

# **Linnaea School Curriculum**

We translate the mission statement and objectives into our daily programme through a variety of unique and creative educational approaches. The following descriptions are designed to provide a snapshot view of Linnaea School.

## **The Human Spirit-A Community**

### *The Circle*

Every day at Linnaea begins with a morning circle. Everyone participates in this; children, teachers and any visiting adults. This time together is crucial. It reminds us we are a community and brings together all members to talk, play, make decisions, and celebrate. Each morning has a general theme, but all are designed to involve children in the running of the school, build a sense of community, encourage the virtues of peacefulness and co-operation, and develop children's leadership skills and self esteem.

### *The Virtues Programme*

This programme is designed to call on the child's innate desire and potential to live their lives in a positive and respectful way. It provides a framework and a language for teaching values and virtues in the day-to-day lives of children. Different virtues (i.e. consideration, excellence, generosity, justice, patience) are introduced on a regular basis within the circle meetings, through stories, discussions, songs, and role-plays. As the children develop the language to identify specific behaviour in a positive way, the programme offers a vehicle to discuss negative behaviour in a positive light (e.g. "How could you have handled that situation by practicing the virtue of tolerance?") This programme is just one of the ways we promote feelings of empowerment and self-esteem in the children at Linnaea School.

### *Conflict Resolution*

All staff and students learn and regularly practice the tools of conflict resolution. We learn to articulate problems without blaming or attacking, we practice reflective listening skills and tolerance for the other's point of view. We learn to accept responsibility for our part of the problem, and develop skills to work through to a common solution.

### *Bringing the World to the Classroom*

We believe the more children are aware of the rich diversity of our world, the more likely they will grow up as tolerant and accepting human beings. We use stories, songs, discussions, drama, and 'World Tours' to introduce children to multicultural holidays and discuss world religions and customs. Current social issues are explored at age appropriate levels. We introduce the students to inspiring individuals who have contributed to making this world a better place. We try to offer role models drawn from a balance of male and female, child and adult (and even animal), famous, and relatively unknown individuals.

## *Relationships*

Every attempt has been made to design the school around the concept of community. There is no separate staff room for adults, we share work and play spaces alike. The staff and students are on first name basis - respect is both expected and mutually modeled. Parents are expected to spend time in the classroom, to participate in regular community meetings and support events and activities of the school. This partnership helps to bridge the gap between home and school life for children and ensure them that the adults in their life are working together to support and nurture them.

## **A Dynamic Curriculum**

### *Learning Group*

Following the morning circle we break into our learning groups or classes where the remainder of the morning is spent focusing on the core academic subjects. These classes are multi-age, spanning at least two and usually three grade levels. We feel it is healthy for children to interact and form friendships with children of a variety of ages. Having different ages in the classroom forces more individualization of programming and dramatically reduces the level of competition and comparison. A great deal of effort is made to ensure the members of each class grouping develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. We feel if children are to be free to take the risk to learn they must feel safe, supported and happy. The bonds that develop between members of each class and between the teachers and children are special ones and part of what makes Linnaea a wonderful place to grow and to learn.

### *The Curriculum*

The curriculum follows the B.C. Ministry of Education guidelines. Our students study all subjects and develop the skills in these subject areas as prescribed by the curriculum. Within the parameters of the curriculum, the students are able to have input into defining areas of concentration and methods of demonstrating their learning. Some of this is done through individual agreements between students and their teachers, while some are a class decision arrived at by consensus.

We use some textbooks, as well as a great deal of student and teacher created materials and games. Art, drama, and music are recognized as powerful vehicles for learning and are integrated into our programme in many ways. We approach learning as a holistic experience and attempt to move away from the compartmentalized approach to learning reading, writing and arithmetic.

We believe if our children are going to have doors open for them they will need strong skills in literacy and mathematics. They will need to be able to research, find and utilize information, and make decisions. They will need to know how to work both cooperatively and independently. Most importantly, they will need to develop an appreciation for, and a desire to strive for, excellence. We believe the combination of traditional and individualized curriculum that we offer at Linnaea prepares children well to meet the demands of a fast changing and complex world.

