FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

ABOUT THE PRACTICES AND PEDAGOGY AT BOWDOIN COLLEGE CHILDREN’S CENTER
Attachment is defined at the Center as a safe, secure and predictable bond that forms between a child and their primary caregiver through caregiving routines.

- When a child is secure and sure of their care and that their needs will be understood and met, then they can freely play and learn. In order to build these secure and sure relationships, we have primary care assigned for each child. We practice primary caregiving so that a caregiver and child are in a meaningful and trusting relationship.
- The caregiver bonds with the child and that family by taking ownership of the primary care responsibilities such as feeding, napping, changing and dressing while the child is in the program.
- Additionally, we assign specific subs to the programs at the Center so that we decrease the number of adults a very young child needs to know and trust.
- We also avoid transitioning children to a new program arbitrarily (because of a birthday) choosing instead to decrease the number of transitions and changes to the group of children and their caregiving team. Instead we build strong bonds by moving groups of children from program to program together with their primary team.
Primary caregiver/co-lead/educator

- The primary caregiver steps into the role as the child’s main focus while they are at the Center. Initially, a child who is new to their group is cared for primarily by this person so that they build trust and connection through repeated routine care interactions. Over time, the connection develops into an understanding and then trust. Once this connection blossoms into a deeper relationship, children receive care from other caregivers who are known to them.
- After developing strong and solid relationships with the children, we hold a presence with them so that they feel their “center” with us in order to play freely and independently. Being present might mean doing chores, working in the garden, shoveling, or knitting so that attention isn’t focused on the playing child but rather on the task at hand while we are visible to them.
- Primary caregivers write conference reports throughout the year, meet with parents for check-in conversations, and guide them through their child’s development as needed.
Continuity of Care refers to the importance of providing children form, predictability, and stability within a child care setting for at least the first three years of life. Of most importance is the primary care relationship lasting from infancy through age three.

- The benefit of a child having the same primary caregiver in a childcare setting for the first three years of life is that it decreases stress for the child and the family.
- The decrease of stress allows the child’s brain to engage in a continual development process and an opportunity to make greater connections with their experiences in their world.
- Continuity of Care also offers a connection between parents, teachers and children that creates a feeling of safety and security for a child. Because there is not a sense of loss at the beginning of a year (or right after a transition) where the teacher/child relationship needs to be formed. Instead, the relationships carry over from year to year, increasing the time allowed for growth and development.
The Children’s Center staff have studied two interwoven paths that lead to children’s learning through play. One path is the creation of a rich emotional landscape necessary for a healthy, nurturing world where children can thrive. The other is the engaging world where cognitive growth offers rich, substantive, and deep play. The understanding that “emotion drives cognition” informs our work with the youngest, most tender minds. We strive to create a haven where children can trust, predict, and experience security. With this solid emotional foundation, they play and so they learn. We protect their play and learning from the circumstances and obstacles of group care.
**Background understanding of the importance of play**

- Virtually every theory of child development hypothesizes that play is related to healthy cognitive and social development (e.g., Piaget, 1962). When children play, they refine motor skills, explore the physical properties of objects, learn cause and effect, and engage in means–ends problem solving.

- We intentionally and deliberately offer materials that deserve children’s attention, investigation, and exploration. Our outside space and inside rooms are planned for play in the purest, most authentic sense. With this play at hand, we then work to protect it from disruption and interruption; surviving the rhythm of children’s interactions, and benefitting from the quiet adult’s presence.

- As children develop cognitively and acquire language, their goals can become more sophisticated leading to longer episodes of focused attention, particularly during play.

- The term “focused attention” has been used to designate activity during which “attention is directed more or less exclusively to one task and not divided or shared between tasks.”

- The environmental design, materials, and the tone of the room build a calm atmosphere in order to set the stage for children’s focused attention. Group care, by definition, can be disruptive and distracting so our goal each day, throughout the day, is to minimize the impact of group care on children’s learning.

- By letting children be bored we help them, because being bored represents the opportunity the children will have to become creative. Children are able to be by themselves and create their own play without adult direction. This is important because in early childhood everything is about being able to create.

- We understand that when children see the familiar repeatedly they may do one of two things. They may recognize the familiar and find the novelty through creative engagement or they may recognize the familiar and respond with disinterest. Adults who are busy alongside the child, engaged in their own work, not reacting to either of these responses, is allowing the child to grow.
Nature-based play

