

**BUCKINGHAM BROWNE & NICHOLS  
LOWER SCHOOL**



**CURRICULUM OVERVIEW  
BEGINNERS  
2023-2024**

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# **Beginners Curriculum Overview**

## **Beginner Curricular Philosophy**

What does it mean to be a learner and thinker? What is the shape of critical thinking? These are the questions that inform the Beginner Program, shaping a deeply integrated, research-based, child-centered approach to the educational experience. In the Beginner classroom we are in a unique position to support young children as they begin to define themselves as thinkers and learners in the school setting. Through our work, we focus on developing habits of mind necessary for critical thinking. Children engage in thoughtful investigations about the world, challenging themselves to think deeply about their interests and questions, discovering new ways of deepening their knowledge.

Our curricular model and the learning that it implies extends far beyond the confines of the classroom or the school building. The Beginner curriculum engages the richness of each child's experience, inviting the breadth of their lives into the core of the curriculum. The ultimate goal of this philosophy is to stimulate and scaffold a passion, respect, and method for learning about and being in the world.

The Beginner Program has a particular vision of the child as a learner. Each aspect of the curriculum relates to this child: an engaged, thoughtful, respectful, and investigative learner. This is what we seek from ourselves, from teachers, from our students, and from our classroom communities. It is with this vision of the child in mind that we outline the structure of our curricular philosophy.

### **The Child**

We begin by addressing the children themselves, and the way they are considered as learners within our curricular philosophy. Children have a unique perspective on the world, and by engaging this stance we are able to access deeper, more meaningful learning. This being the case, we as educators must begin with the unique mind of the young child, addressing the particular thinking and learning of the child in order to create the most effective classroom environment.

First, we see all children as competent, creative thinkers and learners who are actively engaged in the process of making sense of their world. This perspective emerges from the Reggio Emilia early childhood centers, and influences all elements of the program. Each child brings his or her unique understandings of the world into the learning experience. Our curricular practices, environment, and interactions reflect respect for these competent individuals.

## **The Child (continued)**

Children naturally engage in integrated thinking, viewing the world holistically as they create knowledge and understanding. In the Beginner classrooms, we approach learning in an integrated manner, bringing science, math, language arts, and artistic skills to bear as we engage in problem solving. This fusion of knowledge defines the way in which the child acquires information and thinks critically about the world.

This integrated approach to learning is the central component to the Beginner curriculum. We avoid fragmented learning constructs, such as “math time,” “writing time,” or “science time.” Instead, the Beginner Program chooses to celebrate, support, and challenge the complexities of the integrated thinker, who brings all forms of knowledge to bear in the learning process.

## **The Emergent Curriculum**

The basic structure of the Beginner curriculum is founded on the concept of emergence. The curriculum is turned inward, emerging out of the interests and pursuits of the children, rather than focusing on outside dictates from teachers or prescribed curricula. In this manner, the curriculum is founded on subjects that are vital and essential to the children who inhabit the classroom at a given time.

The teacher takes on a nuanced role of observer and facilitator in the context of the emergent curriculum. Teachers engage in a delicate process of observation, documentation, and scaffolding of children’s play. Through this process, the teacher is able to weave a curriculum that embodies children’s interests as well as the academic skills necessary to bring these interests to fruition. In the emergent classroom, teachers look to the children and their experiences to provide the foundation for studies in the classroom. When the preschool children show an interest in the structure and make-up of playgrounds, the architecture and physics of playgrounds might then become a classroom investigation. When we have an unusually heavy snowfall and the children are amazed at the process of freezing, melting, and shaping of snow, this is the vital subject of the moment. All of this work is shaped around the age and developmental needs of the child. As the children engage in work around these concepts, the teachers integrate learning opportunities within the children’s zone of proximal development. In this way, we make the learning in the classroom essential to the children, the curriculum reflecting them and the interests that they share at that particular moment in time. This manner of conceptualizing the curriculum celebrates the integrated thinking of the child and also responds to the constant development and change that young children experience.

