



Where kids love to learn since 1988

What Makes Our School Unique?

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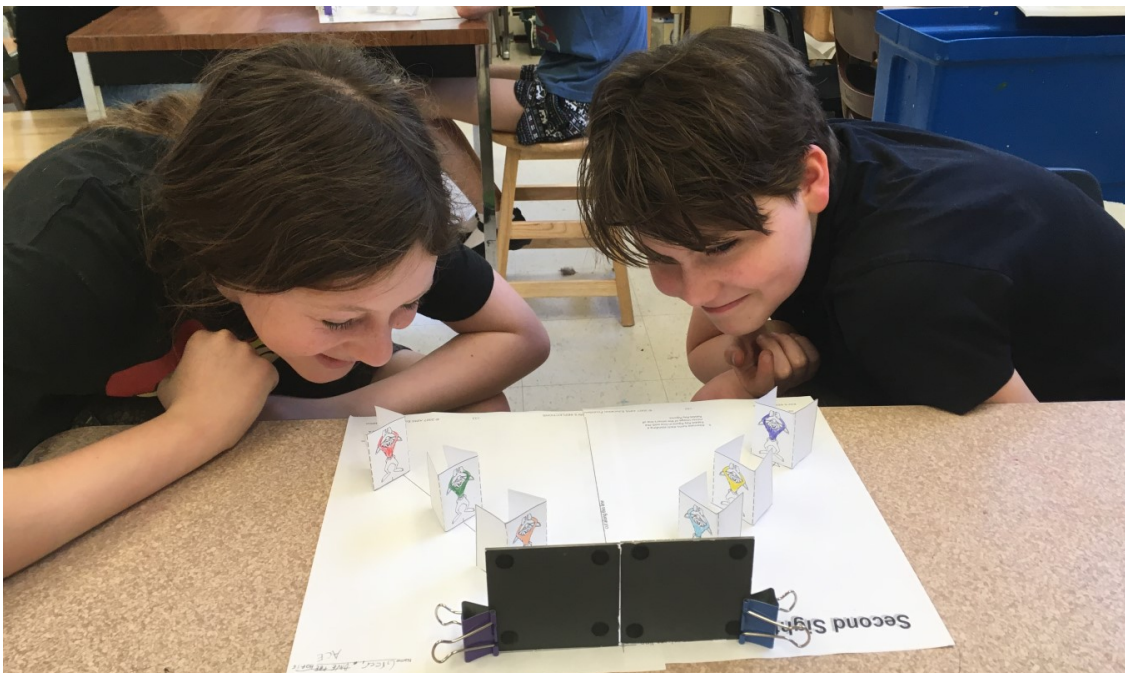
What does it mean to individualize curriculum?

Your child is like no other. At The New School, we build our relationship with your child on the understanding that each child processes their thinking and actions based on prior experiences, and has unique ways of accessing information and of expressing their understandings.

Each week we develop an individual plan for your child. This plan, what we call a contract, takes them through the week's schedule. It connects your child to whole group, small group, formal classes, read aloud time, individual work, and academic games that we feel will best support their growth and learning.

Teachers work closely with each child and invest time to build a relationship, as they see children in many different lights. Teachers participate with children throughout the day, in lunch, gym, art, camping, and trips, as well as academic times. As their image of the child grows, the contracts evolve to reflect each child's changing needs and interests. Most assessment is done through observing children as they work. This feedback allows for regular adjustment of each child's program. We also use traditional, grade-specific assessments in reading and math.

Each month we have a Child Study Day of collaborative planning that allows teachers to share insights and experiences and build a team approach to designing curriculum. We use that day to think about what particular children may be needing on their contracts and which other children might be well-paired. Children's abilities vary across content areas, and our mixed age setting allows pairing that matches growth and support.



The Benefits of a Multi-Age School Environment

From birth, all of us are social learners (Lev Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory). It is how we learn to walk and talk. We learn from those who are older by watching, listening, and copying. The older child learns the importance of nurturing and appreciating the younger child, learning to moderate and modify behaviors to stay in step with young friends. Each learns to negotiate and temper their actions. Taking on the role of teacher or student with classmates also allows for reinforcement of skills in many settings.

In our frequent discussion groups, children absorb how others express their ideas, and learn to respect all voices, as they experience the culture of the school.

