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HANDBOOK

EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

BENNINGTON COLLEGE

August 1986

Early Childhood Center Handbook

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The Bennington College Early Childhood Center provides educational programs for young children in an environment designed to encourage exploration of materials and to foster positive social interaction as well as to help each child develop as an individual. Children should be intellectually challenged and emotionally secure.

Philosophy

The educational philosophy of the Center is based on respect for the developing child. The staff plan programs that reflect the research and knowledge currently available about children's physical, emotional and cognitive growth. Careful observation of children is combined with continual monitoring and evaluation of programs to maintain a quality of education that is consistent with our goals for children.

Children grow in mastery and self-esteem when they learn along with others; peers, teachers and parents. Children need a variety of adult models who will share the joy of learning with them while valuing different styles of learning. Student teachers and teaching interns add richness to the children's lives with the diversity of their backgrounds and interests. At the Center, teachers take an active, but not an intrusive role, in supporting children's creativity and search for knowledge and understanding. The process of education is as important as what is learned. Listening to children and providing them with time to reflect as well as to act is a part of this process. As a family oriented center, we offer children opportunities to share experiences with their friends and their families through special family events. Trips into the community provide other adult models for children to meet. The world of work is shown with respect for both men and women workers.

Children live in a world that is often complex and challenging for them. We deal with this at the Center by addressing the children's concerns and interests about nature and technology, as well as about people through our curriculum. General themes and key concepts, when appropriately geared to children's age and experiential level, help them integrate their experiences into a meaningful construction of reality. We hope to enlarge and deepen children's understanding of their world by giving them the opportunity and the materials and time to explore and express their thoughts and feelings through play, language and direct investigation and involvement.

History

In 1933, one year after the founding of Bennington College, a nursery school was started on the campus to provide an opportunity for direct observation and experience with young children to the college students. The school was also a link between the college and the community, because then, as now and throughout its history, most of the children enrolled in the school were children from the surrounding towns.

The Nursery School was housed in Cricket Hill, a converted farmhouse which still stands close to the Barn, a central administrative and classroom building. The lower floor of Cricket Hill was used for the school and slides, swings and a sandbox on the lawn provided a playground. The catalog for 1933 states "A very small financial outlay has added a most useful element in the educational program of the College"

When the college acquired Jennings Hall in 1939, the musicians who were in a converted hen house moved into Jennings and the nursery school moved into the hen house, its present quarters. There were two large rooms for a three year old and a four year old group and three smaller rooms for an office, a woodworking room and an additional playroom for the older children. Photographs show Bennington College women in blazers and bobby socks pushing the children on swings and reading stories to them. The nursery school was one of the few schools for young children in the community even though it was closed during the Non Resident or Field Work Term.

In 1969, Bennington College became a co-educational institution. The faculty slot for the director of the nursery school had been a half time position in psychology. This slot was converted into a full time psychology position and the new director was hired as a Teaching Associate. Over the years the relationship of the school to the college had been characterized by ambivalence on the part of the Social Science Division about its educational value and by the administration about its expense, however modest. This issue was confronted in 1970 with strong support from the college students, male and female, who worked at the school and community parents whose children attended the program. One of the outcomes was a full time faculty position in Early Childhood Studies for the director of the center. Another led to keeping the nursery school open during the Field Work Term.

The school also offered a summer program for the first time in 1972. There are now summer programs for children from two through nine, serving the community and the many summer programs in session at the college.

In 1973, with the addition of an all day nursery school for threes and fours as well as a preschool program for children with developmental disabilities, the nursery school became the Early Childhood Center. At that time, there was no program for children with special needs under the age of six in the

Bennington area. College students worked on a one-to-one basis with these children in a special class. They also worked closely with the children's families and other agencies in the community.

As a result of fund raising by the center parents and the college students, in 1977 space was added to the original preschool building for the Individual Learning Program for children with developmental disabilities. This made it possible in 1978 to offer an afternoon Prekindergarten program for young five year olds. In 1980, the morning nursery school room space was expanded to allow the center to offer this program to more children. Meanwhile, funds had been raised by parents and students to purchase a van for the Center as well as to improve the physical plant. The outdoor area had been enhanced in 1974 with the construction of a wooden dinosaur, designed and built by one of the center mothers. The Dinosaur's Birthday party became the annual event closing each academic school year.

The passage of P1 94 142 mandated educational programs for children with developmental disabilities in public education. Since the public schools in Bennington responded to this law promptly, there was no longer as great a need for the center's program for this population. The Center staff decided that its resources would be most effectively utilized by offering a mainstream program for those developmentally disabled children who could benefit from learning within a regular preschool classroom. For sometime the idea of a program for two year olds and their parents had seemed educationally sound. In 1982, the Center started a Twos group which had regular parent meetings as a component of the program. The space previously used by the Individual Learning Program was adapted for the twos.

Parents at the Center asked the staff to develop a kindergarten program which would be geared to the educational needs of children with extensive preschool experience. They undertook to raise the funds necessary to renovate a building adjacent to the center play area which had been used as art studios. In 1983, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the nursery school's founding, the kindergarten program opened. In 1984, an extended day option was added to the kindergarten program. In 1985 parents again raised funds for the renovation of a building close to the play area for an extended day prekindergarten program. The Center now consists of a Preschool building which houses the Twos Program, The All Day Nursery School Program and the Morning Nursery School, as well as a Prekindergarten building and a Kindergarten building.

In 1985 the Academic Council of Bennington College approved a cooperative program with the Bank Street College of Education in New York City for majors in Early Childhood Studies. Working at both institutions, students may combine undergraduate and graduate studies to earn two degrees by the end of five years.

General Description

Each of the center programs is headed by an experienced professional, educated in the field of early childhood studies. The teacher is assisted by college students who take a year long course Child Care in Perspective. This course is open to parents to attend. The students work nine hours a week for a full year within the same group. The ratio of adults to children is carefully worked out in each group. In order to maintain those ratios, we may supplement the student teachers with teaching interns.

Our educational programs are predicated on having a limited number of children in each group and a schedule of activities reflecting not only the number of children, but set arrival and departure times. Three of our programs offer an extended day. Children must attend the Center at least three mornings and, if they are registered for an extended day, at least two afternoons. Since each group, except the Twos, goes swimming and on trips, these minimum times provide continuity for the children. Parents who wish to extend their child's week or day after the semester begins cannot do so until the staff evaluates the possible impact on the rest of the group and our staffing patterns. Within these constraints, we attempt to be flexible and meet the changing needs of families.

