In music class, the Kaleidoscope teacher reads *Sheep Take a Hike*, by Margot Apple, a picture book about some sheep who set out on a journey. They encounter many kinds of terrain (uphill, downhill, through bushes and trees, swamp, and meadow) and several types of weather (warm and clear, fog and rain).

The story seizes the full attention of the 20 four-year-olds. After they act out zigzagging through a forest, tramping through fog, and trotting home, the music teacher asks the children to provide sounds for these story elements (“Can you give me a sound for trotting?”). She draws a symbol for zig and zag on a flip chart and asks, “Would that sound good if it were played with rhythm sticks or *gueiros* [hollow gourds]?” After the children agree on the sounds and corresponding notations, the teacher points to the notations as the children “tell” the story with the chosen sounds or instruments.

BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY

Settlement Music School was founded almost a century ago (1908) with the mission of offering social services and music lessons to immigrant families in South Philadelphia. Today it is the largest and one of the oldest community music schools in the United States, currently serving more than 15,000 students of all ages in six locations in or near Philadelphia and in Camden, New Jersey.

In 1990, Settlement expanded its mission, creating a preschool program to teach music and other creative arts to three- to five-year-olds. Settlement sought to enroll families in this program from a nearby deteriorating high-rise housing development.

The preschool was named Kaleidoscope to express the richness of its educational offerings as well as the diversity of its families.

The Kaleidoscope Preschool Arts Enrichment Program is a unique creative arts-integrated preschool. Housed within two of Settlement Music School’s branches, Kaleidoscope serves economically and racially diverse neighborhoods in South Philadelphia and in the Germantown section of the city. Most of its 100 preschoolers come from families with low incomes and receive scholarships. Many of the children (15 to 20 percent) qualify for early intervention services, such as speech and occupational therapy provided by local agencies.

Kaleidoscope was licensed in 1996 by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a child care center and academic preschool and earned NAEYC Accreditation in 1998. The President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities honored the Kaleidoscope program in 1998 with the Coming Up Taller Award for exemplary and model programs in community-based arts education.

**Teachers and physical layout**

The Kaleidoscope teaching team includes three artist-teachers (one each for visual arts, music, and dance), six head teachers, and six assistant teachers (one for each of the six preschool classes, grouped by age). Head teachers have bachelor or associate degrees in early childhood education, and most assistant teachers have an AA or BA in related fields. The artist-teachers have advanced degrees in their disciplines, strong performance or exhibit backgrounds, and preschool teaching experience. Many teachers live in the community, and several have children or grandchildren enrolled in the program.

Kaleidoscope children share Settlement facilities with school-age, adult, and senior students engaged in Settlement’s core and special programs. On any day, Kaleidoscope preschoolers might encounter a string quartet practicing in an adjacent studio or professional musicians rehearsing and auditioning in the recital halls.

Homerooms use spaces originally designed for music classes and individual instruction. Their quirky shapes and distinctive characters accommodate a wide array of basic learning centers. The dance studio in the South Philadelphia facility was originally a bathhouse that served the many immigrant families in the neighborhood.

Class size ranges from 12, for the youngest group of threes, to 20 for the five-year-olds. In homerooms the emphasis is on dramatic play, literacy, and using manipulatives and puzzles. These rooms contain a limited array of creative arts supplies, since the children spend so much of the day playing and learning in the specially equipped arts studios. Each studio offers an abundance of appealing, appropriate, accessible materials.

The program is full-day, from 8:15 a.m. to 2:45 p.m., and the children begin and finish the day in their homerooms. Families are encouraged to visit, participate, and observe in all the arts classes and homerooms. At 9:30 a.m., each group with its homeroom teachers begins the daily rotation through the visual arts, music, and dance studios. This system gives every child a daily 35-minute period in each arts environment. The remainder of the day is spent in homeroom activities and outdoors.

**A typical day**

On a rainy, blustery March day, 20 four-year-olds and their parents enter their early learning homeroom. After greeting the teacher and signing in, some parents join their children for breakfast. They talk with the teachers and each other as the children finish eating and begin to play. After cleanup, the children gather and carefully walk down two flights of steps to the music studio.
**Music studio**

Martha Zook, music teacher, greets the class. She and one of the homeroom teachers help the children remove their shoes and socks. Everyone then forms a circle to begin the day’s musical activities. As a transitional step to focus attention, the children warm up their voices by singing a song they know well (“It’s Raining, It’s Pouring”) and clap to keep a steady beat.

