



HEBREW ACADEMY

RABBI ALEXANDER S. GROSS

Early Childhood Curriculum

Philosophy

The Hebrew Academy Early Childhood Program provides high quality education in a setting that engages the young child spiritually, cognitively, physically and affectively and nurtures the “sense of self”, while laying the foundation for lifelong learning.

Reflecting the mission, vision and philosophy of The Hebrew Academy, the Early Childhood Program endeavors to instill a love of Torah, Israel and learning to our students. Our program offers a process-oriented, hands-on approach to learning. Developmentally appropriate curriculum and materials allow each child to work according to his/her ability or skill level. Based on learning theories and the current brain-based research, children learn through direct interaction with their environment, one in which there is a natural integration of Torah and general studies in conjunction with an introduction to basic skills in reading, language arts and math. The suggested curriculum is both thematic and emergent. Based on the calendar, the thematic approach includes holidays, special events, etc. The emergent curriculum is developed through the children’s interests, which come from the themes. Active participation in various mitzvot internalizes a love and respect for the Torah and its inherent values. Life cycle events, Shabbat and holiday celebrations develop within our children an identification with, and a sense of responsibility to, the school, community, Klal Yisrael and Eretz Yisrael.

Skills Development

Children in The Hebrew Academy Early Childhood Program are educated in a warm, nurturing and wholesome environment. The center-based curriculum allows for hands-on learning. Children learn through play; therefore, the environment provided will foster imaginative and creative play, reinforcing the goals and concepts of our curriculum. Listening skills, following directions, encouraging conversation, respecting and valuing each child’s creativity and individuality are all skills developed. The curriculum is child-based and enhanced by his/her interests. Each child’s experiences and social, emotional, cognitive and physical growth are encouraged at his/her own level.

Integration of Curriculum

Judaic and secular knowledge will be offered through an integrated curriculum in which all areas of the Judaic curriculum will include general studies topics, such as language arts, mathematics, creative arts, science, music, movement. Likewise, all areas of the general studies curriculum will be infused with the Jewish values, ethics and the integration of Hebrew language.

Personal growth and social development are important parts of a child's growth as a member of society. *Midot Tovot* (positive character attributes) and interpersonal *mitzvot* are woven into the curriculum.

Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is a valued component of our program. Our teachers, parents and children are partners in learning. We encourage parents' participation in a variety of ways. Parents are encouraged to schedule classroom visits, participate in school events and celebrations throughout the year, participate in our active PTSA (Parent Teacher Student Association) and share educational parenting materials and weekly classroom newsletters prepared by the teachers. Our goal is for our parents and teachers to work in a partnership to evaluate, appreciate and improve our outstanding program, thereby enhancing the children's school experience.

Introduction to Curriculum Materials

The purpose of these curriculum materials is to provide an overall guideline. These materials will provide a rich, integrated educational program. The interests and creativity of the children, and the creativity of our teachers are valued strongly. Therefore, allowances are made for changes and/or redirection in thematic areas as long as these changes reflect the philosophy of our school and a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Weekly staff / team meetings are held to reflect the teachings (both thematic and emergent) and to discuss ideas, methods and curricular areas. Future materials and suggestions are introduced and ideas are shared.

Lesson plans are submitted to the Director for review weekly, and are then sent home every Friday to be shared with the family.

Personal and Social Development

One of the primary goals is that children feel good about themselves (as individuals and part of the class), develop strong social skills, enjoy coming to school and develop a love for learning. Children will learn how to interact as a group and be valued as individuals in the classroom setting. Children will be encouraged to share their work and ideas, to ask questions and make comments about happenings. Questions will be asked during activities and play to further their thinking and to extend their activity. Documentation (comments and questions will be written down as dictated to the teachers) and will be maintained in the children's portfolios.

Activity / Learning Centers

Our classrooms are divided into many different activity centers, which include: library, blocks, dramatic play, small manipulative toys, art, science/discovery, writing, computer. The curriculum is integrated into each center by changing it throughout the year to reflect Jewish and secular holidays, special units and interests of the children. Each center has its own objectives in developing and guiding the use of cognitive skills, group interactions and energy outlets, as well as imaginative and sensory activities. Teaching or learning a skill is not just restricted to one center, but may be taught or reinforced at many different centers during the school year. Our emphasis is on teaching children to work independently and in groups with materials that will enhance and develop these skill areas. The following is a brief description of terms used for each center and how each one develops skill areas:

Manipulative (fine motor) Center: develops eye-hand coordination and visual perception skills. Puzzles, pegboards, lacing and other games are used.

Science (investigation) Center: working with magnets, magnifying glasses, water/sand play, plants, sounds, smells, etc. to see how the world around us works.

Reading (library) Center: books are added / changed regularly according to unit being studied.

Construction (block) Center: develops small and large muscle coordination and balance and encourages creativity and promotion of language and math skills. Blocks, legos, small vehicles, etc. are used.

Housekeeping (life skills) Center: encourages dramatic play and social interaction, and helps to build self-esteem and self-confidence. These are accomplished through the use of role-play, dolls, costumes, etc.

Art Center: encourages individual expression and creativity while developing a sense of personal accomplishment and enhancing fine motor and visual perception skills.

Writing Center: develops and enhances fine motor skills, provides exposure to various writing tools and materials and encourages pre-writing and writing skills.

