The mission of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Preschool is to provide a model inclusive early childhood program that serves children (ages 1 to 5 years) of students, faculty, staff and the surrounding campus community.

Service

UNLV/CSUN Preschool was founded in 1974 and has been accredited by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs since 1994. An Early Childhood Special Education Model Demonstration Program that serves preschool age children with disabilities was incorporated into the Preschool in 1994. Through cooperative agreements, programming for these children with disabilities is provided by the Clark County School District. An additional interlocal agreement with the Division of Child and Family Services, Southern Region, Early Childhood Services First Step Program (hereinafter referred to as First Step) was established in January 1999. The purpose of this agreement is to meet the objectives of P.L. 105-17 and the National Association for the Education of Young Children position on natural environments by bringing infants and toddlers with developmental delays served by First Step into the Preschool for early intervention. First Step is a Part C early intervention program that is committed to serve children (ages 1 to 3 years) in their natural environments.

In addition to providing the campus community with much needed service, the UNLV/CSUN Preschool is an Early Childhood/Special Education clinical site which is being utilized by practicum students and student teachers in ECE, ICS and ESP in the College of Education, as well as the Department of Psychology and the Department of Nursing. Dr. Filler and Dr. Gelfer are the two current faculty advisors for the Preschool. The Preschool has become a major source of on-campus employment, hiring approximately 56 student assistants for spring semester 1999.

The UNLV/CSUN Preschool celebrates all children in an inclusive environment with no prerequisites for participation. It recognizes the diverse needs, ability, interests, and cultures in a setting where each child is valued and respected as a unique individual developing at his/her own rate.

We believe that each child's development is guided by a cooperative team of professionals through observation, interaction, and well-planned learning activities.

Through promotion of a curriculum that provides age-appropriate and individually appropriate activities, equipment and materials children have many opportunities to be actively engaged in the learning process. The curriculum promotes the development of the whole child - physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively through a balanced daily schedule of individual, small group and activity based learning experiences.
We recognize the importance of working closely with families and acknowledge family involvement as an essential and vital component of the total learning process. Families are encouraged to participate in all activities within the program.

Research

Educational pursuits are balanced to respect the needs of the children, their families, and UNLV/CSUN Preschool's ability to maintain a quality service program. The Preschool collaborates with faculty, schools and community groups to advocate for improved resources for young children and their families. Research activities initiated by UNLV/CSUN Preschool or by faculty and students in related fields of study are intended to promote knowledge of developmental issues and practices relevant to child "educare," early learning and the practical application of this knowledge.

Five separate studies have been conducted at the UNLV/CSUN Preschool over the past 2 years. The purpose of these studies is to investigate the potential utility of the portfolio as an assessment tool. In addition, research to distinguish the type and nature of friendship/interactions of children in an inclusive preschool environment is also ongoing.

The specific objectives of these studies are as follows:

1. To validate the portfolio as a measure of children's friendship and interactions, as well as, concurrent evidence will be portrayed describing the relationship between portfolio assessment and direct observational assessment.

2. To examine an assessment procedure to determine its utility for qualitative information on children' social interactions and friendships (e.g. developmental process of friendship, sociability differences within the context) will be examined.

The outcomes of these studies have been presented at numerous national conferences such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), The American Association on Mental Retardation (AAMR), The Association for Severely Handicapped (TASH), The National Coalition for Campus Children's Centers (NCCCC), The Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI), and The American Evaluation Association (AEA).

Training

UNLV/CSUN Preschool is a transdisciplinary training site uniquely designed to meet the needs of children and the adults who care for them, while also offering student appointments as child care workers. The Preschool provides opportunities for university students and members of the community to increase their knowledge of child development, developmentally appropriate teaching practices, anti-bias/inclusive program planning, and parent/teacher/child interactions. Students, faculty and other professionals from child-related disciplines can learn about Child Development, Early Childhood Education and Early Childhood Special Education on site.
UNLV/CSUN Preschool also promotes evaluation of its current programmatic components such as toddler and preschool curriculum, child nutrition, family involvement, multicultural diversity and creative environments for children. In-service and pre-service experiences include classroom observations, internships, student teaching practicums, directed experiences, apprenticeships and mentorships.

As the field of Early Childhood Care and Education evolves to meet the growing needs of today's children and families, UNLV/CSUN Preschool will continue to play a leadership role in teaching, training, and research at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

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