Schools tend to divide children by "their date of manufacture," (Sir Ken Robinson, TED Talk) usually referred to as age. At The New School, we consider what captures your child's interest. How do they pursue their passions? How do they pursue areas where they are not strong? Where and when are they fearful? In the process, we will often find a 10 year old child is his most imaginative and generous self when he plays with a 5 year old. We often find older and younger children enjoy opportunities to learn and play together. At The New School, in our family-like community, children are able to find true peers regardless of age.



The Importance of Play

At The New School, both indoor and outdoor space is considered to be a part of the learning and educational environment. Both spaces are used for formal and informal learning.

As Rusty Keeler, playscapes architect, says, we want to provide space and time for "children to discover themselves and the world around them...tickle the imagination...make places for children of all abilities to interact with each other and the natural world." The social learning that takes place as children companionably swing together, play chase games, or find private nooks is essential to a



child's busy school day. Adults are available to help negotiate the delicate nuances of play and we see these many moments as valuable opportunities for teaching and learning.

Outside at The New School, we have a combination of asphalt play space used for student-initiated and teacher-initiated organized games, a grassy space with a traditional fixed climber with swings, slides and tower, and a woods area with a myriad of loose parts- -logs and wood for combining and recombining as houses, forts, and small cozy spaces.



On a daily basis children at The New School go outside for a half hour of gym, which is both open play and organized games, as well as for lunch (weather permitting). Younger children often get an additional 15 minute outdoor play break between structured learning activities. Children arriving by 8:30 have outdoor play until school begins at 9:00, and we are outside again between 3:00 and 3:15.

Throughout the year we take many trips for recreation, or tied to science and social studies classes, going to city/county parks and historical landmarks. We also go camping overnight at Highland Forest at the beginning and the end of each year. The camping trips build community among children, school and families as we hike, ride horses, set off rockets and enjoy exploring the natural world.



Affective Education

Affective education, intellectual education and academic education support and need each other. At The New School, we make time for all of them. Our school rules are: Take care of yourself, take care of others, and take care of materials.

What is affective education? Areas of affective growth which we are actively working to support are:

- Positive self-image, concerned with developing a realistic self-awareness
- Decision making, the ability to evaluate alternatives
- Coping with failure, being able to utilize mistakes and lack of success
- Problem solving, evaluating differences and generating possible solutions
- Curiosity, an eagerness to explore and understand
- Imagination, the ability to create and visualize mental images
- Risk-taking, willingness to undertake that which has uncertain outcomes
- Participating appropriately in groups, being physically present, attending to others and actively taking part (Gemini Program)



**End of the Year Appreciations
(child to child)**

We support these dispositions (Lillian Katz) during scheduled parts of the day and week and impromptu as children or issues require. Directly, we are able to flexibly construct whole group and small groups to address the needs of the moment. These meetings may be facilitated by students or teachers. Indirectly, we make sure that a child's weekly contract includes games that promote social interactions, shared work to encourage collaboration, and individual work to build upon each child's strengths and support needs.

As adults, we often say "be good" or "be nice" or "say you're sorry" to children. However, at the school we recognize that it takes at least 31 skills (Gemini) to solve any problem. Having the language *and* confidence to express needs, as well as the ability to find and identify the problem and break the problem into solvable parts, are skills we work on daily. We almost always ask "What did you want?" assuming good intentions whether the issue is jealousy or a strong agenda. It is followed by "What is another way you could get that?" We work to help children both express their needs and also listen to other perspectives, an essential skill in all times. We want them to learn how to be responsive rather than reactive to challenges.



School and Community

It is probably only in the last 120 years that the education and schooling of children has been primarily conducted in school buildings. For much of history children were educated at home, as apprentices, as child labor on farms, in mines and factories, with school as a luxury of the middle class and wealthy.

As schooling became more the norm, a child's inclusion in and exposure to the wide world was more limited and controlled.

However, as Neil Postman in The Disappearance of Childhood says, "The world of the known and the not yet known is bridged by wonderment ...where the child's world...must seek entry, through their questions...As media merge the two worlds...children rely on news



from nowhere...We are left with children who are given answers to questions they never asked." At The New School we believe, and take time to recognize, that we are citizens of the world and the planet. We work hard to bring school and the world together in ways that help students begin to make sense of the natural and human environment around them.

We regularly work on a project called Making the World a Better Place. It is school-wide and year-long. The project often begins with reading books about individuals or groups who have contributed to the well being of people and/or the environment. As we do this we begin to build a chart which classifies the information into who, when, where, vision and actions.