Materials are an essential component of the emergent curriculum; materials carefully and intentionally placed in the classroom create the rich landscape from which inquiry can grow. Classrooms are organized to inspire a highly collaborative,

## **The Emergent Curriculum (continued)**

problem-solving approach to learning that allows for the child's vision, action, and voice. Beauty and aesthetics are central to this approach to materials and environment; the beauty of the classroom reflects both a respect for the children in the classroom, as well as a desire to create sustained engagement with that environment. Just as adults are inspired and motivated by beauty, so children respond to the aesthetics of their environment, deepening their thinking and learning to meet the richness of the beauty around them. Teachers carefully consider the individuals present in the classroom, as well as broader experiences with young children, using these understandings to select materials that allow for:

- multi-sensory experiences,
- explorations of scientific phenomena,
- study of language and writing as vehicles for expression,
- mathematical concepts, and
- examinations of social studies in the world.

The emergent curriculum requires trust in the power of play as a vehicle for learning. The young child is a researcher, and his most motivated research occurs in the context of play. In order to harness the most powerful thinking of the young child, the Beginner classrooms frame our work around play, seeking rich play experiences to facilitate inquiry and critical thinking.

### **Projects In The Curriculum**

Projects are ideal for the integrated learning demonstrated by young children as each project engages a wide range of subject matter. The study and investigation of math, environment, movement, observation, expression, science, language, art etc. are essential components of the project approach. All of these components are conceptualized as integrated, each essential to deep learning about subject matter. In the emergent curriculum, teachers offer children tools and language from these academic genres, thus opening the children up to the real life application of these subjects as they relate to child-centered projects.

Through projects, we begin with the children's experiences, interests, and natural investigations into the world around them. These classroom pursuits are the foundation for the project, the engagement in something real and vital to the children and their classroom community. Each skill is then engaged as an outgrowth of this project, emerging as a tool necessary to serve the children's authentic interest in a particular project.

## **Content Areas**

All of the academic elements of the Beginner curriculum are integrated into the framework of the emergent, project-based approach. Each skill or area of knowledge is seen as a tool for investigation and deeper understanding related to the children's genuine interests and inquiries into the world. Each content area addressed below is woven into classroom exploration, investigation, and project work. This allows children to understand academic concepts as powerful, integrated resources with which to approach learning as a whole.

## **Language Arts**

Emergent literacy (pre-reading and pre-writing) is an on-going developmental process. Literacy develops in young children through the observation of functional uses of reading and writing in authentic settings such as home, school, and community. Beginners experience language through a wide range of authentic and meaningful experiences that are designed to meet children at their developmental level.

In Beginners:

- Children are surrounded by a print-rich environment that cultivates interest in language and words.
- Writing is modeled through charts, stories, songs and poetry, and documentation of weekly activities.
- Teachers encourage and support student writing by creating many opportunities to draw, copy, trace, and dictate stories.
- Student authors share diverse forms of writing, learning collaboratively through engagement with peers and teachers.
- Children learn to be a part of an audience by listening to their peers share a wide range of story making (written text, pictorial narratives, dramatic play, and story telling).
- Children listen and respond in numerous ways to books (fiction and non-fiction), poetry, and environmental text.
- Diverse types of reading (story telling, reading text, reading pictures etc.) individually, with friends, and to adults is encouraged daily.
- Children explore sounds through rhyme and alliteration to increase phonemic awareness.
- Children explore the importance of listening carefully to all members of the community, integrating group knowledge into their understandings of the world.
- Children are learning to respond meaningfully to various topics, offering comments and questions to deepen class discussions.

## Mathematics

Beginner teachers plan rich environments that allow children to explore math concepts in the context of play. In particular, children explore mathematics as a tool for making knowledge about the world around them. When engaging in project work, children discover the essential nature of math concepts as they support the integrated goals of project work (such as geometry in planning cities or measurement in building a set for a play). Math experiences are everywhere in the Beginner classroom, emanating from the daily experiences in sand/water play, block building, dramatic play, cooking, science exploration, manipulative games, and cooperative play. Some of the math concepts that are scaffolded during the year are:

### Number and Number Sense

- Count, recognize and order the numerals 0 to 12
- Demonstrate knowledge of quantity (few, many, less, more)
- Use manipulatives to solve problems
- Learn to share individual critical thinking process with the group
- Understand 1:1 correspondence and accurately counts objects 1-20
- Use positional language and ordinal numbers in everyday activities