The Center is licensed by the State of Vermont and is eligible for Title XX funding for children who qualify. Most of our families pay tuition. Scholarships are available. The Center is subsidized by Bennington College. It functions as a demonstration school and teaching placement for students in the field of Early Childhood Studies within the Social Science Division as well as for students from other fields within the college. The Social Science Division requires an evaluation of the center program each year and parents are asked to cooperate in providing information for that evaluation. Tuition payment is used towards the expenses of salaries, food, transportation, supplies and equipment. Fund raising contributes to our Scholarship, Building and Equipment Fund or other specifically designed purposes.

Each family is expected to serve on a Center committee which make a variety of activities available and which creates a supportive family environment for the children. Committee chairs are elected in the spring to serve from July 1 to June 30. Parents are welcomed to visit the Center, help on group trips and contribute their ideas and questions about the programs.

Admissions Policy

The staff reviews new applications and information about returning children by March 1. Parents are notified at that time of their child's acceptance. To hold the child's place, a non-refundable deposit, applicable towards the last tuition payment, is requested. Parents with children already in the Center may have their earlier deposit carry over for the next year. Bennington College faculty, staff and administration children have preference, as do siblings of children already at the Center, or who have attended the Center in past. Children who applied one year and did not get in because of lack of space have priority over new applications. Applications are then considered in the order which they have been received.

In our nursery school groups, which combine three and four year olds, children are usually three by the September of the year they attend. If there is a question about the appropriate age group for a particular child, a decision is made by the director and the staff after meeting the child and conferring with parents.

Applications received after March 1 are accepted as they are received. If there are no openings, a waiting list is established and parents are informed when places become available.

Each family is asked to visit the Center before making a decision about enrolling their child (or children). A member of the parents' Visitors Committee will give interested parents a tour of the Center and answer any questions. If the family does decide on the Center, we suggest that they arrange a visit sometime in the spring semester with their child to the group he/she will attend. The staff presents an evening open house in the spring to discuss the program with parents.

Scholarships

Scholarships are awarded for the year. The director reviews applications, considering both family income and expenses, applying a formula developed by the staff and the director and approved by the Parent Advisory Committee. Our scholarship funds come from individual grants from Bennington College and the Center's fund raising program.

Bennington College offers a tuition scholarship for its non-union employees. The College pays 50% of the Early Childhood Center tuition for employees with a family income of \$12,000 a year or less and 25% tuition for employees with a family income of from \$13,000 to \$25,000. Because of these guidelines, we usually do not give awards greater than 50% of tuition.

Closing date for accepting scholarship applications is June 30. Any applications received after that date are only considered if all the funds have not yet been allocated. Since scholarships are awarded on a percentage basis, increases in fees are usually modified by the formula. We do attempt to continue awards to families during the child's years at the center once they have been allocated. We do ask families to submit applications each year. We also ask families to keep us informed of any changes in their circumstances which might make them eligible for a scholarship. We have a variety of payment plans to help parents spread out the cost of the Center throughout the year.

Fees

Fees vary for each of the groups since the demands on the educational resources of teachers and materials also vary. The Center budget is reviewed each year by the Director of the Center and the Dean of the Faculty of Bennington College as well as the Parents Advisory Committee. The fee schedule is set by the director with the approval of the Advisory Committee and the Dean of the Faculty. Parents are informed of any fee schedule changes by the time of registration for the coming year. The fees reflect the need of the Center to balance its budget, while providing reasonably priced early childhood education.

Fees for all of the groups are annual fees. They are prorated depending upon the number of days a week a child attends. If these days change during the year, the fees are adjusted to reflect that change. The afternoon fee for children in extended day programs is calculated to provide an eight part payment plan. Because the additional fee for the extended day is originally calculated on an hourly rate, some parents mistakenly assume it is an hourly fee. It is not. As with our other programs, major changes are reflected in the fee schedule, but we can not afford to calibrate each fluctuation and count minutes in either direction.

Bills for the year are sent out in September and parents are expected to follow the payment schedule indicated. Checks are made payable to the Early Childhood Center and sent to the director. If there are any problems in payment, parents should contact the director immediately. Non-payment of bills will result in a request for the withdrawal of children from the program.

In none of our groups is there a policy of making up snow days, sick days or holidays. Holidays are accounted for in the billing procedure. Although our calendar year is ten months, bills for the extended day programs are based on the number of actual full weeks the center is in session. We condense two half weeks, for example, to make one. We do not charge parents who are inadvertently late for extra time, nor do we charge for an extra day here or there if it seems necessary in terms of a family crisis or advisable from the point of view of the child's program. Any questions about fees should be discussed with the director.

Opening Procedures

During the first two weeks of September, the head teachers call to arrange appointments for a child's visit to the Center. Picking out a cubby, exploring the space and meeting with the teacher before school starts helps to make a comfortable beginning for a child. In order for the meeting to be pleasant and unhurried, the staff schedules at least thirty minutes for a visit. It is best, if possible, for a child to come alone with his/her parent. Siblings will have other opportunities to visit; at our Holiday and Dinosaur Birthday parties for example.

Except in the Prekindergarten and Kindergarten groups, admissions are staggered the first week so that the children will have a chance to get to know each other gradually. Since many children are three day a week children, this usually does not present any problems. Children's schedules are arranged with the head teachers so that the class size is balanced for each day of the week. Special information and/or requests that the parents have given the director are passed on to the teachers. We do try to take into consideration car pools and other family needs as well as the needs of the group.

For children who are riding the bus, the bus driver(s) will schedule a visit as well. It is particularly important for children who have never ridden the bus to meet the driver and riders and see the bus stop at their homes. However, since we may have new bus drivers and bus riders, all bus children will be visited. The bus run starts the second week of school.

At the end of August and through September, parents are contacted to arrange an interview for a family and developmental history. This record of interests, activities and development is useful for the professional and student staff in meeting each child's individual needs. Completing the interview form usually takes about an hour. Since children are often made uncomfortable when adults are talking about them, we ask that you do not bring the Center child with you to the appointment. The meeting usually takes place in the director's office, Barn 93.