Throughout the course of the year we invite Mystery Guests. After initial guessing, the guest confirms or informs the school about what they have come to share; the talk is followed by an open-ended question period. Mystery Guests provide context for our Social Studies, Science and Art through their personal experience.

- During the 2016 election older children studying government were assigned sections of four different party platforms. They developed questions to ask representatives from the Republican, Democratic, Green and Libertarian parties who visited.
- A parent who had spent 3 weeks doing research in the Antarctic came to show slides and answer questions.
- One of our alumni, who had travelled the world as a jazz musician, came and played for the children before he left for California to get his Ph.D. in political science.
- Nina Laden, a writer and illustrator of children's books, came and talked with children about her process.

Besides bringing IN people from many different walks of life, we also take children OUT on many trips for leisure and learning: trips to City Hall, Court House, Museums and Galleries, Historic Walks, local parks and streams, the Arboretum and Zoo, artist studios, scientist labs, Cornell Ornithology facility, SUNY ESF, The Children's Theater at LeMoyne, Syracuse Stage, OCC for concerts, and the Bus Hub for helping the League of Women Voters register voters. Our oldest students work with us and their families to find places they can intern whether it is a library, Syracuse Cultural Workers, a farm, a computer lab, or Syracuse Stage Costume department.



All of these experiences provide welcome surprise during the weeks of school. Each visit to...or from... provides food for thought, unexpected dissonance or assonance to tease students' thinking and widen their view through the window of experience of others. As the world continues to become a global community, the children find themselves a growing part of that world village.

Democracy in the Classroom

Most teachers and parents, when asked, what are your long term goals for your child(ren), will answer that they want them to be lifelong learners and informed, active citizens of our democracy. For those goals to be met, the curriculum and daily life of the classroom must provide adequate time and practice.

At The New School, we take time to look into the growth, change over time, and issues of American democracy. This is part of our daily, weekly and yearly curriculum. We also believe that teaching must provide students with many opportunities to live a democracy.

Each student has an individual contract. Basically, it is a map of a student's week, a day at a time. It includes individual work, with some traditional workbooks. A contract also connects students to academic games, small classes and large group events and discussions. Teachers meet with each student - formally and informally - to discuss their contract and respond to student requests and interests. Contracts can be altered to include student input and needs.

As a part of classes, whether in Social Studies, Science or Read Aloud, there are regular discussions through which children learn to find/develop their own voice and listen to others. According to Dewey, this is a core of democracy--understanding that each person brings their own experiences and understandings to a discussion and that we must learn to find our own voice, and hear the other's.

One of the cornerstones of The New School includes a classroom that is premised on children making choices in a learning environment. (Margaret Lay Dopeyra-Responsive Care Model) These opportunities for choice, based on Dewey's belief of lived democracy in the classroom, forms a base for our work with both younger and middle school children.

This is exhibited in the role we invite children to play within the design of the curriculum and the expectation we have that children are capable of problem solving and negotiating to solve their problems with peers and adults. It is also manifest in the set up of the classroom, which invites children to make learning choices for themselves throughout the day.

Discussion is a regular part of children's building relationships with peers. When there is a conflict, as inevitably there will be, teachers are facilitators more than judges or jury. Children are expected to talk through their choices made and reconsider what other choices they could make. Time is allowed to provide for these resolutions with a recognition that it is likely to require many revisits.



We also believe and take time to recognize that we are citizens of the world and the planet. On a regular basis we work with students on a project we usually call Making the World a Better Place. Eventually we bring to them the question "What can we do?" As students discuss this and identify "what," we then turn to "how?" The opportunities are endless and the sense of empowerment they gain is essential.

Teaching and Learning through Games

Why do we play games? What do they accomplish for teaching and learning?

We have games for math, language arts, social studies, science and strategy. We have games for inside and outside. We have cooperative and competitive games. We have games we buy and we have many more games teachers and children have made. As children make games, they isolate a skill to teach, which reinforces their own learning.

Games have both academic and social goals. Over generations we have created games sequenced to our curriculum. This allows games to be an integrated part of our math or language arts programs and for children to build skills in a structured way. We use a variety of games:



card games, board games, active learning games. Math games can begin with counting and comparing numbers on up through geometry and algebra. Language Arts games can begin with letter names

and sounds, vowel sounds, vowel teams through word making games, and reading comprehension activities.