### Classifying, Sorting and Patterning

- Sort and classify objects by different attributes
- Recognize simple patterns in the environment
- Originate and extend patterns

### Geometry and Spatial Sense

- Recognize, and name basic shapes
- Demonstrate ability to complete puzzles using perceptual strategies
- Explore and identify space, direction, movement, position and size

### Measurement

- Use non-standard units to measure length, weight and quantity
- Use measurement terms appropriately such as longer, shorter, bigger and smaller
- Use estimation in meaningful ways

### Data and Analysis

- Organize and draw conclusions from collected data, such as creating and discussing surveys and graphs

## Social Studies

Social studies in the Beginner's classroom are designed to foster a democratic social learning community. Teachers facilitate this growth with books, films, discussions, projects, and through a constant focus on community, justice, kindness, and collaboration. As a part of our work with social studies, teachers are trained in Responsive Classroom, and are guided by these philosophies and practices. The children work closely on concepts regarding rights and their responsibilities as

## **Social Studies (continued)**

members of the community. In particular, the Beginner classrooms focus on concepts of diversity, multiculturalism, and the multiplicity of experiences that each member brings into the community. Supportive and deep thinking on these issues are seen as the foundation for the children's development of citizenship within the school community.

## **Science**

Science is a central element to the ongoing explorations and investigations into the world around us. The goal of science in the Beginner classroom is to help children to learn about the natural environment by organizing materials so that they can discover concepts through their own active involvement and reasoning powers. Science is discovered through a multi-sensory, hands-on approach that emphasizes observing, interpreting, collecting, recording, and predicting information about scientific topics and concepts.

The central goal of science in the Beginner classroom is to nurture the children's natural curiosity while their disposition to inquire is encouraged. This work is facilitated through daily work with classroom teachers, as well as weekly meetings with a science specialist to offer new materials, possibilities, and explorations of new questions. If curiosity and exploration are valued, children's quest for deeper meaning and greater insight about the world around them is fulfilled.

## **Lower School World Languages**

Our goal is to help students to build a foundation for future language learning and to be prepared to communicate as global citizens of an interconnected world. To do this, we want to highlight and embrace student identities and provide an environment where they are comfortable taking risks and applying a growth mindset to language learning.

The Lower School World Language Department uses an approach to teaching languages that focuses on proficiency and communication in an engaging and low stress environment. Teaching with comprehensible input prioritizes the delivery of understandable messages that are personalized, meaningful, interesting, and relevant to our students. The goal of our classes is for students to acquire Spanish or French through communication and active participation. When age appropriate, we aim to spend at least 90% of our classes in the target language focusing on listening and reading to provide input (as opposed to formal vocabulary and grammar instruction).

We also strive to provide opportunities to explore other cultures and to do interdisciplinary work that allows students to connect and expand upon what they are learning in other places.



## Lower School World Languages (continued)

### Spanish

Beginners are introduced to Spanish once a week for 25 minutes using a multi-sensory approach focused on seeing, listening, and doing. Beginner Spanish students are exposed to the language through games, songs, stories, and movement activities. It's important to acknowledge that students come to Spanish class with different experiences in relation to language learning.

### Music

Each Beginner attends music class weekly in the Morse Building Music Room. The main objective is for children to enjoy their musical experience as they participate in music activities and explorations with their group.

Beginners music activities focus on the child's musical experience through singing, moving in space, using their bodies to express musical ideas, listening to a wide variety of styles, languages, and genres, as well as exploring unpitched and pitched percussion instruments. The overall objective is for students to use a variety of tools to explore and communicate their music ideas to others.

#### Rhythm

- Experience pulse in movement/body percussion
- Play unpitched percussion instruments
- Experience moving to a variety of meters
- Sing invented rhythmic sounds (scatting)

#### Melody

- Differentiate between high/low
- Experience up/down as well as singing in a limited range
- Explore vocal tone production
- Develop a repertoire of songs as a group
- Explore creating songs by singing
- Explore pitched instruments

#### Harmony

- Experience tonality differences
- Sing/chant with instrumental accompaniment

#### Form

- Experience same/different
- Experience patterns in songs through games, movement, and instrument play

## **Music (continued)**

### Expressive Qualities

- Explore space
- Experience tempo, dynamic contrasts, and timbre contrasts
- Experience unpitched percussion technique
- Create movement/music to accompany stories, rhymes, and poetry

### Timbre

- Identify unpitched percussion
- Differentiate between vocal qualities (speak/sing/whisper/shout)
- Demonstrate dynamics (loud/quiet)

## **Visual Art**

In Beginners, the experiential art-making process includes creative hands-on exploration and discovery of a range of art experiences, typically including objects from nature and found materials. The process of creating through sensory-based exploration provides a developmental tool needed in the acquisition of cognitive and physical growth.

