

"Effective early years is the game changer."

Why Early Years are so unique

Now, I am an Early Years Specialist Teacher of Music and Movement. I teach all the children in Early Years, which at Concordia is 210 individuals. But I do some of the same [baseline assessments](#) (under Learning on my website) as the Homeroom Teacher, as well as my own baseline assessments focussing on music (First Steps Program) and movement (SHAPE). Although I have not been a Homeroom Teacher, I aspire to be one. To this end, I have conducted research on ResearchGate, and I have been in Homeroom Teachers' classes every day. This is my summary on what is necessary to make the step up and claim my own class.

From day 1 of PS, PK or Kindergarten, we are exposed to the unknown. Each child will have a different yearning for the start of school – some excited and prepared, others anxious or sad to be away from their home. The diversity of life and learning experiences guided by family members, carers and pre-school teachers (us) shape the character and skills of each child in a unique way. It is my role to quickly capture and understand this range of differences, identify a starting point for each child and help them settle in with personalised support. Taking video of the children at play, and in class, provides me with baseline data of where each child is. I then use my EY baseline skills chart to assess each child.

The impact the first year of school can have on child development and educational success is also unique. Research shows that at this stage of growth, development is most elastic, therefore interventions implemented in this period have a long-lasting impact. A longitudinal study conducted by CEM revealed that being in an effective class in the first year of school, when the children were aged 3-5 years, was significantly related to later attainment at age 16. I've seen this myself. My pre-schoolers from my first year at Concordia are in MS now, and they use the same language we taught them 6 years ago. 'No thank you,' 'Stop it I do not like it,' 'Yes Ma'am,' 'No sir' and etc.

But what does an 'effective' classroom look like?

Teaching informed by evidence

Evidence of child performance provided by my assessments, including baseline assessments and day-to-day classroom interactions, have a strong role to play in informing effective practice.

My assessments and observations are made over the first 6-week period of school, which is a long time to wait if immediate actions need to be taken. So, we need to get our baseline assessments done quickly. My baseline assessments are usually conducted within the first week of school. The quick turnaround of results means that value is added to the classroom from the get-go, as it provides me with an objective, detailed overview of a child's starting off performance.

It is important to note that baseline assessments should not replace observational methods, but instead work in tandem to inform actionable plans.

Deep knowledge of child development

Data-collection is inert and a burden if it is not translated into actionable plans. Understanding the findings from the data allows teachers to inform their practice and deliver change management.

Teachers know their children best. Often, the baseline data reflects what an experienced early years teacher discovers through their own observational assessments so there are no surprises. For someone like me, just starting out in the early years, the baseline data is a helping hand in supporting and developing my confidence in my assessment.

A child-centred approach

Baseline assessments can reveal hidden talents, and stars in the classroom. The quiet child at the back of the classroom may be your strongest reader or the confident, talkative child may not have the vocabulary range you may expect. This does not always become apparent straight away as it takes time to develop relationships.

By assessing each child individually, I can more effectively align resources to particular needs right from the start.

Creating a partnership with families

Involvement from parents and carers also has a long-lasting impact on a child's educational journey. By championing this partnership, I can share the successes of the children, and build the support network needed to nurture a child's engagement at school.

Through parent meetings, ad-hoc catch ups or stay-and-play, parents can also acknowledge any areas which could be further developed at home. This is a useful resource for helping me put plans in place to further support learning outcomes and progression during the early years.

An effective first year stays with children throughout their academic lives, giving them the best chance to succeed and achieve their full potential.

Attendance at an effective reception class raises the level of attainment by the end of first year.

Ultimately, children and their learning are at the heart of what we do. Supported by extensive research, by maximising resources and investment in the Early Years you can fuel a child's development throughout their school life. Early Years really is the game changer.

Important characteristics of Early Years Teachers

Enthusiasm for Children

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the most important characteristic for teachers of early childhood development is enthusiasm and passion for children. This goes well beyond enjoying being with children. It means wanting to make a difference to every child. I must have the drive to unlock every child's door to learning, overcoming any obstacle a child may have, which I do.

Patience and Humour

Working with young children all day takes huge measures of patience. The nature of their age makes young children rambunctious, with short attention spans and little self-control. Every child is different, too, making the job even more challenging. After a day full of challenges, I must come back and meet the same and new challenges the next day. A patient nature, combined with a sense of humour, helps me take the ups and downs of every day in stride, while focusing on the end goals.

Communication Skills

I have learned effective skills for working with young children and for communicating with them at their level. I have found it extremely useful to learn Mandarin, as this is the first language of 95% of my classes. I value communication with the child's parents about their needs, skills, problems, and achievements, so we can all help the child without undue emotion. Daily, I must communicate with other teachers who teach my class, as well as the school principal and other administrators. The more effectively I can communicate to all involved -- both orally and in writing -- the more rewarding and positive my job is.

Respect of Differences

Every child comes to school with a unique personality and learning style. To reach each child and teach each child effectively, I must respect these differences and work with each child's style, rather than try to force the child to adapt to another style. In our global society, we must also be prepared for multicultural classrooms with many ethnicities, cultures and traditions represented. A classroom where these differences are not merely tolerated but are welcomed and embraced creates an open and exciting learning atmosphere. Currently, Concordia is 90% Chinese (although holding foreign passports). So, understanding Chinese culture has been crucial. My Mandarin teacher helps me out a lot with understanding the culture. And so do the parents, grandparents, and Teacher Assistants, and many others I interact with every day.

Creativity and Flexibility

Planning lessons that will engage young children and educate them at the same time takes creativity. I know adapting lessons to individual learning styles requires flexibility. Regardless of how organized I am, and how well I've planned the day, I must remain flexible

to handle all the glitches that can throw off the day. I must be willing to change plans and ideas as needed. A successful early childhood development teacher will use creativity and flexibility to make every day a positive one for her and for the class.

So, for me it's about putting the child first in all situations. I have the passion, and organisation, and I am open-minded, realistic, adaptable, and observant. But, most importantly, I love small children. You must love your children. Love helps motivate you and find kind solutions to problems and joyful learning activities. When children feel loved and safe, they feel free to learn.

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