UHMCC values and trusts the expertise and passions of its teachers. We therefore embrace an eclectic mix of pedagogical approaches and techniques. Walking through each classroom you get significantly different feelings as each group emphasizes different things and in different ways. You may see Reggio-inspired bulletin boards, Montessori materials and Waldorf-inspired dolls sitting side-by-side. Classes sharing the same space could be progressing through seemingly very different units of study, but it all works together.

So, how can all of this fit into a single, coherent program? The answer is that we start with the child but we don’t end there. Firstly, our basic philosophy is seated in social learning. We all emphasize collaboration as part of the learning process: peer-to-peer and peer-to-teacher. When collaborating, no one person’s voice dominates the others so the teacher’s interests and passions share importance with the child’s. Paired with that is the concept that we work within the child’s Zone of Proximal Development as proposed by Lev Vygotsky. By focusing on what a child can do with assistance to develop independent proficiency, we develop the child’s potential. We work within the child’s potential – the future child, as well as honoring the child in the moment.

Secondly, we are an NAEYC accredited school seeking to be a powerful voice in the early childhood education community. We demonstrate what a quality preschool program could be. UHMCC developed a coherent core curriculum that balances developmental and academic benchmarks based on the age of a typical child. These developmental benchmarks, banded by age ranges, help us assess both the individual child’s progress through the program and the program itself. While we purposefully state that we are not a kindergarten preparedness program, our benchmarks are developmentally appropriate while still meeting or exceeding what the state expects for entrance into kindergarten. Our benchmarks are consistent across all classes.

These benchmarks are not the entire curriculum and should never be viewed as such. Each teaching team is required to define their own full curriculum, based on their passions, interests and values, and knowing what the child will need to progress to the next level. We believe that a teacher’s role is to use knowledge of development, culture, and each individual child and family to guide implementation of meaningful, three-dimensional curriculum.

To be clear, a curriculum is the child’s educational journey, both intended and spontaneous, including emergent components. The journey is documented and regularly reviewed, both within the classroom throughout the academic year and as the child progresses from one class to the next over the course of years. In general, child interests and passions are used to develop units and themes. Units and themes define the contexts which opportunities for learning and development, as defined by the curriculum, are presented.
What It Looks Like By Age

**Age 2 to 3**

At this level the core curriculum focuses far more on developmental issues rather than academic issues. Academically, we look more towards exposure issues as the child gains more familiarity and awareness of concepts and skills. We also look at getting comfortable with other children and other adults. We focus most on developing independence and laying a foundation for communication skills.

**Age 3 to 4**

At this level, we have more balance between developmental and academic issues. We look to develop independence in a broader range of domains, add greater detail in our investigations, and demand more accountability in conflict mediation as the child takes on greater social risk and interaction. We strongly focus on the foundations for cooperation at this level, moving beyond what most programs address.

**Age 4 to 5**

At this level the balance between development and academics shifts more toward academics as we seek to lay in foundational skills and habits for independent complex thinking and investigation. Social skills center more on collaboration skills as children begin to work more in small groups. We also work more closely on pre-reading and pre-writing skills and begin to look at short-term goal setting.

**Mixed Age**

The strength of our core curriculum and greater freedom to fill out the curriculum and define pedagogical approach is most evident in a mixed age class and at the times when different classes combine. We worked hard to define skill progression across age bands. This allows the mixed age group to take on both learner and teacher roles. Particularly in a mixed age group, children are able to move up the progression at their own pace because we clearly understand what the next steps are and how they interplay with other skills and practices across subject areas.

**Suggested Reading**

- *Comprehension & Collaboration* by Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels
- *Rousing Minds to Life* by Roland Tharp and Ron Gallimore
- *Developmentally Appropriate Practice* by Carol Copple and Sue Bredekamp
- *Growing Minds* by Carol Copple
- *Education for a Civil Society: How Guidance Teaches Young Children Democratic Life Skills* by Dan Gartrell