Committees

Advisory Committee

This committee works closely with the Center director in developing and reviewing school policies and procedures. Parental views are well represented by this committee which plays an active role in maintaining the quality of the Center's program. Committee members conduct an evaluation of the Center each year. The full committee meets once a month. There are three sub-committees; Personnel, Finance and Curriculum Study. Although curriculum development is the responsibility of the director and the professional staff, parents are an important resource for ideas in long range and immediate planning.

Educational Program Committee

Parents organize programs about the education and rearing of young children which are meaningful to each year's group of parents. There is usually one such program a month. Once a year the committee presents a panel discussion focussing on public education, involving local educators. The committee welcomes suggestions from other parents. In the past, events have included guest lecturers, films, workshops, mini-courses and kindergarten workshops.

Environmental Maintenance

This committee reviews the physical condition of the Center three times a year. They make recommendations for improvements and organize a schedule of priorities as well as tasks for parent/staff work days during the year.

Fund Raising Committee

Throughout the year, parents and the director of the Center organize fund raising projects involving the rest of the Center community. This committee's work is vital to the Center since funds raised are used for scholarships, building and equipment needs. This committee meets at least once a month; more often when a fund raising project is in process.

Holiday and Dinosaur Party Committee

Parents plan and set up these family parties. They contact parents for cookies, order additional supplies and clean up. Any expenses for supplies are reimbursed by the Center. After an initial meeting, most of the members' work is done on the telephone and on the day of the party.

Movie Committee

This committee plans movies for family viewing at scheduled times during the year, usually eight times. Committee members choose and order movies, set up the Center for them, organize refreshments and clean up. Families rotate in their responsibilities for a specific movie day.

Pot Luck Picnic Committee

Each October there is a family pot luck picnic. This committee organizes the event; asking parents and staff for food, arranging entertainment and cleaning up.

Public Relations Committee

This committee provides publicity about the events and the educational programs of the Center. They also edit and publish the monthly newsletter, The Dinosaur Digest, as well as a calendar of events.

Transportation Committee

Committee members may interview and hire the bus drivers and riders with the director. They also help the director plan a bus route and arrange car pools and deal with any problems that may arise in relation to the bus. They meet about three times a year if all goes well.

Visitors Committee

Parents schedule appointments with visitors, such as prospective parents, and are available to answer questions and provide information. They take visitors on tours throughout the Center. Most of their work is done in January and February as prospective families visit the Center, but they are on call throughout the year. They have an initial meeting with the director to review information about the Center.

Program Descriptions

Two Year Old Program

The program for two year olds provides support and information for parents as well as for the children. The goal of the program is to develop an awareness of other children in a relaxed atmosphere. The program is developmentally appropriate and offers direct sensory exploration of the environment. Assisted by student teachers, the head teacher presents activities which support the growth of the child's autonomy and enhance the development of perceptual-motor abilities.

Spaces in the program are limited. For parents, the head teacher will conduct workshops that focus on issues of parenting and child development. Films, videotapes, and guest speakers will supplement the discussions. The workshops are an integral part of the program.

All children are visited at home by the head teacher during the summer. The starting of school for each child is carefully planned in cooperation with the child's family. Children will be observed and information shared with the parents. We hope to follow children's progress after they have been in the program to see what, if any, effect this early schooling program has on their development.

Morning Nursery School Group

All children are individuals who enter nursery school with different interests, strengths and learning styles. Because of this, the morning group provides many different learning experiences. Large group, small group and individual learning opportunities are all important.

Activities to choose from often include: cooking, art, dramatic play, sand and water play, blocks, and language arts activities. Circle time and group meetings are times when we sing, play games and just talk. Having time to socialize with other children and the adults in the room helps to foster individual growth.

Two important themes that are emphasized in the morning group are a sense of independence as well as the building of a positive self image.

This group meets from 8:30 to 11:30. A lunch option until one o'clock is available. The schedules for this are set at the beginning of the school year.

All Day Nursery School Group

The main purpose of the All Day class is to provide an integrated experience throughout the day that meets the physical, emotional and developmental needs of the children at different times of their day. Children need a safe, caring, comfortable environment away from home as well as a variety of materials and experiences that foster intellectual and social growth. The children learn to participate in the life of the group by solving problems and making choices. They learn to respect each other's uniqueness and to be constructive in helping each other. The educational program is geared to the size of the group, the time of the day, individual and group interests; providing a balance of stimulation and relaxation, independence and cooperation. At the end of the day, children from the Prekindergarten and Kindergarten join this program, allowing a positive and family like mixture of ages and activities.

Schedules for children in the All Day Group who stay past 11:30 are arranged individually at the beginning of the year. Children may be picked up at 1:00, 2:00, 4:00, 4:30 and 5:00. In order for us to have an educational program for the afternoon children, we need to have a block of time between two and four for trips, special projects and activities. Any problems with this arrangement should be discussed with the director.

Prekindergarten Program

The Prekindergarten program is designed for children from 4 1/2 to 5 years of age. The educational focus is on a balance between structured activities and self-directed play. Emphasis is placed on helping children acquire a sense of independence in thinking and acting while learning to see themselves as members of a group. The children are encouraged to work independently on both child initiated and teacher directed tasks. They are also encouraged to help each other and to share responsibilities within the classroom. The children learn not to be discouraged by mistakes and to enjoy the pride of accomplishment and skill.

A variety of activities including music, movement, science, and nature study allow the children to explore the world through their actions and to reflect on their learning. The group is a small one of twelve children. The size of the group makes it easier for the children to acquire the classroom skills of listening and sharing. The structure of the program is supportive of the children's social and cognitive growth.

The program meets five days a week from 8:30 to 11:30, with an extended day option. Children may stay from 11:30-2:30, for two, three, four, or five afternoons a week. Special activities such as swimming are planned for the afternoons. If additional child care is needed, children may join the All Day Nursery School Program from 2:30 to 5. The Head Teacher is assisted by Bennington College student teachers and/or teaching interns. The children meet in their own self-contained building.

Kindergarten Program

The goal of this program is to meet the educational needs of children who have had preschool experience and who are ready for a diversified program which includes more formal learning and more long range planning. This group has weekly trips which are used as a basis for the weekly curriculum. Other classroom information and skills are integrated with these trips to build an organized and meaningful curriculum. Parents are informed of the schedule of trips. Student teachers and a trip assistant and the head teacher use the center van and a college van for transportation. Depending upon the nature of the trip, parents may be asked to help or may accompany the group. Parents' involvement in a variety of ways is an essential part of the kindergarten program.