When the song is over, a volunteer weatherperson goes to the window to describe what is happening outdoors. Martha reads *Rain*, by Rozanne Lanczak Williams, about different kinds of rain sounds: the pitter-patter on windows, raindrops falling on an umbrella, boots sloshing through puddles. Then she leads the children in telling their own rain story through musical sounds; their composition starts slowly, builds to thunderclaps, then fades away. After this highly stimulating experience, the children put on their shoes and socks and descend two more flights into the basement for dance class.

**Dance studio**

The children can hear music long before they enter the dance studio, where they again take off their shoes and socks before joining Kaye Fernandez, dance teacher, in some transitional, warm-up activities. Then everyone spreads out across the studio, each waving a colorful chiffon scarf in an imaginary wind to the music of “Spring,” from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*. When the music ends, the children fold up the scarves using chin, chest, arms, and fingers.

Kaye now asks the children how they would move if they were outside in the rain. They demonstrate stomping in puddles, jumping over puddles, splashing through puddles. In the final dance activity, Kaye asks them to step only on the raindrops symbolized by round blue dots applied randomly to the dance floor. She starts the music and gives five children tiny umbrellas. The five go from one pretend raindrop to another, stretching to make large steps or balancing between small steps. When they finish, they pass the umbrellas to five other classmates. After everyone has had a turn, the children find their shoes and socks and then, with their homeroom teacher, climb back up two flights of stairs to the art studio.

**Visual arts studio**

Won jung Choi, art teacher, welcomes the class, and the children put on smocks and choose a work area. Some draw with crayons and markers or cut with scissors. Several tape and embellish designs with bright pieces of colored foil on paper, and others make pictures using stencils and paper punches. A few children paint at easels, alone or with a friend. All of the children constantly exchange information or discuss their work with teachers.

At the clay table, Won jung helps several children make frogs in a spring pond. Soon the children are discussing what frogs do in the rain. The work on the frogs is remarkably realistic. One girl, with guidance from Won jung, makes a princess instead of a frog. This inspires the homeroom teacher to look for a book about the frog and the princess.

**Back to homeroom**

After their active morning, the children return to homeroom for lunch, teeth brushing, the fairytale of the frog and princess, and a brief quiet time. Next, they get ready for circle time, where they take attendance, note the day and date, discuss the weather, review what they have done so far, and tell what they have put in their cubbies to share with families at home. With the homeroom teacher as referee, the children negotiate the next day’s job assignments. There are many helping jobs, such as door holders, line leaders, lunch helpers, snack helpers, cleanup signaler, and in the
older groups, circle-time leader. Given the inclement weather, the children will not go outdoors today, so until it is time to go home, they play with each other and their teachers in learning centers.

**Using the arts to achieve learning objectives**

NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards (www.naeyc.org/academy/standards) serve as unifying core values and guiding principles for the program. The Kaleidoscope written curriculum forms a deep and broad conceptual base for planning activities in homerooms and studios for all classrooms. For example, in January teachers plan activities that help children recognize patterns. They act out movement patterns to match the word patterns and images in *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt*, by Michael Rosen, in the dance studio with props. In music class they write and perform drumming patterns. Children paint and draw linear patterns in the visual arts studio, and in homerooms they make designs with pattern blocks and geo boards.

Together, the arts and early learning homeroom activities support children’s understanding of concepts like pattern. Working in many environments enables children to identify patterns independently and to apply pattern recognition across their daily experience. Research documents and supports how essential early sensory experiences—such as those inherent in visual arts, music, and dance or creative movement activities—are to learning (Gardner 1993; Ratey 2001). The auditory, physical, and visual work in all of the arts studios amplifies and enriches children’s exploratory play in the homerooms.

