



ST. MARY'S

An IB World School

PRESCHOOL

Jean Piaget, leading cognitive theorist, theorized that a child's mental models, or cognitive structures, are based on the child's activities; engagement makes meaning. Free, unstructured play is healthy and, in fact, essential for helping children reach important social, emotional and cognitive developmental milestones. Piaget's theory is based on the idea that the developing child builds cognitive structures known as mental maps, or schemas, for understanding and responding to physical experiences.

St. Mary's offers an inquiry based program allowing the students to reflect on their learning in order to develop their own understanding of the world. Through teacher directed activities and child initiated play experiences, the student adjusts their mental model to accommodate their new knowledge. Our focus is on creating inquiry based, engaging activities taught in a transdisciplinary curriculum which also involves an important element: play. "Play is the work of the child." – Jean Piaget

Through play, the child learns to negotiate the world around them. Their imagination and creativity flourishes as they role play and invent games and the rules that govern. Through a fine tuned balance of academics and play, St. Mary's students become life-long learners prepared to conquer the challenges that lie ahead of them.

PRESCHOOL CURRICULUM

Two-Year-Old Classroom

St. Mary's offers a dynamic two year old program that focuses on the development of the child in relation to perception, motor skills, cognition, language, emotions, and social skills. Through a warm and loving environment, St. Mary's youngest students are able to learn about themselves developing autonomy while learning about the world around them and where they fit into that world.

Attachment is a complex, ongoing process that lasts a lifetime. Learning how to create attachment to others such as friends and family is an essential part to developing a sense of self and social skills in order to be successful in learning. Assisting the young children in creating bonds between the teachers and peers assists in the development of attachment which affects mental, social, and emotional development. By providing an environment where the children can trust that their basic needs will be met and they will be loved promotes strong attachment development in the children.

Perception is the ability to take in and organize sensory experiences and sensory information provides an important link to the other areas of development. Children learn to use their sensory experiences to learn about their world. St. Mary's provides a very sensory rich environment using music, stories, cooking projects, art, and visual object to stimulate the different senses.

Motor skills are divided in to fine motor skills, small movements of the body, like picking up a cotton ball, and gross motor skills, large movements of the body like running. Both fine and gross motor skills are important to the daily functioning of people. Fine motor skills and muscles are developed and strengthened through activities such as cutting a variety of mediums (such as green beans, spaghetti, yarn, paper), lacing, the use of nesting blocks, painting using different modalities (Q-tips, cotton balls, small paint brushes), using clay and clay tools, using small objects like tweezers to pick up and move other small objects like beads. Gross motor skills and muscles are developed when the student is engaged in our outside curriculum. The students are provided tricycles, balance boards, a climbing structure and room to run and jump while outside. When inside the classroom, the students are engaged in activities such as dancing with scarves, banging large drums, and hammering to aide in large motor developing and motor planning.

The process of gathering information, organizing it, and using it is the essence of cognition. Knowing and understanding comes from active involvement with people and materials. Young children are naturally active, interactive, and learning through their environment. They seek experiences that are interesting to them and that eventually lead to problems solving. St. Mary's promotes cognitive development by inviting and encouraging exploration in an environment rich in sensory experiences. When given the opportunity to play with a variety of materials as they wish, children will encounter problems such as how to make a large object fit in a small space. Allowing the students to explore the materials and manipulate them to solve these cognitive problems promotes cognitive development. Young children learn through constructing knowledge, meaning, by taking what they already know about an object and applying it to a problem, they can construct new knowledge about the new object and problem being presented to them. It is through this construction of knowledge that cognition is enhanced. By providing our students with a variety of materials and allowing them a degree of freedom to explore the objects and materials, they are developing a new knowledge daily. Our students are provided with materials in science, math, language, dramatic play, art, and music to allow for their cognitive development.

Math

Color mixing, cooking, planting and gardening, observing light and shadows, learning about plants and animals through observation and literature, and beginning to use scientific vocabulary are all ways in which our young students are learning about their environment and scientific principles.

Science

Counting songs and games, classifying objects by attribute, exploring shapes and colors, and using math vocabulary to describe their immediate environment (such as inside, outside, above, below, next to, behind, in front, up, down) are ways we introduce our students to math concepts. Providing a variety of blocks and materials allows for the development of spatial awareness and architectural concepts.