Besides developing the basic skills, children are engaged in creative dramatics, nature studies and science. Computers are available as are unit blocks to be used by children and teachers to provide alternative ways of learning. The various skills of communication are practiced as children learn to speak and to listen to each other. Bilingual materials are available as part of a multicultural program to enlarge children's understanding and appreciation of other people. Movement and music are also a part of this program. During the winter months, children learn to cross country ski as a part of a program to help them feel control of their bodies.

A limited number of advance students majoring in Early Childhood Studies develop programs for the kindergarten group. College students have taught the children photography, ceramics and geography. Each year the program varies depending upon the skills and interests of the college students. Students must submit a semester's curriculum to the director and head teacher who monitor the program throughout the semester.

Like the Prekindergarten, this program meets five mornings a week from 8:30 to 11:30 with an extended day option of two, three, four or five days until 2:30. Children may join the All Day Group until five.

Daily Schedules

The following are approximate outlines of the children's day. Children find security in a predictable series of events. Structure helps them emotionally and intellectually develop a sense of self-control and mastery of events and the environment. Within this structure children have the freedom of individual choice of activities. It is the sequences of the schedule which is important, not the precise times. Changes are made throughout the year in response to the weather, the maturing needs of each group, and other circumstances.

Twos Group

8:30 - 9:30	Activity Time
9:30 - 10:00	Pick-up and Snack
10:00 - 10:40	Activity Time
10:40 - 11:00	Pick-up and Circle Time
11:00 - 11:30	Outside Play

Morning Group - Nursery School

8:30 - 8:45	Arrival and Free Play
8:45 - 9:00	Welcome Circle
9:00 - 10:10	Indoor Activities (includes clean-up)
10:10 - 10:25	Snack
10:25 - 10:45	Circle Time (more sharing, music, stories, etc.)
10:45 - 11:30	Outdoor Time
Thursday	Swimming

All Day Group - Nursery School/Day Care

8:00 - 9:00	Arrival and Free Play
9:00 - 9:15	Circle
9:15 - 10:00	Work Time
10:00 - 10:15	Clean-up
10:15 - 10:30	Snack
10:30 - 11:00	Story/Special Activities
11:00 - 12:00	Outside Time
12:00 - 12:30	Lunch
12:30 - 1:00	Story
1:00 - 2:00	Rest
2:00 - 3:00	Special Projects
3:00 - 3:15	Circle Time
3:15 - 3:30	Snack
3:30 - 4:30	Outside Time
4:30 - 5:00	Story/Quiet Activities
Tuesday	Swimming

Prekindergarten

8:30	-	8:45	Arrival/Welcoming
			Free Choice of Activities
8:45	-	9:15	Morning Meeting
9:15	-	10:00	Activities
10:00	-	10:15	General Clean-up
10:15	-	10:30	Snack Time
			followed by brushing teeth and getting ready for outdoor play
10:30	-	11:00	Outdoor Play (or indoor physical activities depending on the weather)
11:00	-	11:10	Preparation for Circle
11:10	-	11:25	Circle Time:
			Story, Song or Rhythms, Sharing an Idea, Work, Object
11:30			Dismissal of Morning Children
11:30	-	12:00	Free Choice
12:00	-	12:30	Lunch
12:30	-	12:40	Lunch Clean-up
12:40	-	1:00	Mat Time
			Quiet Music or Story
1:00	-	1:10	Clean-up after Mat Time
1:10	-	1:30	Readiness Skill Game/Free Choice;
1:30	-	2:00	Movement
2:00	-	2:30	Outdoor or Indoor Activities
			(depending on the day and choice of children)
Wednesday			Swimming

Kindergarten

8:30 - 8:45

Arrival Time

8:45 - 9:00

Morning Meeting

Weather/Calendar/Word of the Day/

Sharing

9:00 - 9:30

Outdoors (Group Games)

9:30 - 10:30

Group Time

Academics/Free Choice/Art/Special
Projects/Blocks/Individual Learning
Room

10:30 - 10:45

Clean-up

10:45 - 11:00

Snack

11:00 - 11:25

Circle/Story

11:25 - 12:00

Preparation for Home or Lunch

12:00 - 12:30

Lunch

12:30 - 1:00

Pre-Reading/Reading Time

1:00 - 2:30

Special Project Time

Drama/Music/Movement

2:30

Preparation for Home or All Day Class

Tuesday

Trip

Wednesday

Swimming

Further Information About Programs

All children are expected to attend circle time or meeting time. It's a time for songs, games, sharing information and experiences and making plans.

In addition to scheduled times, stories will be read to children throughout the day if they choose them. This is also true of music and movement activities.

The Morning Nursery School Group and the All Day Nursery School Group have swimming once a week. Half of the group goes one week; half the next. Those remaining behind have special activities planned for them. The teachers of each group will inform you about their particular swimming schedule.

Each nursery school group will take regularly scheduled trips that will be integrated into the program. Ideas for the trips may come out of children's play and conversation, but preparation for the trips will include discussions, stories, musical activities, art projects and dramatic play props. For example, children's play on the Center's fire engine leads naturally to a visit to a firehouse; but before and after the trip teachers can provide many different activities for the children which will make the trip more meaningful in anticipating, experiencing and recalling the event.

Cooking is a part of each group's program. It is educational and enjoyable and increases in complexity as the year progresses and the children develop. All day children often help in the preparation of lunch. Children in all the groups cook for snack.

Clean-up is part of the everyday routine. We feel it is important for the children to do their share of taking care of the Center.

All of the projects and schedules exist to help the children in their development. An essential part of the children's experience at the Center is having time to make choices and to learn in their own ways. Play is one way a child knows his or her own world - by mastering it, talking about it. In exploring materials and discovering other children, each child is unique and must be respected as such.

Early Childhood Center Staff

Director

The director is a full time faculty member in Early Childhood Studies within the Social Science Division, teaching courses in child development, early childhood education, children's literature and children's play. The Director is responsible for the educational and financial well being of the Center. The administration of the Center requires the hiring and supervision of all personnel, budget management, fund raising, curriculum development and evaluation. The Director provides educational support for the teaching staff, works with the parent committees and is the academic supervisor of the student teachers. The Director is the liason between the Center and the Social Science Division and the college administration.