**Planning curriculum**

The director and teachers developed the Kaleidoscope curriculum guide as a structure for and means of coordinating lesson content and play choices. It stresses collaboration between disciplines and is child-centered, flexible, and spontaneous. When the teachers meet in the late summer to plan for the coming year, they reference the overall goals established by the guide and make certain to build in time for observing and recording children’s progress on key concepts and skills in visual arts, music, dance, and homeroom activities. They try to avoid activities and schedules that could subject children to overstimulation, too-frequent transitions, confusion, or fatigue.

Lesson plans follow the sequence provided in the Kaleidoscope curriculum guide that includes program philosophy, description, structure, and activities. The curriculum guide coordinates learning activities across the three arts studios and early learning homerooms. It includes a wealth of activities that artist and homeroom teachers have collected over the years to create an arts-rich, integrated learning environment that increases challenge and difficulty for typical expectations of growth and mastery. The Kaleidoscope curriculum guides teachers in planning activities that directly connect to the assessment tools the program uses. Families support the curriculum through the parents committee, special homeroom occasions, program events, and performances.

**Learning in music**

Music is an intensely social experience. To sing or play instruments in a group, children must listen to themselves, their leader (often the teacher), and each other. To be successful, everyone has to conform to the spirit and structure of the music, starting and stopping together and

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coordinating their musical activity from moment to moment. Singing, playing instruments, and joining in games are intensely integrative learning activities. They build on children’s natural drive to join in and exercise their auditory discrimination or hearing ability as well as fine and gross motor coordination. By the end of the year, children freely and flawlessly choose, organize, and complete together many complex singing and moving games.

Activities such as moving to music, playing an instrument, and keeping time with “body percussion” establish a profound sense of one-to-one correspondence, which is the basis for counting and understanding mathematics. Music class develops phonological or listening awareness (of themselves and others), listening comprehension (the ability to name and describe categories of sounds, instruments, and timbres), and fine and gross motor coordination (using hand and percussion instruments). The simultaneous demand upon motor skills, cognitive skills, and social knowledge fosters deep learning and long-term memory. Once children learn the patterns, pitch, and rhythms of their favorite songs, they can create new ones based on modifications to those they know.

Learning in dance and creative movement

Physical movement tasks demand full engagement of the mind and body. In the dance studio children gain body awareness: they learn the different parts of their body and how they work separately and in coordination. Body awareness leads children to play and experiment with locomotor movement (walking, running, leaping, hopping) and nonlocomotor movement
(bending, twisting). In addition to teaching the meaning of verbs, these creative movement elements enrich children’s understanding of nouns like giraffe or bear and verbs like gallop, slide, or leap. Completing a sequence of physical movement tasks (going on a bear hunt) builds cognitive skills, motor planning (not leaving any of the steps out), and motor coordination (making muscles do what you want them to). This success leads to individual creative experimentation or expression (Benzwie 1996).

While discussing and recalling activities, children use new language to describe the movement tasks they worked on the previous day. Kaye guides children through creative movement activities by starting with simple, familiar tasks that build strength, coordination, and confidence. Using this step-by-step approach, children with varied developmental abilities eagerly try difficult tasks and willingly accept more creative challenges.

Learning in visual arts: Easel painting

At their easels the three-year-olds begin to explore with brushes and paint in primary colors. Typical first creations are “blobs” (roundish shapes) in the middle of the paper. Some children stick to one color for several months, but eventually most begin to mix colors and spread paint in varying amounts (thick or thin). They become interested in brush strokes and in guiding the brush along a linear path. The shapes they produce grow in size and definition, covering more and more of the paper. With more opportunities to explore paint and brushes, children’s strokes become designs, and colors and shapes begin to separate.

Painting at an easel every day gives children opportunities to experiment, learn, and make progress as painters. By age five, most children make representational forms using several colors and shapes. Lines and shapes become letters, numbers, objects and figures, earth and sky (Kellogg 1970).

The pictures tell stories, and children use adjectives and adverbs to describe their choices of materials and colors. Children advance tremendously in fine motor coordination through consistent, concentrated use of a wide variety of art materials. In addition to easel painting, the children draw, and they work on collage with scissors, tape, stencils, paper punches, clay, and found objects, creating large group and individual two- and three-dimensional projects (see www.ket.org/arttoheart for many excellent art activities).
Assessing children’s progress

In creative arts environments, children have many opportunities to demonstrate achievement and competence. Although teachers and families watch this progress with pleasure and excitement, some may not fully grasp the extent of children’s development in their artwork or their musical and movement capabilities. (An overview of typical development in the arts—Young Children and the Arts: Making Creative Connections [AEP 1998]—can be downloaded at www.aep-arts.org/publications/index.htm). The Kaleidoscope program documents what children are learning: where each child begins in the school year and where he or she finishes. Success and achievement in learning and school readiness depend upon sustaining an evolving relationship between children, families, and teachers.

