

Discovery Developmental Center Curriculum Framework

Mission Statement

To build a community of early childhood professionals and families dedicated to creating a rich and caring learning environment for all children.

Philosophy and Core Values

Discovery's philosophy is firmly grounded in the concept that **children learn best through play!** Children develop self esteem and an enthusiasm for learning through a creative, non stressful educational experience. Our core values guide our work and philosophy of early learning:

Children are competent and capable. Respecting and trusting that children can participate and contribute to the daily learning experiences are key factors in developing appropriate programming.

Children need empathy and a sense of belonging. Helping children become aware of the gifts and abilities they and their peers possess promotes respect for each other's strengths and challenges, and heightens their ability to be sensitive and supportive of one another.

Children have the right to explore. Children have the right to explore the arts, sciences, languages, and relationships within a community of caring, nurturing adults and in beautiful environments that are interesting, well-cared for, and reflect the culture of our community. They have a right to explore and experience the natural world, both indoors and out, with enough time and space to imagine and explore in ways that nurture deep learning.

Children need respectful relationships. Children need adults who intentionally plan learning experiences that are important to them, and who teach them the social and language skills necessary to communicate with adults and peers in an appropriate manner.

Children come from families. Families are a child's first teacher and hold the key to the healthy development of their children. We cannot do our work without them.

Curriculum Framework

Discovery utilizes the High Scope Preschool Curriculum as the framework for how we plan for children's learning. At the core of the curriculum is the belief that children need active and play-based learning environments with plenty of activities and materials to choose from; positive interactions with adults who care about and believe in them; and a daily routine that has ample time for them to explore, learn and manage care-giving routines and transitions, and develop positive emotional and social behaviors and healthy habits. Assessment also plays a role in the curriculum. Utilizing both High Scope's Key Developmental Indicators (KDIs) and Montana's Early Learning Standards and information from screening tools, teaching teams plan for experiences that are relevant and interesting to the children in their classrooms. They observe and document what the children are doing and saying, and adjust their plans as needed to help children reach developmental milestones and goals. Family input around experiences, hopes and dreams, values, and home-center relationships is solicited during Intakes and Family Chats, as well as on-going daily and weekly interactions. Materials and experiences are adapted as necessary to allow for the participation and success of ALL children, regardless of their abilities or developmental stage.

Active, Play-based Learning Environments

Classrooms are arranged in learning centers to facilitate child-initiated play and learning choices at developmentally appropriate levels for each age group, and the individual children within that group.

There are spaces for drawing and painting, dramatic play, math and science, blocks and building, manipulative toys and puzzles, writing, language arts (stories and finger plays), music, and large motor activities (outdoors and in). A wide variety of open-ended materials are available to enhance children's learning and creativity, which are rotated and/or expanded upon depending on children's interests. Creative arts materials are available daily, giving children a variety of experiences with paints and painting tools, drawing materials, collage materials, play dough, and other open-ended materials. Children also have time to experiment with a variety of sensory materials, including sand and water on a regular basis. Materials are presented on low, open shelving units or bins with picture labels that help children locate and then return materials. Learning centers allow children the opportunity to make choices, explore and experiment with a variety of materials, problem-solve, make decisions, and interact with their peers.

Positive Adult Interactions

Young children learn through active exploration and a certain amount of risk-taking, whether it's engaging in a new experience or trying a new food. Before children can begin to take risks, they need to feel safe. The role that adults, at school and at home, play in this cannot be overemphasized. Feeling safe begins with positive relationships with caring adults. Teachers get to know children as individuals, fostering relationships that include mutual respect and care. They strive to help children develop self-control and to practice thoughtful and courteous behavior towards each other. They utilize a problem-solving approach when faced with conflict and/or inappropriate behaviors. Teachers have a high degree of freedom in choosing what materials are presented to the children and when. Utilizing an emergent curriculum approach - defined by early childhood theorists like John Dewey, Jean Piaget, and Lev Vygotsky, as "teachers planning activities and projects based on the interests, needs, and skills of the children in the classroom", teachers pay attention to what children are saying and doing, and develop lesson plans around these interests or questions. They note which milestones or KDIs might be at play, and make adjustments to plans as children's interests evolve. Teachers ask questions, share ideas and resources, and support children's play. They strive to have authentic relationships with each child and each family.

Daily Routines

A consistent daily schedule is a key component to helping children feel safe in the environment. Being able to anticipate what comes next helps develop self-control and a sense of competence in managing transitions, expectations, and their own behavior. The daily schedule supports active learning and is planned to provide a balance of indoor & outdoor play; quiet & active activities; individual, small group, & large group experiences; and child & staff initiated explorations. There are times for peer play and times for mixed-age play, providing opportunities to "mentor" or be "mentored" by playing with children both younger and/or older than themselves. Routine tasks such as hand washing, toileting, diapering, eating, dressing, and resting are incorporated into the daily routine and serve as a means to further develop self-help and social skills. Large group teacher-directed activities provide time to teach communication skills, help children make plans and reflect on their own observations and learning, and gain a sense of community and belonging. Small group activities provide times for adults to present new materials or ideas and facilitate, observe, and expand upon children's learning.

Assessment & Teaching Teams

Developmentally appropriate practice includes the goal that teachers support the learning and development of all children. To achieve this goal, teachers must know children well and use everything they know about each child – including their individual learning styles, interests, and preferences,

personality and temperament, skills and talents, challenges and difficulties to develop meaningful lesson plans. Assessment is one way to learn this information. Assessment is an ongoing, continuous process and involves a variety of strategies to gain information about children's development and learning. Teachers make observations and document children's work, play, questions, behaviors, and interactions, and collect work samples. Teaching teams meet weekly to discuss these observations and determine which milestones or KDIs should be emphasized in upcoming lesson plans. They share communications from families that may impact upcoming lesson plans such as family celebrations, life changes, and health and wellness concerns. Teachers share criteria currently being met on COR Advantage child assessment platform, and discuss ways to scaffold individual children's learning. The lesson planning framework includes these pieces, plus areas to record materials and experiences, environmental changes, and teaching strategies to use. Teamwork makes it easy to adjust lesson plans and teaching practices appropriate for both whole classroom activities and individual children.

High Scope Key Developmental Indicators (KDI)

"KDI's provide the content by which we can measure the progress of active learning as it takes place. The...KDIs are a series of statements that form the curriculum for social, cognitive, and physical development of children..." (High Scope Preschool Curriculum, Epstein & Hohman, 2012.) "KDIs define the kind of knowledge young children are acquiring as they interact with materials, people, ideas, and events." Fifty-eight indicators are organized within eight content areas:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development and Health
- Language, Literacy, and Communication
- Mathematics
- Creative Arts
- Science and Technology
- Social Studies

The High Scope Curriculum can be found in its entirety on-site at Discovery, or at www.highscope.org.