Head Teachers

Early Childhood Center head teachers are employed by Bennington College and are designated as teaching assistants within the College. They are directly responsible to the Director of the Center who meets with each one of them individually each week and as a group in weekly staff meetings. Besides planning and implementing a curriculum for the groups they teach, the head teachers are responsible for the daily on-site supervision of student teachers. A bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a related field is required of all head teachers.

Student Teachers

Each group has a number of student teachers, assigned for the year. Our goal for student teachers are to show them a philosophy of education in action and to provide them with the opportunity to develop skills in working with young children. Student teachers are encouraged to initiate and implement curriculum ideas, reflecting their particular interests and talents in areas such as art, music, movement, science or language. Students learn to be part of a teaching team and to develop the ability to communicate effectively with children and parents.

Besides taking a class with the Center Director, student teachers meet regularly with their head teachers as a group and individually. Their work is continuously monitored in order to help them develop their skills and understanding.

During the Field Work Term, when Bennington College is closed, student teachers are hired to work at the Early Childhood Center. When possible, an attempt is made to hire students who have been working with a group, to provide continuity for the children. This is not always possible.

Teaching Interns

Advanced students majoring in Early Childhood Studies, or related fields, are hired to work in groups where additional staff is needed. These are students who have worked at the Center for a full year, or during Field Work Term, or in the Children's Summer Program. They know many of the children already, and have been judged by the Center staff, as capable of handling the additional responsibilities of teaching intern. This may include working without the direct supervision of a head teacher. These interns are directly responsible to the Center Director or to the particular head teacher with whom they work.

Substitutes

Each year the Center staff develops a substitute list of people whom they feel comfortable calling upon in case of staff or student teacher illness. We attempt to use the same substitutes regularly so that the children will know them. Substitutes are usually former students or parents or qualified people from the community. Substitutes are paid minimum hourly wage. Individuals wishing to be on the substitute list should notify the Director.

Support Staff

Many people, besides teachers, make a center work. The Early Childhood Center is fortunate in having a large support staff of cooks, bus drivers, bus riders, swimming and trip assistants, administrative assistants, environmental maintenance and cleaning staff. Most of this support staff are college students, selected for their interest and ability with children, as well as their particular skills. Some of them work at the Center for the four years they are at Bennington College, providing a valued continuity. The staff is hired by the Director and the professional staff. Each head teacher directly supervises several of the support staff, giving immediate feedback to them on their work. Meetings are held regularly, and whenever problems arise, to coordinate the efforts of all of the different student workers and teachers.

General Information

1. Please send a complete change of labeled clothing to the Center. It is a good idea to check the clothes periodically for seasonal and size change. Sometimes clothes have been used and not replaced. Any clothes sent home from the Center with your child should be washed and returned so that they can be used by other children when needed.
2. Please escort your child into the building when you bring him or her to school. Please pick up your child promptly. Inform the head teacher when you have picked up your child, and other children if you are in a carpool. Once parents arrive children become their responsibility. We stress this because student teacher assignments are made according to nursery school and day care schedules. The college students may have other classes or responsibilities and may need to leave promptly. We do not want to be understaffed for the number of children present at any time, nor do we want any confusion as to where children are.
3. Since we have a variety of programs with children arriving and leaving at different times, please do not bring your child earlier than scheduled. This can lead to as much confusion as late pick ups.
4. At the end of each week, please check cubbies for paintings, lost clothes and other treasures. This is not only for your child, but as a help in keeping the Center clean.
5. Although we have full-sized plastic aprons, we urge parents to send children to the Center in clothes that are meant for work and play. We want the children and teachers to feel comfortable while the children use sand, water, paints and clay materials that are often available to them only at the Center.
6. All day children are requested to provide their own blankets for nap with the child's name on the blanket. Please take these blankets home for washing over vacation times.

7. Children are discouraged from bringing toys from home to the Center. The toys may get lost or broken which is upsetting for the child and difficult for the group. However, the staff recognizes that children often need an object, a toy or blanket, to help make the transition from home to school easier. Small or special toys which help a child in that way may be brought to the Center, with the understanding that the toy will be put in the child's cubby or drawer and that it is the child's responsibility to take care of it.

Since two year olds usually find it hard to make distinctions between school and home toys, we ask that the twos not bring any toys. If this presents a problem for your child please discuss it with the twos teacher.

In any group, if you have concerns about this policy in regard to your individual child's needs, please talk with the group teacher. There will be times during the year when the different groups will have theme related days in which children may bring toys, books or other objects related to the specific theme. The teachers will inform you of these days. If children wish to bring a food treat for the group, please check with the group teacher so that you may arrange the best time to bring such a treat as well as to be sure that the treat is consistent with our food policy. Children's birthdays are celebrated by the group making cupcakes for the birthday child.

8. When your child is absent, please call. We like to know what is happening. If child has a prolonged illness, a call on the first day is all that is necessary.
9. If your child appears ill before school, please keep him or her at home, both for his/her sake and that of his/her friends. If a child becomes sick during the day, we keep the child at rest in the Center's office and call you or your alternate number.

10. If your child requires medication during his/her time at the Center, the medicine must be hand delivered to the head teacher with a note giving permission to administer the medicine. The note must also contain information about dosage and expiration date. Student teachers are not allowed to administer medication.
11. If you are going to be unavoidably delayed in picking up your child, please call. It helps us soothe an anxious child if we know the reason for, and the probable extent, of the lateness. We assume that this will rarely happen.
12. If someone other than a parent or a person known to the staff is going to pick up the child, please inform us. We need to know about other going home plans, such as carpools, or visits to other children. Children are fairly reliable informants, but they sometimes become confused in their understanding of arrangements. A note to the teacher can clarify situations easily.
13. During school hours teachers may not be able to come to the phone. If this is so, please leave your message and name and number with the student teacher.
14. If you have any questions about your child or general school policy, please call the teachers or the director to make an appointment for a conference. If there is anything happening at home which might have an effect on the child in school we would appreciate the information so that we might more effectively help your child. Although we have two regularly scheduled and optional conferences each year, we are available whenever a discussion is necessary. Transition times, (going and coming from the Center), however, are generally not good times for prolonged discussions. The children often need the teacher's full attention then.

Bus Policy

There are a limited number of places on the bus. Selection of the children as bus riders is based on a number of considerations. Children must live within an area that will not increase the time of the run beyond an hour. Children with both parents working will be given priority if their residence is within the range of the time limit. A rider as well as a driver is on the bus.