## *Theme Study*

The curriculum is designed around school-wide theme units and, wherever possible, subjects are integrated into these themes. Each theme lasts approximately six weeks and comes from the social studies and science curricular areas. An example of a theme study is Ancient Egypt. All the children in the school studied aspects of this time and culture, appropriate to their age and level of understanding. All of the students were introduced to the mythology through storytelling and painting. This activity was the primary focus of the kindergarten/grade one class study. The seven-to nine year olds compiled beautiful hand-bound alphabet books with each page depicting something they had learned about ancient Egyptian culture. The older children rotated through five in-depth research stations and compiled reports on their results. In addition to this, spelling, creative writing, and reading were built around themes and concepts from Ancient Egypt. We always end our study units by coming together to share in some event that celebrates what we learned. For this unit of study the entire school traveled back in time to Ancient Egypt and spent a day dressing up in costume, cooking date-treats, visiting pyramids, creating Egyptian murals, and sharing in storytelling.

## *The Afternoons*

In order to match the natural rhythms of children's energy and focus the afternoons have a different pace from the mornings. Some time each week is spent in class groupings, working in extended blocks on group and individual theme projects. Music, physical education and art are also a focus for afternoon times, and pull together a wider range of age groupings. These subjects are built around units that allow the children to experience a wide variety of activities in the arts and physical movement.

Special instructors are brought in for many of these units to share their skills and talents with the children. While we believe a trusting relationship between a student and teacher is a crucial element in the learning process, we also believe children need to learn through experience the world is full of teachers. By bringing in a wide variety of instructors for special units the children develop confidence interacting with adults and learn to acquire skills and information delivered through different teaching styles.

Our art programme offers the children the chance to use good quality materials while developing a variety of artistic skills and vocabularies. The emphasis is on the process and encourages in children pride in their accomplishments. Favourite pieces are selected throughout the year and showcased in our year-end art and poetry show.

Our music and drama programme exposes the children to a wide variety of music and theatre activities. It includes developing listening and audience skills as well as performance skills. We believe that the experience of working together to stage concerts and plays is a powerful vehicle for developing group skills and self-esteem. There is a role for everyone and everyone is needed for the production to be a success. Four major public presentations take place each year; a Festival of Lights concert before winter break, a musical play in March, a May Day celebration of music and dance, and a year-end concert in June.

## *Clubs*

Our clubs programme is an exciting, innovative part of our curriculum. It is designed to meet part of the Personal Planning curriculum by helping children develop skills and talents for leisure, personal pleasure, and possibly, future employment. Clubs are presented in six week units. Children select one of five or six clubs in which to participate. These clubs take place once a week for approximately two hours. They generally consist of five to ten students of varying ages and one adult who has been asked to come and share their joy and skill in a particular area.

This modeling of adult enthusiasm is a powerful example for children who don't often have the opportunity to see adults play, and don't connect adult work with fun. The clubs vary widely in topics from cooking, weaving, poetry, dance, drumming, and drama, to hiking, bike maintenance, carpentry, kayaking, chess, and computers.

## *The Natural World*

Every effort is made to engage the children in the rich natural setting of Linnaea Farm. Students interact with the farm animals which include sheep, cows, chickens, and horses. The children often help to raise new chicks in the spring, and all look forward to visiting the spring lambs and calves.

The children take responsibility for a small organic garden, composting, recycling and decision-making to reduce the school's landfill accumulation. The school is part of the national Green School programme and all students work actively on related environmental projects. They also participate in on-going discussions of current environmental issues at age appropriate levels and in hands-on projects such as stream restoration, heritage seed saving and salmon enhancement projects.

Each class chooses a habitat on the farm to study and care for each year. This stewardship is a wonderfully interactive way to introduce the children to field study techniques, the food chain, indigenous plant life, animal conservation, water care, life cycles and countless other discoveries and scientific skills. Observations, field notes, art and poetry are recorded in their beautifully bound Nature Journals.