Open-ended, sensory-based exploration stimulates a child's brain to grow and develop neural connections that establish links to other areas of learning. The process of creating supports cognitive growth by building skills in numeration, sequencing, cause and effect, and literacy. Our goal is to also develop an aesthetic appreciation of art that applies to all areas of life.

## **Library**

Students visit the library in the Morse building where they listen to stories, select books to take home and begin to develop their library skills. The read aloud time provides an opportunity to:

- Discover the joy of reading.
- Enrich their vocabulary and develop listening skills.
- Talk about the role of the author and the illustrator.
- Read books that may relate to what is being studied in the classroom.

When signing out books, students are able to choose from a variety of titles and genres as well as learn the responsibility of borrowing and returning a book within a given period of time. As the year progresses, students will learn:

## **Library** (continued)

- How the library is arranged by categories.
- What types of books can be found in the library.
- How to find books of personal interests.

## **Technology**

At the BB&N Lower School, it is our intention to integrate technology into the classroom in meaningful ways, and our goal is to teach students the skills necessary to be successful throughout the school year as well as to prepare them for future years. Through technological integration we give our students an introduction to word processing, spreadsheets and graphing, presentation software, three-dimensional design, internet safety and digital citizenship, online research, robotics, and programming. Our teachers create academic environments that facilitate student creativity, innovation, communication, and collaboration with others, while developing students into critical thinkers, problem solvers, and decision makers.

## **Physical Development**

The Beginner physical education class introduces students to ways they can manage their bodies through movement exploration. This movement education helps the student to develop both mind and body through safe physical activity.

### Play:

- An integral component of a child's physical, mental and social development; Beginners are given time to play with and experience a variety of balls and offered equipment.

### Manipulative activities:

- Balls and objects are used to introduce the skills of throwing, tossing, catching, kicking, bouncing, striking and rolling.

### Locomotor activities

- Patterns of walking, running, jumping, hopping, galloping, and sliding as the students move around, over, under, between and through various objects and apparatus while changing force, direction and shape.

### Non-Locomotor activities

- Bending, twisting, stretching, reaching, lifting, raising, turning, curling, changing their body shape.

## **Physical Development (continued)**

### Rhythmic Activities:

- Exploring, moving, dancing, creating and warming up to music.

### Gymnastics

- Creative movement, animal walks, and balance stunts. Development of the upper body through climbing and swinging on the rope ladder, climbing up the cargo net, and work on the low balance beam.

### Group games

- Animal and color themes provide the central focus as we introduce games with simple rules and limited equipment. Changing speeds, levels or shapes with limited equipment.

### Relaxation/Belly Breathing/Mindfulness Activities

- In many of our classes, we incorporate quiet, mindful activities as a way to relax and concentrate on our breathing.

## **Creative Movement**

Creative movement at the beginner level exposes our students to self-expression through physical movement and dance. Music, usage of scarves, acting out different characters from stories and coordination skills will all be taught each week. Yoga, mindful movement, and dramatic skills are also woven into the structure of the class.

## **Responsive Classroom**

Responsive Classroom is part of a school wide program to support the development in each individual of a core of important habits of mind that build the positive social emotional components for positive communication, character development, interpersonal relationships, and responsibility to the broader school community. In the Beginners program we focus on the following skills:

- Build class rules and explore what it means to be part of a learning community.
- Learn to sit and positively participate in morning meeting; to share, greet, engage in all activities and be a respectful listener.
- Practice working with a partner and with small groups of peers.
- Accept and understand consequences for actions or comments that may disrupt or hurt others' feelings.
- Show proper use of classroom materials and following class/school rules.
- Become a supportive friend and teammate in games and lessons.