Bus Regulations

1. Children must be ready on time. The driver will honk the horn and wait no longer than three minutes. The driver will not return if your child is not ready.
2. Parents need to put children on the bus and take them off the bus on the return trip. The bus rider will help but he/she is needed by the other children still on the bus.
3. Vacations or extended illnesses should be communicated to the bus driver either directly or through a message at the Center. Changes of schedule for attendance and bus need to be made no later than the Wednesday before school opens, whatever date that may be.
4. Please be at home when the bus is due. Young children become quite apprehensive when there is confusion about transportation. Please be sure that we know if someone other than the usual person is going to be at home. We can help your child more effectively if we are aware of what is happening. If your child is dropped off at a babysitter, be sure the sitter's phone number is on file at the Center.
5. Changes outside of the regular bus route are not permitted except under unusual circumstances. Such changes must be discussed with the Center director. If you are going to pick up your child at the Center, please send a note; again, so both the bus driver and the teacher know. Children may usually be a reliable source of information, but it is a heavy responsibility for a child whose time sense is not yet solid and who may mistake one day's plans for another.
6. Children will be dropped at stops on the bus route as scheduled at the beginning of the school year. Children who regularly ride the bus may be dropped at another child's house who is already on the route. The bus driver must be given a written note about such a change. Children who are not regular bus riders cannot be transported on the bus for visits to other children's houses.

7. If the bus driver arrives at the regularly scheduled stop and no adult comes out to meet the child, the driver will take the child back on the bus and the bus rider will attempt to call the parent or baby-sitter at the next stop. If that is not possible, the child will be brought back to the Center to stay until the parent is contacted.
8. There will be no non-school personnel or hitch-hikers on the bus.
9. In bad weather the bus driver and director will decide whether we can provide bus service. An announcement will be made on WBTN if we cancel the run. If there is any other reason for cancelling the bus run, we will call you.
10. If your child has any problem on the bus, please let us know immediately either by discussing it with the bus driver or by calling Sally Sugarman, 442-5401, ext.119, or at home, 447-7179.

In the past we have had difficulties with the bus which has prompted the need for some further regulations:

1. If the driver finds that the bus will not start after five minutes, the driver or the rider will call the first parent on the schedule to get a chain of calls going about the delay.
2. If there is no bus rider, there is no bus run. Both rider and driver must be at the bus no later than 10 minutes beyond the scheduled time.
3. The teacher at the Center will be informed about any problems or delays with the bus, so that they can accurately answer parents' questions.
4. If a bus breaks down, the rider stays on the bus with the children. The driver calls the College maintenance for assistance on the Center walkie-talkie. The Center staff will be informed and will start the telephone chain.

Discipline

The staff of the Early Childhood Center considers discipline a positive and interactive process leading towards growth. Discipline in terms of limits and controls adds reassuring structure to children's lives and helps them organize their relationships to other people. Our goal is for children to develop inner discipline by experiencing support and expectations appropriate to their age levels. Although the same principles apply throughout the center, particular behavioral expectations and regulatory techniques are geared to children's ages and experiences as well as their uniqueness as individuals.

In the process of learning about the worlds of objects and people, children need to understand the behaviors which are acceptable and those which are not and how one tells which are which. A developmental approach considers how a child thinks, the child's experience, and the child's ability to understand the demands of particular situations. Demonstrating clearly what is expected is different when dealing with a two year old than with a five year old. The two year old can not process language as the five year old can. The two year old can not inhibit impulses as easily as a five year old. A minimum of words, accompanied by a model of the desired action may be more useful for the two year old than the explanation that may benefit the five year old. In both cases, the child needs to be respected while learning the rules of the social group. Both age children should be provided with the techniques that will lead to them solving conflicts themselves. They should learn to be responsible for their own actions, but not diminished as people because of their mistakes.

Conflicts are a necessary part of growth, which is not to say that they should be encouraged, but that they should be seen as an opportunity to teach children effective ways of dealing with conflicts. Accepting children's feelings does not mean that all expressions of those feelings are acceptable. Children do need to have the reality of their feelings recognized and appreciated, just as they need to learn about the feelings of others; children and adults. Realistic consequences help children see their actions in the context of other people's needs and reactions. Again these consequences must take into consideration the children's ages. For example, it might be more appropriate to redirect a two year old than remove the child from the situation since separation is an important developmental step which should primarily be a positive one. With a four or five year old, however, having time alone to cool down and consider the situation may be helpful. Even in those circumstances, children should be offered a choice as to where they wish to be when separate from the group.

In a demonstration center, teachers are not only modelling behavior for the children, but for the student teachers. Since many responses are specific to the situation and the individual child, discussing principles and recognizing a variety of ways of handling the same situation are important. Shared goals must be communicated. Sensitivity to children's reactions must be cultivated. If children persist in behavior that is not acceptable, then clearly, the particular approach is not effective and must be reexamined in light of what the child seems to be learning from the situation. Education is a process of continuous monitoring and learning on the part of the adults as well as the children.

Parents often believe that the calm and patience for which the center staff strives is unrealistic. Conflicts are not inherently rational, but responses to them acknowledging the strong feelings involved while offering alternatives, can be. Nor is all discipline confined to conflict situations. Much of it involves realistic limit setting so that people may live together in an orderly way. If adults whose only job within school hours is teaching other people's children, can not provide a healthy model of discipline most of the time what is the need for schools? Most adults do not find it unrealistic when teachers spend many hours with children teaching reading in the best way possible although this is not a common behavior outside of the school situation. The reading children have learned so unnaturally in school, they will use naturally in other contexts. Discipline, like reading, is a process which is learned and can be learned most efficiently when taught thoughtfully by caring adults.

This is not to say that any school can promise to deliver the ideal every hour and day of the week. Like children, teachers learn from what doesn't work as well as what does. A teacher's obligation is not to be perfect, but to be willing to learn and to teach.

One of the major differences between a teacher's role and a parent's, is that the teacher works with a group of children with whom she has a close, but temporary and limited relationship. Discipline appropriate in the context of the intense and ongoing relationship of parents and children may not be appropriate in the teacher/student relationship. The differences between home and school are many and therefore the discipline will be different. Children can learn much from these differences.

Communication between parents and teachers is helped by mutual understanding of these differences in relationship and situation. Obviously, a parent trying to make dinner for the family while a two year old is having a tantrum is in a different situation than a teacher with two assistants at ten in the morning helping one of six children resolve a difficulty over sharing school toys.

