

1. INTRODUCTION

What Is a Cooperative Preschool?

A cooperative preschool is a place where parents and children learn together. Parents learn more about their children as the children learn more about the world.

The classroom experience can provide parents with a valuable understanding of how their child behaves alongside other children and how he or she is unique. By helping in the classroom and participating in the parent education program, parents can acquire skills in guiding their children and meeting their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs. The cooperative preschool is organized and administered by the parents. Parents hold offices, work on committees and assist the teacher as “parent helpers” in the classroom. The classroom operates under the direction of a trained teacher. The teacher determines the curriculum, maintains standard procedures for the school program, and serves as a resource on child development and parent education.

In a cooperative, the parents enrich the program by contributing their time, talent and skills. Their participation helps ensure the smooth operation of a high quality program. Parents find that the more they give, the more they, and the children, receive.

From Our Teacher: Anette Horten

As an early childhood educator, I am committed to providing a place where preschoolers can explore, discover and learn through play. I see the preschool years as a time for children to discover who they are, learn about the world outside their own family, and become excited about school and learning.

I am a credentialed teacher and have taught elementary and middle school in addition to my preschool experience. I have completed my master's degree in Cognitive Development in Educational Psychology at UC-Berkeley and am continuously interested and involved in the study and theories of childhood development. As the mother of four, I look for ways to put those theories into practice on a day-to-day basis.

In the classroom, my priorities are to foster positive self-concepts and strong socialization between children and adults. Along with self-guided discovery and open-ended activities, I believe these are basic to a child's success and academic achievement in the subsequent years. I hope to encourage this through a variety of physical and quiet activities, explorations and lots of play, play, play.

Program Philosophy

Portland Tillamook Preschool provides a child-centered, play-oriented preschool program for children from 2¾ to 5 years old.

- We believe that young children learn best when they actively explore their environment through play, and that young children are intrinsically motivated to do so when the environment supports this type of learning.

- We believe children deserve the opportunity to learn and grow at their own pace in an environment that provides many opportunities for them to explore their world they live in.
- We believe children should be free to explore and make choices. Children can only learn the things they have been given a chance to do. Each child will take advantage of different opportunities and learn different things from the available choices.
- We believe we must respect our children, their minds and their bodies. We must respect the choices they make as well as the thoughts and feelings they have.
- We believe children can learn to take responsibility for their actions when given clear direction and realistic expectations.
- We believe a cooperative preschool offers a unique opportunity for parents and children. It offers the chance for the teacher and parents to work together to the benefit of the children. In a cooperative, everyone works together.

Children can:

- Learn to work cooperatively in a group.
- Learn to move from activity to activity with grace.
- Learn to be self-directed.
- Make friends.
- Learn to solve conflicts constructively.
- Continue to develop skills needed to work toward academic success.

Parents contribute to success by:

- Being on time for class and parent-helping.
- Following through with class activities by talking with their child about school.
- Sharing information about their child with the teacher.
- Talking with the teacher about any concerns they may have.
- Treating all children with love and respect.

The teacher will:

- Teach the children with love and respect.
- Have planned activities that will lead children in their growth.
- Keep parents informed about classroom activities.
- Be a resource for parents, and be available by phone, e-mail, in person, and by appointment to discuss any concerns parents have or to share knowledge of normal development.
- Refer parents to other sources if unable to answer specific questions.

We also believe that young children's emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development is inter-related. Therefore, we seek to educate the whole child.

EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

We believe a young child's emotional development is promoted by providing a safe, nurturing environment with adults who are both caring and sensitive to a child's individual needs. When children know they are safe, their rights protected, their needs met and their individual differences valued, they are free to develop their emotional

selves more fully. They begin to develop a sense of self that is individual, autonomous, and safe, even when their own parents are away.

We foster this process by providing many opportunities for children to act independently, make choices, and initiate activities in a free-play environment. By assuring these activities are appropriate to the child's level of development, we provide many opportunities for success, which help the child build a competent, positive self-image.

Throughout this process of developing autonomy and initiative, children experience a wide range of emotions. We believe it is vitally important to validate these emotions by communicating to the child that these are normal, acceptable ways to feel. We then move on to help children identify their emotions and find appropriate ways of expressing them. By providing positive, consistent guidance and limits, we further the child's sense of security by letting the child know that we will keep him or her safe at all times and by helping the child regain control if s/he should lose it. Please ask before you hug, tickle, or play roughhousing games with kids. Some enjoy this, some don't. We respect the child's physical and emotional boundaries.

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

We believe young children's social development is promoted by providing them with many opportunities to interact with peers in a variety of self-chosen activities. During these early interactions, we try to stay nearby and attentive to the situation to provide help if needed. However, we are careful not to intervene too soon, allowing children to work through their problems themselves whenever possible. When we do intervene, we encourage children to think of solutions to the problem in order to help them develop the problem-solving skills which will enable them to eventually solve such problems on their own.

We further positive social development by providing activities which encourage children to share, take turns, cooperate, help, become more aware of each other, and value diversity among people. We model these behaviors for our children when we work together as parents and teachers in running the school.

PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

We believe young children's physical development is vital to their overall well-being. We provide a safe, healthy environment with many opportunities for children to move and develop their bodies. Opportunities are provided daily for children to develop large and small muscles. The daily schedule includes time for active play outdoors or indoors during inclement weather.

We expect movement to be the norm for young children and provide for lots of movement within the classroom. When limits need to be set regarding movement, we try to redirect the child to an area where they can run rather than stopping the activity altogether. We provide for children's fine motor development by offering a variety of open-ended activities at varying degrees of development in which children can choose to participate.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

We believe young children's intellectual development is promoted through providing a variety of child-initiated, open-ended activities. Especially important to intellectual development are activities in which children can develop physical knowledge about their world (gravity, objects in space, scientific properties of matter) by exploring and playing with real objects and materials such as sand, water and wood blocks. Also important is the development of mathematical knowledge when children put these objects into relationships with each other during play and notice that each block, for example, has a specific size, weight and shape.

