



**University of Wyoming
Early Care and Education Center**

*Classroom Q & A
for Families*

Why do your classrooms look the way they do?

We strive to create classrooms that are home-like, full of beautiful and interesting materials that are open and available for children to interact with independently. Our learning environment is filled with images and materials representing those things that are most important to children; their families, their homes, their friends, and their work and learning. Each classroom is unique because it represents the unique attributes, interests, and contributions of children, families, and teachers that are members of that classroom community.

What will I see children doing during the day?

Children and teachers engage together in learning activities throughout the day. Children work and play individually and in groups – accessing materials independently, investigating their interests, and exploring and testing out ideas. Children contribute to the classroom community in multiple ways, including caring for materials, participating in routines, and supporting and caring for one another.

Do the children just play all day?

Our teachers carefully plan the environment and daily activities so that children are offered rich experiences and multiple opportunities for discovery, interaction, and growth. Teachers offer engaging and meaningful learning activities as part of every routine during the day. To some, this may look like “just playing”, but there is always a purpose and a goal in every experience a child has during their day.

What curriculum do you use?

Our curriculum philosophy is based on the belief that children construct knowledge through their experiences with materials and with other people. The learning opportunities our teachers offer evolve from the interactions of the children and adults in each classroom. Some describe this type of curriculum as an Emergent Curriculum. We utilize the Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards as a framework within our emergent curriculum to plan and document children’s learning.

What exactly is an “Emergent Curriculum”?

Emergent curriculum describes the kind of curriculum that develops when teachers plan experiences that are "socially relevant, intellectually engaging, and personally meaningful to children."

Does this mean teachers base what they teach on children’s interests alone?

Emergent curriculum is never built on children’s interests alone; teachers play a vital role in guiding and directing the learning that occurs in each classroom. Teachers constantly use their expertise to make important decisions about the direction of the classroom curriculum. In emergent curriculum, both

adults and children have initiative and make decisions. This power to impact curriculum decisions and directions means that sometimes curriculum is negotiated between what interests children and what adults know is necessary for children's education and development.

How do you know that children are learning?

We assess children's learning daily using many techniques. Each child has an individual portfolio and his or her work, learning, and growth is documented in the portfolio on an on-going basis. The Wyoming Early Childhood Readiness Standards provide one framework we use to guide the information we collect for each child. In addition, we use documentation panels (what you see on the walls throughout the center) to document individual and group learning experiences in each classroom. We encourage parents to review the information contained in documentation panels because they do more than simply display cute pictures of children at play. They provide in depth reflections on the learning and work of the children in our program. They are an important tool we use to communicate our philosophy to others.

How do you share information about children's learning with parents?

Our teachers meet formally with parents twice yearly to discuss their child's learning and to celebrate his or her progress at school. Every fall and spring parents will receive a written report of their child's progress, will have the opportunity to review their child's portfolio, and will work with the teacher to create learning goals specific to their child. In addition to the formal conferences, teachers will share important information with parents through blogs, newsletters, and e-mails throughout the year. Parents are encouraged to view portfolios or discuss their child's progress or any concerns they may have at any time.

What do you do to make sure children are ready for Kindergarten?

We have found over the years that children from our program are well prepared to have a positive experience in elementary school. We also believe that "readiness" is about much more than simply knowing your ABC's and numbers. While we do address these academic skills with preschool children, we also recognize that enthusiasm for learning, social and language skills, independence and confidence are of vital importance in ensuring that each child has a great experience in Kindergarten.

We believe that concerns about "readiness" often focus too much on the *child* individually, and that many people are responsible for ensuring that Kindergarten classrooms are welcoming, supportive and caring environments in which all children are deemed "ready" to learn and grow.