The Arts

Dramatic arts allow students to express themselves through creativity and imagination. They will use varying styles of drama to explore concepts within the units of inquiry as they are introduced by the teacher. Students will act, sing, dance and role play as an individual and in groups.

Art is incorporated daily through many different modalities such as using scissors, glue, crayons, markers, paint, chalk, oil pastels, or charcoal and all on different mediums such as cloth material, newsprint, foil, wax paper, or butcher paper.

Music

Music includes the exploration of sound and the expressive use of musical elements. Students will join together in musical activities using their voices, bodies and simple instruments to develop concepts about sound and musical awareness. They will participate both individually and in groups. Students will have opportunities for practice, and consistent exposure to music. They will begin to develop an awareness and appreciation of music from different cultures.

Language

Language includes both expressive and receptive language. Expressive language is the ability to communicate your needs and feelings to others. Receptive language is hearing and understanding what others are saying. Both receptive and expressive language is important in a child's development and is fostered daily in our 2 year old preschool. Engaging in dialogue daily, creating monologues, discussing events both past and future, telling stories, singing songs, creating rhymes and poems, reading books both individually and in groups, asking questions and encouraging our students to ask questions, listening to the students and summarizing for understanding, and helping our students listen to their peers are all ways in which we foster language development in our program.

Helping young children recognize their own feelings and cope with them contribute to the child's inner sense of self-direction and competence. Sometimes people want to label feelings as "good" or "bad". However, all feelings are good; they carry energy, have purpose, and can provide us with messages that are important to our sense of self. Through guidance, our programs assist children in identifying their emotions and feelings and validating how they feel. Children feel all the same emotions that adults feel at this young age; however, they don't always understand what they are feeling (such as frustration, embarrassment, elation, excitement, separation anxiety). By empowering our young students to understand their feelings, we are empowering them to be confident and communicate how they are feeling which leads to problem solving and peer relationship development.

PRESCHOOL TECHNOLOGY

All Preschool classrooms are equipped with video cameras, picture cameras, and light tables. Light tables provide the opportunity to explore science and light through engaging hands on activities. A variety of materials are placed on the light table such as x-rays and glass encased insects and small animals. Students are introduced to technology and curriculum content through interactive media to aide in learning and retention. Video and picture cameras allow teachers to capture students engaging in activities throughout the day. This equipment provides the means to create digital and video reflections for both students and parents. Videos capture the true essence of student learning at this young age, including dramatic play, social interaction with peers, creative interpretation, and making cognitive connections using ramps.

The Jr. Kindergarten program features three computers in each classroom and a Smart Table, used as an interactive computer for students in small groups. Learning games are designed and developed based on the current IB Unit of Inquiry. The Smart Table offers another method of visual and hands on instruction, encouraging students to actively participate in their own learning. The Smart Table and learning games reinforce concepts that are being taught in the curriculum and create a fun, social and interactive learning center in the classroom.

WEEK OF THE YOUNG CHILD

St. Mary's is proud to be both an IB World School with a Preschool that is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC is both an accrediting agency and advocate for young children. Part of being an NAEYC accredited school is being able to participate in Week of the Young Child (WOYC). NAEYC describes WOYC as:

“The Week of the Young Child is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the world's largest early childhood education association, with nearly 90,000 members and a network of over 300 local, state, and regional Affiliates. The purpose of the Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.

NAEYC first established the Week of the Young Child in 1971, recognizing that the early childhood years (birth through age 8) lay the foundation for children's success in school and later life. The Week of the Young Child is a time to plan how we--as citizens of a community, of a state, and of a nation--will better meet the needs of all young children and their families.”

During WOYC, St. Mary's Preschool designates each day within the week-long celebration with a specific learning theme. Our goal is to showcase how much young children learn through play. Past themes have been: buildings and architecture, language and literacy, the arts, and through the senses. Within these themes the students are “playing” yet learning so much. Through buildings and architecture, the students are learning math concepts, spatial awareness, and how to building with materials other than blocks. This week long celebration takes place every April and is a favorite of our teaching faculty.