Director’s Corner:
Deepening Discovery & Exploration

The Children’s School’s “developmental goals” for discovery & exploration express our commitment to substantive, inquiry-based study of developmentally appropriate themes. By highlighting our educators’ intentional preparation for these learning experiences and responsiveness to the children’s questions and interests, I seek to demonstrate ways that families can further enhance the children’s developing skills and knowledge foundations for future learning.

Discovery & Exploration - fostering a positive attitude toward learning through questioning, observing, and experimenting with varied materials related to diverse themes.

Children’s “approaches to learning” are the most important focus of our intentional teaching during the early years. We foster curiosity, initiative, attention, concentration, planning, persistence, acceptance of mistakes as part of learning, and the value of multiple strategies and solutions to problems. As with the other developmental domains, we combine modeling, explicit instruction, and coaching throughout the individualized process for each child.

The specific skills we teach generally follow the scientific method, beginning with questioning and predicting, then collecting and observing, and finally explaining and reporting. When seeking answers to our questions, we teach classifying, ordering, comparing and contrasting as basic skills that we practice with varied objects and events to highlight foundational science and math concepts (including all five domains of mathematics that I introduced in the October newsletter). We also introduce a wide range of tools for observing and representations for recording so that children have multiple options at their disposal.

When choosing themes, we aim for broad coverage of the life, earth, and physical sciences, literature and the arts, and social studies topics. For example, the preschoolers have studied recycling & community helpers, fairy tales & folk tales, and the healthy body so far this year, while the kindergartners have studied the healthy body, Native Americans, light & color, and the marketplace. We’re all about to study building, which will include focus on the physics involved, the aesthetics, as well as the community context. What amazes me most about our educators’ approach to the themes is their ability to identify the key concepts and frame them in a way that the children can understand. We also rely heavily on non-fiction books, internet sites with appropriate images and explanations, and expert guests to support our explanations of key theme content.

Naturally, mathematics is a prominent part of our inquiry process because our data collection often involves counting, measuring, describing shapes, spatial relations and patterns, and then representing the data via graphs, tables, etc. Our upcoming building unit will have many opportunities for extended projects that involve mathematics. Recently a preschool 3’s group helped Mr. Salinetro measure various spaces to determine where we can use a large Pittsburgh floor map for building our city, and the kindergarten is planning to design and build a chicken coop for use in a later project of hatching chickens.

Family support for discovery and exploration is essential because you have more time to help each child pursue individual interests for even deeper inquiry, especially via extended projects, field trips, and broader reading / internet research. We look forward to hearing about your explorations!