Patio / Playground: gross motor development equipment enhances balance, climbing, coordination and locomotion.

Sample Daily Schedule

- Times must be flexible due to the varied ages of the children, and to allow for children's creative expression.
- Times should be adjusted to accommodate special activities (music, dance, library, programs, etc.)
- Themes should be reinforced daily through language arts, mathematics, science, art, music, in centers and large group time and can extend over several weeks (ie: holidays), integrated into daily activities

Welcome to Class

Greet each child as they enter the class; music playing
Get settled; put belongings away; choose an activity center

Light Clean up

Toys, equipment put away, in labeled areas

Large Group Time

Tefillah; Roll call; Calendar; Weather; Introduce or reinforce theme

Snack

Brachot

Learning Centers / Small Group Time

Self-directed activities in specialty interest centers
Teachers should circulate; ask questions, document; assist children

Outdoor Play

Teachers must be circulating playground

Wash-up; Prepare for Lunch

Lunch

Teachers must sit at tables with children
Brachot; Birkat Hamazon

Dismissal Half / Day children

Rest / Nap Time

Quiet time on mats; some children will nap, others may look at books, etc.

Snack

Brachot

Outdoor Play / playground or patios

Clean up / wash up

“Wrap-Up”; Circle Time

Talk about the day; reinforce theme

Gather Belongings

Dismissal

Suggested Thematic Topics

September – October

Welcome to school!

Who am I?

ME!

I am special; My Family; My Feelings

Rules

Shabbat

Rosh Hashana

Yom Kippur

Sukkot

Shemini Atzeret

Simchat Torah

November – December

Mitzvot

Tzedakah

Thanksgiving

Coming to America; Family Celebrations; Foods

Being thankful, grateful, sharing

Chanukah

January – February

The Night-time Sky

Friendship and Love (We are different / alike)

Dental Health month

Trees / Ecology

Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Tu B'Shevat

President's Day

March – April

Community and Helpers

Transportation

Purim

Earth Day

Pesach

May – June

Bugs, insects, plants

Yom Ha'atzmaut

Lag B'Omer

Mother's Day

Memorial Day
Yom Yerushalayim
Shavuot

To be included on a daily/weekly basis:

Hebrew language, Parshat Hashavua, Tefillah, Tzedakah, Mitzvot, Midot, Calendar (Jewish and secular), Alphabet (English and Hebrew), Rosh Chodesh, Colors, Shapes, Numbers and more.

Essential elements to teaching Tefillah

An effective teacher must balance five competing elements:

1. Teaching that the practice of religious Jews is to begin the day with Tefillah.
2. Supervising the development of proficient prayer mechanics including pronunciation, rhythm and choreography.
3. Finding opportunities for children to connect to the experience, by building empathy and understanding.
4. Opening conversations to questions about Hashem, loss, thanksgiving, blessings, etc.
5. Facilitating a spiritual environment by promoting spontaneous, prayerful moments.

A child's relationship with Hashem will change greatly with age. Although most children do not start asking questions until around the age of four, there are many ways to infuse the classroom with concepts from the earliest age, building on each age group's concepts.

Infants – 24 months

- Wonder is part of every day.
- Tefillot are part of every day.
- Jewish ritual objects, rituals and routines are part of every day.

2 Years

- Wonder is part of every day.
- Tefillot and talk about Hashem are a part of every day.
- Tefillot are a way to talk to Hashem.
- Jewish ritual objects, rituals and routines are part of every day.
- We wonder about things in nature.
- We can try to be *kadosh* like Hashem.
- We treat others with love and *chesed*.
- Children's relationships with parents and teachers provide a foundation for a relationship with Hashem.

3 Years

- We can speak about our feelings and ask questions about Hashem.
- Tefillot and talk about Hashem are a part of every day.
- Jewish ritual objects, rituals and routines are part of every day.
- Each and every person is created B'tzelem Elokim, in the image of Hashem.
- We are thankful for Hashem's gifts.
- Hashem created the world. On Shabbat, He rested, and so do we.

4 to 5 Years

- We can talk to Hashem with prayers.
- We can learn about Hashem from the Torah, the Siddur and stories.
- Shabbat and chaggim provide many experiences and images of Hashem.
- We can explore our understandings of and relationships with Hashem with grown-ups, such as parents, morot and Rabbis.

Topics and Skills

Language arts

Listening to stories, poems
Dramatizing stories
Listening to music
Writing experience stories
Telling stories
Letter recognition
Writing, drawing, painting
Awareness of different languages

Following directions
Developing vocabulary
Associating written with spoken language
Using art media to express feelings
Using books
Increasing attention span
Understanding figures of speech
Developing articulation skills

Mathematics

Temperature
Measurement
Numbers (rote counting)
Seriation
Shapes
One-to-one correspondence
Problem solving
Calendar

Size
Creating sets and subsets
Time
Patterns
Classifying and sorting
Matching sets
Charts and graphs
Spatial relations

Science

Color
Plants and trees
Animals and insects
Stars and planets
Texture
Conservation
The body

Weather
Weight and balance
Air, water, fire, light
The senses
Sound
Experimenting, predictions
Observation

Social Studies

Feelings
Transportation
Community helpers
Respecting differences
Art, music, drama
Food we eat
Jobs
Manners

Family
Pets
Likes and dislikes
Celebrations
Rules
Friendships
Sharing and cooperation
Homes