

Class make-up: Each of our preschool classes consist of 16 children, ages 3-6 years, with a balanced mixture of typically-developing children and children that are learning above and below the expectation for their age. There are many factors taken into account when children are assigned to a particular class, including: age, gender, level of need (for children with special needs and/or behavioral concerns), child/family rapport with the teachers, parent/teacher input, and available space. The percentage of typically-developing children will be no less than 50%, with the ideal ratio being 50-75% typically developing children and 25-50% children with varied levels of need (physical, speech, cognitive, behavioral, etc...).

Teachers: Emerson Academy seeks to employ teachers that are committed to providing the best possible learning environment for ALL children. Each of our preschool classes has two teachers, with at least one of the teachers in each class possessing a degree in a field related to child development and/or a teaching certificate. Our teachers undergo on-going training to stay up-to-date on innovative, developmentally appropriate, research-based teaching practices.

Ability grouping: The teachers will assess all of the children every 6 weeks using an evaluation tool developed specifically for inclusive preschools. Using the information gained from the assessment the teachers will group the children into homogenous (similar ability level) groups for small group instruction during reading and math. For large group instruction the class will be together as a whole and instruction will be modified to accommodate both higher level skills and very basic skills.

Curriculum: The preschool curriculum is being designed by Sarah Johnson, M.Ed. It consists of 2-3 week thematic units that cover a broad range of subjects that the children are interested in, such as dinosaurs, outer space, fairy tales, and favorite authors. The curriculum includes specific goals and objectives related to the following areas: creative expression, positive self-esteem, social skills, cognitive skills, communication skills, health/safety habits, physical development, and appreciation of diverse cultures, families, ethnicities, genders, and levels of ability. The daily schedule reflects a balance among activities: indoor vs. outdoor, quiet vs. active, individual vs. small group vs. large group, gross vs. fine motor, and child-directed vs. teacher-directed.

Each classroom will be arranged so that learning centers are clearly defined and the children know the purpose of each center. For instance, in the writing center the children will have a variety of tools (pens, pencils, letter stamps, stickers, etc...) to use in that center and the teachers will ensure that the children know how to take care of the materials and keep them together. Developmentally appropriate materials will be rotated on a weekly basis so that the children are exposed to a wide variety of objects that encourage exploration.

Mixed-age classrooms: Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Why not group the children by age?

Answer: In traditional classrooms where children are grouped by age there can be a difference in ability of four years or more between the highest and the lowest performing student, yet teachers are expected to teach everyone the same concepts and skills. Traditional models leads to frustrated teachers who are forced to “teach to the middle” while the children that are higher performing suffers from boredom and the lower performing children are lost.

Question: What are the benefits of multiage classrooms?

Answer: There are many benefits of having children that are different ages learning together, much the same as there are benefits of different aged siblings growing and learning in a home environment. In successful mixed-age classrooms children are taught “helping behaviors” and they are encouraged to seek help from one another and give help to one another. This practice fosters self-esteem and cooperation, and models learning and helping in a family (D. Adams, Harmon, Reneke, T. Adams, Hartle, and Lamme 1997).

Other benefits of mixed-age classrooms include:

- Children spend more than one year with the same teacher, allowing the teacher to develop a better understanding of the child’s strengths and needs so that she can better support the child’s learning.
- Children are viewed as unique individuals and the teaching focuses on each child according to his/her own strengths, unlike in same-age classrooms that often expect all children to perform at the same level.
- Children become a “family of learners” who support and care for each other.
- Older children and children with higher skill levels have the opportunity to serve as mentors and to take leadership roles.
- Children are more likely to cooperate than compete.
- Children are invited to take charge of their learning, by making choices at centers and with project work. This gives them a sense of ownership and self-direction which are the foundation for lifelong learning.
- Children are more likely to cooperate than compete, making it possible for children to help each other as individuals, not see each other as competitors.

--The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI)

Question: If my child is ahead of the younger children won’t she be held back academically?

Answer: No. Research indicates that children in mixed-age classrooms have achievement levels that are as high, or higher, than their peers in same-age classroom. Children in mixed-age classrooms also appear to have more positive attitudes towards school, themselves, and others, when compared to peers in same-age classrooms (Stone, 1998; Veenman, 1996). In fact, one of the best ways to learn something well is to teach it to someone else. Teaching someone else a skill reinforces one’s knowledge. Mixed-age classrooms more effectively reinforce learning, promote leadership skills, and foster relationships of respect than traditional, modern grade level systems (Pudewa 2008).