

CULTIVATING MASTERY in Young Learners

Why today's preschoolers need to explore and take risks.

by Kate Sylvain

Research shows that the more hands-on experiences children are offered, the more confident and secure they become in their learning. And the earlier that can occur, the better. At the Center for Early Childhood Education at Léman Manhattan, we help children become independent lifelong learners who are not afraid to take risks. Through an inquiry-based curriculum and STEAM WonderLab—our innovative maker-space—we provide children ages three through five with their first opportunities to:

EXPLORE

Children are natural explorers. How many times have you witnessed a child pick up an object for the first time and stare at it in wonder, studying every characteristic and using every sense to figure out exactly what to do with that “thing?” At Léman, children are given many different materials throughout the year to do just this. The instructors use a myriad of STEAM materials, some traditional (Legos, Tinker Toys and Lincoln



Logs) and others that are new to the Early Childhood scene, such as Xylobas and the Code-a-pillar—an electronic caterpillar that teaches the fundamentals of coding.

PLAN

Children are encouraged to think about what they could make with the materials before them, to build upon one another's thoughts and ideas, and to question each other's thinking. Maybe it is a building, maybe a bus, maybe a train or a spaceship. Whatever it may be, where are they going to start? What pieces will they need? Does it make sense to use the square pieces for wheels? How big should the creation be, how small? What might happen if you stack the heavy pieces on top? Students work together and encourage conversations in which they have to communicate and build upon each other's ideas so they can begin to understand that negotiation is key to being open-minded, caring members of a community.

CREATE

Children in the Center consistently create using many different materials—across separate languages and disciplines. Whether they attempt to stick to their first plan or plan to adapt their strategies as they create, the children often find their original plans need to be completely redesigned. In the end, the final product is not as important as the process, and that shines through. The ability to explain one's thinking, to be flexible in one's thinking, and to figure out what worked and what did not—and the ability to work through frustration and find success—are just a few of the life skills that children in Léman's Early Childhood program are able to develop: all the important characteristics of a global learner and engaged citizen of the world.

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