Children in a group learn, not only from their own experience, but from watching how the adults deal with other children. In attempting to understand other children's behavior and adults' reactions, children may often report their concerns to their parents. Listening to children helps children clarify and trust their own judgement. If parents become confused or concerned about what their child reports, they need to talk with the child's teacher for further information and perspective.

At times, a child or a group of children, may be having more than the expected problems with controlling their behaviors. Such a situation does not go unnoticed by the professional staff. In such cases, the usual procedure is for the head teacher to discuss the situation with the student teachers and teaching interns and the director. The director may make some observations of the situation. A plan is developed and shared with the group of the teachers, and monitored. With an individual child, there usually is a discussion with the parent about ways in which home and school can work together in understanding the child's needs and helping the child change the behavior. Teachers also work with the other children in the group to help them develop their own strategies for dealing with the objectionable behaviors. Parents sharing information with staff about their children's concerns enlarge the frame within which the teachers may help the children deal with the situation.

In the early years, children's inexperience in the world makes discipline a major area of learning. Although like most subjects, it will be reconstructed as the individual develops, and reorganizes knowledge to reflect new experiences and situations, the first lessons will affect the child's sense of self and provide a process that seems natural to the individual as a way of living in the world with others. As educators, the staff of the Early Childhood Center recognizes the importance of this learning for children and spends much time in reflecting and discussing our goals and methods. As in all aspects of the children's education, the staff welcomes the parents participation in this process.

Rules

Rules are necessary in order for the children to feel safe and develop their own controls. Since there are so many adults for the children to know, there needs to be consistency among the staff members.

Rules also reflect a philosophy of education and demonstrate a value system for the children. Group life makes many demands on young children which can lead to special growth if the child finds adult support for his/her efforts. Rules are one of these supports. They can also be a way of organizing the world so that a child may function more independently.

Most rules involve the safety of the children and respect for other people and for the equipment and materials of the Center. One individual's freedom of expression cannot be at the cost of another child's sense of security. There is also a difference between innovative and creative use of materials and destruction. We must, however, be realistic about the nature of childhood. One of the ways of learning a rule is by breaking it, by testing whether it is always true. The child is not helped at such times by having the rule abandoned. When, over a period of time, a rule seems not to be meaningful for the group it can be re-evaluated and changed. The change and the process of such changes needs to be discussed with the children so that they will have a clear idea of what is newly expected of them.

We cannot anticipate every possible situation which requires a ruling, so we shall try to outline principles and give a few examples. Some of these rules may be interpreted differently for the younger and older children. "No one outside without a teacher" should be strictly enforced in terms of two, three and four year olds, but not so rigidly with older children. However, no children should be out for any extended period without a teacher's supervision.

Rules should be stated positively and as specifically as possible, but as quickly and firmly as the situation requires. Example: "Put the block down on the shelf" is better than "Don't throw the block," but stopping or preventing the block throwing immediately is the issue. As this situation indicates, children learn rules primarily from actual situations.

Stating rules in a positive form not only provides children with information about what is expected, but recognizes the fact that as active beings, children find it easier to act than to inhibit actions. Try to see the situation as the child sees it, and provide guidelines for the child that will help the child learn constructive ways of dealing with difficult situations.

1. We ask children to talk over conflicts. All feelings are acceptable.

Action which hurts another person, child or adult, is not. When a child is having great difficulty, removal from the situation often helps. Children should be told as simply and non-judgmentally as possible why

they are being asked to leave the group and, that when they are ready, they can return to the group.

2. Dangerous and potentially dangerous situations should be avoided.

Examples:

1. Playing with sticks is usually not allowed.
2. Hammers stay in the woodworking area.
3. Balls may be thrown outdoors; indoors they are rolled.
4. Rocks are not thrown.
5. Children may not sit or climb on the porch railing; nor should teachers.
6. Children climb only where they can go themselves.
7. Children may cross the road only with an adult.

There are more of these than one can imagine, but not that children can discover, and erring on the side of caution is better than an injured child. The problem of fostering independence while maintaining a physically healthy child is one we share with most parents.

3. Rules that make life easier for children and adults, but are not as obvious as they seem:

1. Walking is for indoors, running is for outdoors (avoids bumps and falls).
2. Shoes are kept on except for special games and movement activities (avoids tacks, splinters and lost shoes).
3. Sand stays in the sandbox, water in the water table (avoids mess and possible falls).
4. Paint is for paper, not people, equipment or the general environment (conserves environment children's feelings and clothes).
5. The climber is for climbing; tables, chairs, water table, shelves, etc. are not built for climbing (conserves equipment and prevents injury).
6. Children wear outdoor clothes appropriate to the weather (for health of children).

4. Children clean up after themselves. Materials should be put away as they were found so others may use them. Examples: puzzles completed, Lego taken apart. The whole group cleans together at transition times.

5. Rest is a quiet time for looking at books and listening to records. Each child is on his or her mat and does not disturb anyone else. No toys are allowed on mats. Children should be reminded to toilet before rest.

Rules for Teachers

1. No smoking in the Center.
2. No extended philosophical or social conversations (save it for staff meetings).
3. Know where the children are at all times.
4. Never go on a trip without leaving a clear note as to where you are, when you left, and when you expect to be back.
5. Check with people on campus before you take children to special exhibits, classes, or other places, to be sure they want visitors.
6. Be sure you know where and with whom children are going when they are picked up. Question anyone you do not know as to their relationship with the child.
7. An accident report must be filed for any injury causing unusual bleeding, any head injury or unusual fall. Forms are on file in the Center and must be made out in duplicate; one for the child's folder and one for the Director. When in doubt, write a report. Parents must be informed of any accidents, even if the child seems fully recovered. Emergency medical information is on file if it is necessary to contact parents or physician.
8. When answering the telephone, identify the Center and yourself, e.g.
Early Childhood Center and your name. Parents like to know to whom they are speaking and with whom they have left a message. If a teacher is busy, take a message, date it and put it on the message board. Take all messages for the Director of the Center, getting the name and telephone number of the caller. The Director's extension is 119. It is often easier to have the Director call back, than it is to try to transfer a call. If you do try to transfer a call, get the caller's name and number, press down the switch button and punch the extension number. When you have the Director, tell her she has a call; then you hang up.