The Kaleidoscope assessment process informs and includes parents as participants. The communication and observation opportunities deepen families’ understanding of the program’s educational values, especially for the creative arts curriculum. Artist teachers join homeroom teachers in all meetings with parents.

Screening

Early in the school year, as in all Head Start programs, homeroom teachers use a formal tool to screen each child. Because arts activities are especially demanding of a child’s sensory motor coordination and social development, the artist teachers’ observations add weight to the information in the formal developmental screen. The screening results may suggest a need for further evaluation and possibly early intervention services. Home and school visits provide an opportunity to revisit the screening results with homeroom and artist teachers and to share family stories about play, friends, and learning then and in the coming year.

Ongoing assessment

In late fall and spring, all Kaleidoscope teachers record each child’s skill level in early learning, music, dance, and visual arts. Artist and head teachers, using a checklist of typical curricular activities, record what children do, how often they choose to do it, and how successful they are in performing the activities and tasks. Teachers also regularly write anecdotal notes and record progress in curriculum domains. Children’s portfolios support teacher’s checklist decisions (Fantuzzo et al. 2002). At parent-teacher conferences in December and May, parents receive and discuss the checklists with homeroom and artist teachers.

In early February, about halfway through the school year, the Kaleidoscope program closes for a day and a half. First, teachers meet with parents to collect information on each child’s progress. Then, for each child, they review the assessment data collected from multiple sources. The teaching staff and social worker discuss each child’s progress, and teachers make decisions about lesson plans for the rest of the year.

Communication and observation opportunities deepen families’ understanding of the program’s educational values, especially for the creative arts curriculum.

Transition: Showing what children have learned and saying good-bye

Young children need and deserve recognition for their achievements. At the end of the Kaleidoscope school year in June, the children’s artwork is displayed throughout two of the Settlement School buildings. The art shows lots of lively detail in drawings and sculpture. There are broad sections of color and texture in the paintings and collage done by even the youngest children. There is also a music and dance performance; the children and teachers choose songs, games, and movement activities that show what they have learned and how well they can do them.

This celebration of accomplishment helps families, teachers, and children make the transition to the following year. For some families it is hard to say good-bye to Kaleidoscope, especially when several siblings have attended over many years, and it is even harder for some teachers to see these families leave.

The Kaleidoscope arts curriculum builds a strong physical and cognitive foundation for future learning (Heckman 2006). Families intuitively know what research tells early childhood professionals and public policy makers: that high-quality early learning experiences can have lifelong benefits and that knowledge gaps in kindergarten can affect learning in high school (Galinsky 2006).

School readiness requires growth from parents as well as from children. Having seen their children grow into competent and confident learners, Kaleidoscope Head Start families face kindergarten with high hopes and expectations. They are ready to face a new school experience with their children.

One year a mother of five Kaleidoscope graduates asked to speak to the 200 or so parents and children attending the June performance. She told the families assem-
bled how lucky they were to have such a program and how much Kaleidoscope had meant to each of her children. She said that she had been able to finish college while her children were in Kaleidoscope and that she would begin teaching high school English in the fall. She talked about how much she had learned with and about her children over their preschool years. Hearing her say publicly what others have often felt was a rare moment of acknowledgment for the program’s dedicated staff.

After this particular June performance, when everyone else had gone home, five-year-old Ramon sat with his grandmother in the lobby, seemingly in no hurry to leave. Ramon’s grandmother was dressed in a beautiful white suit and he was wearing a matching one. Holding a single rose and intent on every word, she leaned close to Ramon as he told her a long, rambling story. It was clear from her expression of pride and love that she was not really following what he was saying even though Ramon had her full attention. She and Ramon were celebrating his accomplishments, and she was treasuring this moment of success with her grandson.

References


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