A child learns about depth, width, height, length, measurement, volume, area, classification, shape, symmetry, mapping, equality (same as), and inequality (more than, less than)--all from building with blocks.

Building with blocks also teaches art concepts such as patterns, symmetry, and balance. A child learns about symbolic representation, mapping, grids and patterns. A child gains pre-reading skills such as shape recognition and differentiation of shapes and size relations. Language is enhanced as children talk about how to build, what they built, what is its function or ask questions about concepts or directions. And dramatic play is also a part of block building as children create stories to go along with their constructions.

Finally, building with blocks fosters a feeling of competence, teaches cooperation and respect for the work of others, and encourages autonomy and initiative.

It's not just building with blocks that are educational; so is cleanup. Sorting and storing blocks teaches classification and one-to-one correspondence, which are important math skills.

Dramatic Play

The housekeeping/dress-up area in the M&M Room is stocked with play items and props that encourage children to play make-believe. While items are rotated in and out throughout the year, and example of what might be found are: pots and pans, stuffed animals, dolls (soft, unbreakable, washable, and multiethnic), toy telephones, hats, purses and tote bags, unbreakable tea sets, doll beds and carriages.

What's Learned~ Playing make-believe lets a child bring the complicated grown-up world down to size. Research demonstrates that children who are active in pretend play are usually more joyful and cooperative, more willing to share and take turns, and have larger vocabularies than children who are less imaginative.

Imaginative play helps youngsters to concentrate, to be attentive, and to use self-control. Think about how a child develops a game of supermarket. She must first set up the counter, put out the pretend cans of food, invite friends to shop, use the "cash register," and bag the groceries. All of these actions help a child to learn about sequential acts. She also has a story or script in mind that helps her to perform each of these steps in a logical and orderly way.

When children pretend they also learn to be flexible, substituting objects for those they do not have. For example, a child will use an empty paper towel roll for a telescope.

Through imaginative play, children learn empathy for others. Children will often act out a whole range of emotions when playing pretend, offering sympathy for a stuffed doggie that is hurt or for a doll that fell off a chair. We watch them scold a puppet for being naughty or tell a doll how proud they are because she used the potty.

Dramatic play encourages children to think abstractly, which is an important pre-reading skill. Children come to understand that words represent ideas.

Manipulative Toys

Children enjoy playing with a variety of toys that helps develop their fine-motor control. These toys include Legos, Duplos, Play-Dough, Peg-Boards, large beads to thread, and stacking and nesting materials.

***What's Learned* ~ Manipulative toys help develop a child's fine-motor skills, which is a precursor to being able to write. Often these toys are also used in fantasy play. The beads that are strung become the necklace for the "queen" to wear. The Play-Dough creations include cookies for the impromptu "tea party."**

Cooperative Play

During the preschool day, you will see children who are playing by themselves, but you will also see cooperative play, small groups or even the class as a whole working on a project. The amount of cooperative play increases as children grow older. Some of this play may be child initiated, and some may be teacher directed.

***What's Learned*~ Working together, whether it's on a block building or planning a tea party, helps children to learn to respect the ideas of others. They develop their social skills, and social competence is an underlying goal of early childhood education. Children in cooperative play learn to contribute to joint efforts. They also learn how to problem solve by working together.**

Touch Table

A touch table is almost an indoor mini-playground. Even children who don't ordinarily dig in the sand at the beach will find it fun to measure, sift, and pour the sand, bean, rice, etc. from one container to another.

***What's Learned* ~ Children have a practical math lesson in fractions when they pour a cup full of sand into a two-cup container. It explains the concept faster and more clearly than a detailed discussion or drawing. Their fine-motor skills are also being developed as they maneuver a cup full of sand into a sifter. This is great for their eye-hand coordination as well.**

As anyone who has sat on a beach knows, sand and water play is soothing. It encourages children to explore and learn about cause and effect. (For example, what happens if I put a sponge in the water? What happens if I then squeeze the sponge?).

There is no right or wrong way to play with the contents of the touch table (except to throw it out of the table), so each child experiences success.

Puzzles

MAC's rooms have puzzles that vary in complexity; five-piece puzzles, as well as 12-piece puzzles, and puzzles made of different materials. You will find puzzles that interlock and

those that have individual slots for pieces (for example, a five-piece puzzle of five individual animals).

***What's Learned~* Puzzles require abstract thinking: the ability to see a space and envision what belongs there. Puzzles also require fine-motor control in order to place the pieces into place. Having puzzles for varied skill levels permits children at all stages of development to experience success.**

Books

Our book corners have books reflecting a range of levels. We have simple board books, as well as picture books for story time with the entire class.

***What's Learned~* Children learn language skills from books. Whether they are looking at a book individually or being read to as part of a group, when you make books a part of a young child's day you set the stage for a lifelong interest in reading.**

Cleanup

Preschoolers don't yet know that many grown-ups consider cleaning a nuisance. For them, it's another fun activity. It's not a question of efficiency. Allowing the children to clean up before the next transition is another learning opportunity for them.

***What's Learned ~* Preschoolers learn to sort, classify, match, and organize when they put the toys back on the shelf. You'll notice our rooms have low shelves so that children can easily see where objects belong.**

Preschoolers learn that helping behaviors and orderliness are valued. They see that it's important to take care of their environment and that it's easier to find what you want when you put it back in its designated place. Cleaning up teaches self-discipline. Children learn how to follow simple directions. Working together as a class to clean up the room is another exercise in cooperation. As they work alongside their teacher and classmates, chatting and discussing the best way to approach the cleanup effort, language and social skills are being practiced. Preschoolers also enjoy feeling competent, independent, and responsible. With the instant feedback of a clean room and a job well done, a youngster's self-esteem is enhanced.