Early Childhood Center Food Policy

Food is an important part of the curriculum at the Early Childhood Center. It is important in the lives of children in many ways. There are three main areas in which it is incorporated into the curriculum. The first is the kind and variety of food which is served to the children. The second involves the children's experiences in cooking food themselves. The third deals with the attitude we hope to encourage toward food in the children by our attitude as teachers -- the way in which we view food and the decisions we make as a staff based on these attitudes.

Good nutrition is a basic need of children. At the Center we try to serve meals and snacks based on this belief. We use only natural, unsweetened fruit juices and milk beverages. We look for nutritious crackers that are free of artificial ingredients, that incorporate whole grains and are made with a minimum of salt and sugar. In our baking we try to use recipes that employ natural whole grains, a minimum of sugar, fresh eggs and milk. We never use prepackaged mixes. We serve fresh vegetable sticks, fruit slices, raisins and sunflower seeds and the like on some days of the week, as an alternative to juice and crackers.

Lunches are planned to include fresh fruits and vegetables. Soups are homemade whenever possible. Simple casseroles and salads are served. Whole-wheat bread is used for sandwiches. Every attempt is made to use whole, fresh foods in the preparation of the lunches and to eliminate foods that contain artificial additives.

We cook with the children one or more times a week, often baking something for the day's snack, sometimes preparing something for the luncheon meal. Children cook in small groups and are involved in every aspect of the process -- measuring, mixing, shaping, cutting, baking. There are innumerable learning experiences in this process, from the mathematical concepts in measuring to the chemical changes that take place in the ingredients through stirring or heat. Tasting and smelling come into play as the children learn to recognize and name ingredients. Tactile experiences are part of cooking with many kinds of dough that must be rolled, patted, shaped and cut. The satisfaction of creating an edible product to share with others is an important experience for the children.

Food is scarce in the world. We feel it is very important to encourage the idea, by our own attitudes toward food, that it is something to be respected. We try to minimize waste -- to ask the children to take what they can eat, to have seconds if they are still hungry, but not to waste food. In line with our attitude of respect toward food, we do not use food as craft or play material.

We try to make snack time and meal times warm and comfortable times for the children. A child is never forced to eat anything, though we urge the children to taste new foods as they are offered, and substitutes are not offered. Snack time and lunch are good times for conversation with the children and we give great attention to this.

In summary, we hope in our use of food in the curriculum to provide the children with good growing experiences, physically, mentally and socially.

Research Policy

A file for each child containing the family history, medical information, trip permission slips and progress evaluation forms will be kept at the Center until a year after the child has left the Center. The files of the children in the individual learning program will be kept for three years after the child leaves the Center.

This information is confidential. Parents, however, have access to all their children's records. No information is sent out without a signed release form from the child's parents.

Any project for student research beyond the routine observation and assessment is reviewed by the Director and the staff. No research is undertaken without permission from the parents and children.

Swimming Policy

We encourage all children to go swimming; however, we do not force anyone into going. Each child is expected to have his or her own swimming suit and towel. Instruction is given by a staff member at the recreation center. Each group is led by a head teacher and two student teachers. At the end of each swimming session blow dryers are used to dry all the children's hair. We encourage children not to wear tights on swimming days.

Trip Policy

Trips are an integral part of our program. As much as possible, we try to inform parents ahead of time when we will be taking trips. On trips when the children will be riding in the van or in cars, the ratio is one staff member for every four children. On walking trips the staff/child ratio is generally one to three.

Weather Policy

Our goal is to have the Center stay open during the winter, in spite of snowstorms. After checking the condition of the College roads and the number of teachers who can get from their homes to the Center and arranging for the parking lot to be plowed, the Director will ask WBTN to announce if the Center will be open. Usually, if the public schools are cancelled, we cancel the bus run, but still try to have the Center open for those who can get to it. We also reserve the right to cancel the bus run if the bus driver feels the roads are hazardous, even if the public schools are open. If particular driveways or approaches cause unusual problems during the winter, the driver and the Director will discuss this with the families involved. Our main concern is the safety of the children.

On snowy days, the Director and the staff will evaluate whether to continue to stay open. The decision will be based on the weather conditions and prediction, the number of children and the needs of the families involved. We will generally not mix the groups even if the number of children at the Center is small. If, or when, the College closes, the Center will close. Parents should listen to WBTN on snowy days. If in doubt call the Director or the College. The Director will inform the switchboard of the staff decision.

Each group has an outdoor time each day and the expectation is that all children will be well enough to go outside. In winter, children should be warmly dressed, with mittens, hats and boots in addition to snow suits. There are extra clothes at the Center if needed, but children prefer their own.

Teachers are sensitive to changes in temperature and keep the children active outdoors or send them inside. In very cold weather the outdoor time may be very brief. All day children whose outdoor clothes get wet may either borrow other clothes or stay inside during the afternoon outdoor time. We do not send children outside in wet clothes. In warm weather, the staff is also sensitive to the needs of the children in terms of clothing.

Holidays

The Early Childhood Center staff spends a great deal of time each year discussing how to incorporate holidays into the Center curriculum in meaningful and appropriate ways. Holidays offer an opportunity to talk about celebrations in other countries as well as our own. The winter holidays are a particularly good example of this opportunity.

A holiday like Halloween presents certain problems for young children in terms of stimulation resulting from costumes and sweets. Although dressing up may be fun, young children may feel confused or threatened by the variety of costumed strangers coming to the door or encountered on the streets at night. Children often need reassurance at this time to deal with the masked identities they encounter. At the Center, we talk with the children about the pretend aspect and help them deal with the process of transformation by making simple types of masks and costumes, rather than have children wear costumes to the Center. We also ask that children not bring any of the treats they may have collected to the Center to share, since most parents request that we do not give their children sweets.

Valentine's Day is another holiday in which the needs of the children seem to be exploited for commercial benefit. Valentine's Day provides an opportunity for children to talk about friendship and caring about other people. Each teacher does this as is appropriate for each age group. The staff feels that it is best for the Center's emphasis to be on the children's expression of feelings through their own activities. This may be through the making of cards in one group or a group mural in another. We ask that you not send Valentine cards to be distributed at the Center. Cards often get lost, causing upset among the children, as well as confusion about what the cards mean. Address lists are available at the Center should you want your child to mail cards to special friends.

The staff always appreciate ideas which parents have about curriculum. If there are ideas or questions which parents have about holidays, please share them with us.