For teachers, games are an excellent way to analyze and diagnose a student's skills. How do they approach two die? Do they count each dot, one at a time, do they add on the second, do they just know automatically? Do they have a sense that the bigger the denominator, the smaller the piece? How do they strategize figuring out an unknown? Using games also allows children to develop social skills. Games have rules. Decisions have to be made about who goes first, is it cooperative or competitive? Children have to learn how to both win or lose. Neither of these are easy skills. We have group discussions to listen to our classmates' thoughts about how to win or lose gracefully.

Games also encourage flexible thinking. When solving math problems in a game with or without paper, children often use multiple means, trying first one way and then another to



make the outcome work within the game. This mental agility helps children later when they are working with more traditional math materials. Depending on the game and the children, they will often find ways to help and support each other as they discuss the goal of the game or turn.

Games can be fun and allow for small intimate interactions between 1 to 3 children. It gives children who do not have strong social skills an opportunity to initiate conversation, learn to listen, have a shared experience with a peer. It allows an older child who needs to review a skill to teach the skill to a younger learner. It allows younger children with aptitude to find intellectual mates for playing higher level games. It allows all the children in the class to have opportunities to get to know others they might not normally play with. Often, when two children seem to be struggling in their relationship, we find when we talk with them, they agree that playing a game together may help them move past their “stuck” place.



Constance Kamii, a math educator, sees games as an important tool in helping children learn autonomy. In her classroom, this means that children learn to be able to manage the demands of the game and their behaviors independently. Our goal for all students is to develop their ability to learn and to negotiate independently.

Parent Testimonials

Anita Welych:

This is the school that let our son Martin become his truest self. This school used Martin's own interests to overcome some learning challenges, empowered him to learn collaboration, responsibility and self-motivation. He was allowed to think and ponder in complex and creative ways as he learned the NYS curriculum in innovative, interactive, multi-modal ways.

We saw the results in many ways: Martin felt empowered enough to start a campaign to help baby seals in Canada; became valedictorian of his high school; a great friend; an accepting person; and a National Merit Scholar, among other things. We'd do it all over again in a heartbeat!

Jessica Palmer Montena:

When our daughter, Maya, graduated from The New School and started attending Nottingham, we knew it would be a transition for her. Fortunately, the lessons she learned at The New School served her well immediately. Maya was used to interacting with adults who treated her with respect and in a friendly and professional manner; her new teachers all spoke highly of her and how she was a positive influence in her classes. She also made friends with various classmates within the first week of school; she was used to being friends with kids who were different ages and had different interests. Even "mixing it up" at lunch at The New School came in handy; she rotates among different friend groups at lunch in the cafeteria. Finally, she joined the backstage tech crew and worked on the drama productions; she had the confidence to try new things.

We were pretty sure that Maya would do fine socially in whatever setting she found herself, but what about academics? We truly believed that learning at one's own pace was important, but we also knew that most people - even teens! - need a little encouragement from time to time to get their work done. Plus, the academic workload would be significant now that Maya was in high school. Six subjects and nightly homework would be a big adjustment. She found that many of her teachers used "playlists," a type of individualized instruction that allowed students to choose which activities to do and even essentially choose which grade they might earn. This was, in many ways, very similar to The New School and its contracts. Her teachers were impressed by how self-motivated she was to do her work without any prompting or cajoling on their parts.

We're happy that Maya's transition to Nottingham has gone so well; she really enjoys the experience she's having. She sees how The New School prepared her for high school as well, and we would continue to encourage students and parents to trust the process because it truly does work.

Progressive Education at The New School

School is a part of life.

Learners are active participants, problem solvers, contributors, and social beings.

Social-emotional learning at school is an essential part of children's development.

Teachers are facilitators who guide and foster thinking, creative expression and collaboration.

Assessment includes formal and informal interactions and tools, on an individual basis.

Homework is given when parents and teachers see it as needed for the child.

Parents are welcome resources as partners in supporting children's experience.

Community is an extension of the classroom.

Decision making is a shared process across groups.

Program is determined by mission, philosophy, standards and goals for students' futures.

Knowledge is constructed through play, direct experience, use of resources, and social interaction.

Instruction is related to central questions and inquiry, often inspired by the children.

Disciplines are integrated allowing children to make connections.

Skills are tools related to content.

Process is paramount; products are artifacts of process.

Intelligence is recognized as varied, includes the arts, and is measured in observable problem solving.