Dramatic play areas promote literacy development as children learn to use symbols in their play, which they will later transfer to letters and numerals in their grade-school years. Puppets, music, stories and much exposure to the printed word in playful, meaningful ways teach social knowledge and creates a disposition in children to be readers and writers later on. Daily creative opportunities allow children to experience the impact they can have on their world. We are a play school not an academic school, wherein much of this latter type of learning takes place intrinsically during play experiences.

Why a Play Curriculum?

Play provides the ultimate opportunity to learn what you need to know when you need to know it.

I am not being idealistic when I say that I feel the aim of the curriculum is to prepare the child for a meaningful life within his community, to give him the opportunity to know himself, to explore his ability, to extend his skills, to acquire competencies so that he will feel sufficiently confident to go out and try new things, so that his curiosity and creativity will continue to operate throughout his lifetime.

-Otto Weininger, Ph.D. Dept. Applied Psych, Toronto, Ontario

Watch your playing child and see how disciplined he or she is. The word discipline comes from the word disciple, a "follower," and in play the child is following Mother Nature's agenda, a play-plan built in. Children at play are not doing one thing with their hands or bodies, thinking something else in their minds, and speaking of something else with their voice as we adults tend to do. They are totally absorbed in their play-world.

-Joseph Chilton Pearce, Author and Child Development Educator

WHAT DO WE DO IN A PLAY CURRICULUM?

- Set the stage for abundant sensory experiences.
- Provide many opportunities for self-selected learning activities, especially of the manipulative and experimental type.
- Provide opportunities for children to observe work activities of adults so they will have experiences to think and talk about.
- Encourage children with toys, other play accessories, conversations, and art materials to symbolize their experiences through play, art, and language.
- Direct children to learning opportunities they may otherwise miss.

- Encourage each child to use the language they have to clothe their own experience in their own language.
- Plan opportunities for experiences that will help children discover new concepts and redefine concepts already met, including differentiation of concepts.
- Provide opportunities for vicarious experiences through stories, pictures, and conversations related to recent experiences.

Why Multi-age?

Research and experience have shown multi-age to be a better way to educate children when done by experienced, thoughtful teachers. Obviously, multi-age would not be a good idea for a teacher who does not want to change from the traditional format of children sitting quietly at their desks and listening to what the teacher is teaching. Nor is it a good idea for a teacher with little experience, who has been trained by a system preparing teachers for single-age, teacher-led classrooms. We are fortunate to have a teacher with years of experience teaching sessions of mixed-age groups.

Children in well-managed multi-age classrooms tend to:

- Develop more empathy and caring behaviors. The presence of younger children seems to make obvious the need to be careful with each other and to comfort a sad or hurt peer.
- Be better self-regulators. When older children are given the responsibility of reminding younger ones of the rules, their ability to follow the rules seems to improve.
- Not be limited in their friendships or in the quality of those interactions.
- Participate more fully in a wider range of activities. While younger children can participate in more complex and extended play, older children have more leadership opportunities, allowing them greater practice and mastery of social skills.
- Be less competitive and more likely to value individual skills and have an understanding that skills are related to one's individuality rather than age, size, or gender.
- Have the opportunity to learn from someone who is only "one rung up on them" rather than from an adult. This seems to be a highly effective strategy.

These benefits are reflected in mixed age classroom groups from preschool to middle school. In general, three years seems to be the optimal age range.

Our school's emphasis on conflict resolution and open-ended activities works well in a mixed-age classroom. It allows children to handle materials in different ways, depending on their level of mastery. Furthermore, it reinforces social skills for older children, while maintaining an atmosphere which allows younger children to learn to be in charge of themselves (not letting older children take over).

Anti-Bias Philosophy

Portland Tillamook Preschool is committed to a program that acknowledges and supports the uniqueness of each individual and values each child's culture as defined

by his/her family, both present and past. This approach is integrated into all facets of the school program, such as classroom curriculum, parent education, fundraising, and budget planning.

All participants in the school are reminded to treat each person, children as well as adults, with respect for their individual differences. We work to remove biased or stereotypical assumptions from our materials and interactions, giving each person the opportunity to grow and learn without limitations. We are committed to ongoing outreach to the Portland community to build a more diverse population in the preschool. We welcome racial, cultural, economic, and religious diversity and families of every composition.

The Anti-bias/Parent Education Coordinator (a Board member) works to ensure the ongoing commitment of the school to an anti-bias approach, primarily through parent education and discussion of the meaning and content of the anti-bias curriculum. The Anti-bias/Parent Education Coordinator also acts as the liaison and mediator on issues of diversity and as a consultant to the teacher on materials and curriculum.

PCPO (Parent Child Preschools of Oregon)

Portland Tillamook Preschool is a member of PCPO (Parent Child Preschools of Oregon), a statewide organization composed of preschool parent representatives and preschool teachers who meet monthly during the year. The purpose of PCPO is to upgrade the standards of preschools and to serve as a central body providing valuable information and services for preschool education and functions.

PCPO is broad in scope. It offers parents and member schools a chance for total improvement in all phases of preschool education, plus the knowledge and support of an organization fully informed on state and national levels.

Some services available to us as PCPO members are a spring parenting conference, access to a central file of educational material, an insurance program, school evaluations, teacher and classroom support, a directory of all preschool members of PCPO, and a new officers' workshop. PCPO can be reached at (503) 293-6161 or www.oregonpreschools.org.