- When outdoor environments are rich with opportunities for calculated risk-taking, they offer children play with great heights such as climbing, with high speed, such as running, with dangerous tools, such as hammers, stones, logs, and stumps, with rough-and-tumble play with others, and play where the children can “disappear”, “get lost” or explore on their own.
- In outdoor play, children practice planning and executing ideas. They experience making a guess about something and then trying it out — if I drop this pebble into that puddle, how high will it splash? Will I get wet? Children acquire an intuitive understanding of scientific method. Later, when it is taught inside their elementary school classroom, children who have these experiences have a head start understanding concepts.
- During outdoor play, curious children may tinker with materials and ideas when they first begin to determine how to crack ice, splash in a puddle, or make a den or a shelter. Tinkering can be described as an active engagement and manipulation with materials or experiences that children do to figure out ideas and answers to questions. Tinkering with ideas supports children exploring, experimenting, engaging with materials in ways that offer new options and ultimately learning through trial and error.
- When children are given the time, space, and materials to combine, assemble, take apart, and create with; they become immersed in experimentation and discovery that increases their desire to further explore.
- Because of peer play, the space and options to move, create, and explore occur more spontaneously in outdoor play. This is where children learn to take turns, self-regulate, interact with peers, and understand social norms such as what behaviors are acceptable and what ones require refinement. They determine when to engage in group play options and when they wish to be alone and enjoy solitary play.
- Children who are exposed to outdoor environments move physically, participate in exploratory experiences such as putting things together and taking them apart, figure out how to accomplish goals: make sand molds, climbing to the top of the stump, etc. These experiences contribute to the critical thinking and problem-solving skills used later in academic environments.
• A few studies suggest that brief interruptions can end young children’s ongoing activities. Older children (@ 6-years-old) were better able to respond to interruptions without disrupting their play. While 3-year-olds were unable to return to their play without adult prompts. If the play resumed, it was less intense. Children as young as 12-, 24-, and 36-month-old are just beginning complex and symbolic play and have poorly developed control over focused and sustained attention.

• At the Children’s Center adults maintain a calm background in order to avoid drawing attention to themselves or what they are doing so as to support and acknowledge the fragility of the young child’s developing abilities.

• Interruptions are also kept at a minimum when young children receive care that is predictable, when form and structure are in balance; and when sensory stimulation is within the child’s capacity to manage it. When the stimulation rises significantly and the predictable rhythm and structure dissolve away – most children are unable to cope and we see this as an interruption.
Quality Environments

Our rooms are places for experiencing: working places which favor and help learning, develop curiosity and allow autonomy. Teachers don’t impart knowledge but offer conditions for learning by preparing sufficient space and time around the child. These environments sustain and stimulate the child’s imagination as they are arranged for children’s eyes, hands and gestures. This offers a view to educating the child’s mind, not only to recognize the world but to transform it. Educators offer generous care and varieties of possibilities easily accessible to children because they know how to give, prepare and animate. The rooms are places of rich, continual experiences with a meaning for the group of adults and children. These environments are predictable, understandable, and meaningful enough to stimulate the children towards organizing their own games, activities, and discoveries. All of the areas are conceived and designed for everyone to enjoy.
Loose Parts

- Nicholson (1971) coined the term loose parts theory to articulate the idea that children benefit from being given open-ended materials. This means that the materials may be used alone or with other materials. They are movable and do not have a defined use; rather children may use them in a variety of ways.
- Loose parts do not have specific instructions of how the product needs to be used. Through exploration and manipulation of the materials, children figure out how they can be combined, redesigned, taken apart and put together in multiple ways.
- When materials do not have a specific purpose, children feel invited to be curious about the items in their environment and then mess about with them.
School-readiness

• We know that brain development is at the core of all aspects of development.
• Studies have shown that outdoor play influences a child’s neurological development as the neural circuits of the brain become wired.
• Children are steeped in social, cognitive, and language development as they take advantage of the freedom offered to them to collaborate, explore, and orchestrate their experiences in preschool. The materials offered in the play yard appear, on the surface, to be minimal, relatively non-directed, and organic; however, when children manipulate these materials they are not captured by their novelty but instead by their familiarity and so utilize them in play creatively. Here we see a rich palate for them to use in their inquiry, investigations, and problem solving.
• Rather than learn content: letters, numbers, sounds, colors, children experience the learning process.
• They experience frustration at not having something go the way they planned either with peers or with a project. With adult guidance, they learn to identify the frustration and then work through it in order to continue with their goal.
• They are persistent as they attempt to solve a problem or identify a perspective and often don’t stop until there is an outcome that seems to their liking.
• Children collaborate in order to solve a problem, create a structure, or organize a game. While the outcome may not be as they envisioned it, they learn through their own conversations and considerations how to work with others. Because we offer them strong adult models of problem solving, they have information to imitate.
• Reading cues, identifying sequences, following routines, making choices all involve careful observation, memory of past experiences, predictions for desired outcomes, and practice attending to the important features of an opportunity.
• When children enter kindergarten their self-concept, self-esteem, and ability to self-regulate are some of the most important tools they bring with them. These tools have been nurtured in their first five year and will serve them well, as they know their successes when they met with difficult situations, how they solved problems, and how to navigate new environments and peers.
• Learning to read, write, and count will follow easily as they employee their past strategies from play to these new skills in learning.