



CEDAR RIVER ACADEMY

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LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

In the early years, children develop knowledge and skills that will be used for the rest of their lives. Often we take for granted that young children walk, talk, and explore the world around them, but these actually represent milestones in development. Language development in particular is critical as it not only provides the foundation for literacy, but also acts to support thinking or cognitive development as well.

At Cedar River Academy, beginning in prekindergarten, there are daily opportunities for talking, listening, reading, and writing. Our thematic format leads to strong vocabulary development. Our children experience read-alouds daily, watch as our teachers model reading and writing, and all of our children have opportunities for reading and writing in their own way. Your preschool and kindergarten student may use "magic kid writing", which adults often equate with scribbles. But "magic kid writing" demonstrates an understanding that print moves from left to right, top to bottom. You can contrast this with "drawing" which at this age is often circular and covers a page. Soon children are able to pick out words in texts and write words as part of their writing projects. As children move into first grade, more formal instruction begins and children experience the power of reading and writing independently. As children move into the middle childhood grades, reading and writing are used as learning and communication tools.

At Cedar River Academy, it is obvious that our children have had the opportunities to develop their language skills at home and at school. These opportunities, and the vocabulary growth that accompanies them, will provide a firm foundation for learning.

LEARNING TO LIVE AND WORK IN A GROUP

In preschool and early elementary school, one of the most important skills that children learn is collaboration; how to live and work within a group. If you watch very young children play, they will often play next to another child, but their actions do not involve the other child. For example, two children may build with blocks, but they do not build a structure together. As early childhood teachers, we look at the point where children do begin to interact as a sign of growth. As children play together, whether in building blocks or

playing tag, they learn some important skills that will be used throughout life. They learn to see events from another person's view. They learn to negotiate with others and to cooperate. Of paramount importance is their learning of strategies for resolving differences.

At Cedar River Academy, we have identified a set of Values for a Global Community: Respect, Integrity, Community, and Teamwork. In December, we began looking for examples of teamwork and community and recognizing them with our "Thinker Bear" display. Our PreK and Kindergarten students collected food and clothing for food and clothing banks. This was a way of helping children learn to be thankful and to recognize their ability to help others. Our first and second grade worked hard to create crafts that would have been sold at the Second Grade Store during our Winter Program. (The store is part of their math curriculum and they use the profits to purchase books for their classroom.) Although they were not able to finish that project due to weather, they still learned to work together and learned to support one another, even in disappointment.

In January and February, we are emphasizing respect and integrity as demonstrated through friendship and helping others. Earlier this school year, I was outside talking to one of the school district employees who maintains our school yard. He commented on how kind our children are to one another and gave an example of a group of children who were running a race during PE when one student stopped to help another get up before continuing with the race. "You don't see that at other schools," he said. Beginning in early childhood and continuing through middle childhood and eventually middle and high school, we are committed to creating school environments that help our students develop the attitudes and social skills that allow them to achieve lifelong personal and professional success.

EARLY EXPERIENCE WITH NUMBERS

Some of children's earliest experience with numbers take place at snack time. If a child has one cookie and another has two, the first child quickly realizes that he or she needs another to have the same. This happens so early that many people don't realize this is the beginning of mathematical thinking. In our Cedar River Academy PreK and K classes, our students take part in many activities designed to develop an understanding of math. They use counting in songs, poems, and games. They count objects. As they work in the block area, they learn about shapes, sizes, and equivalences. As the children clean and return items to the appropriate place, they are learning sorting and classifying.

Even measurement has its roots in these early years, as children compare who is taller or shorter. These experiences help students to develop an informal understanding of math concepts.

As the children move into the primary grades, they begin to explore more formal mathematical ideas. They learn to represent math ideas using symbols. They use math techniques to analyze problems. They learn about the base-10 system that is the foundation for our mathematical systems. An important skill that develops at this age is the development of quick recall of basic math facts. At Cedar River Academy, our students also apply their math skills within their thematic units to analyze and organize data they have collected. By applying math skills in the real world, students learn to solve real problems.

TIPS ON ASSESSING YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING

At school we assess children's progress frequently to check to see if they are learning. Most of our assessments are done in a "school kind of way". It is important that we also have feedback from parents as to the changes they observe as their child goes about his or her daily activities outside of school. Here are some things that you can look for as you assess your child's learning:

- **Changes in vocabulary and sentence complexity when speaking.** Language and vocabulary are built through conversations about meaningful topics. Children incorporate new words into their speech once they have meaning for the child. Increased ability to use language is important because it allows a child to scaffold his or her own learning. Children will often talk their way through a situation that is problematic for them. This "self-talk" is no longer necessary once the learning is more automatic.

- **Requesting more books to be read aloud or to read independently.** Reading is a tool for learning and imagining. Just as oral language is an indicator of children's current knowledge, the independent requesting of more opportunities for being read to or to read is an indication of the child's motivation to learn.
- **As children learn in school, they begin to apply those skills outside the classroom.** Parents of young children often report their child suddenly will only do things the way their teacher has taught them. It can be quite an experience for a parent to be told "No, not that way. We do that this way!". Often young children can be quite insistent on doing things in a way that reflects their new experiences. While it can be irritating for a parent, this is also an indication that your child is growing confident and is quite proud of his or her new independence and knowledge. Parents will often see applied use of counting, problem solving, and procedures within the daily setting.
- The use of real or pretend writing to communicate. Children are deliberately exposed to a large quantity of meaningful print at school. We read books, write on chart paper, take part in writing stories, review the daily agenda, etc. We want children to see that writing is a useful skill. Parents may observe their child using writing or writing-like symbols to create lists, and write notes or cards. If children have used "magic kid" writing, a parent can ask them to read what it says, adding that "I have old eyes and I can't read this kind of writing as well as I used to", to encourage even the youngest children in their writing.