Information about Early Foundations® Preschool & Prekindergarten

What are the Early Foundations® programs?

The Early Foundations® programs are a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate curriculum based on the latest research and best practices in early childhood education. The programs provide classroom teachers with materials necessary to successfully implement activities that address all developmental domains. Specialized seasonal and year-round equipment kits are provided to further enhance the Early Foundations® curricula.

The program content is research-based and focused on the development of the whole child through age-appropriate activities covering the following domains:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development
- Cognition and General Knowledge
- Language and Communication
- Creative Arts

Knowledge Universe recognizes that curriculum is more than what appears in manuals or a series of activities. Curriculum is everything that happens in the classroom: the way the teacher arranges the furniture and equipment, the choices children are offered throughout the day, and the way adults interact with children. A carefully created framework of educational objectives for Early Foundations® ensures the development of academic, social, and physical skills essential for school readiness. Activities are selected for their ability to introduce or provide practice of these important skills and objectives. Our curriculum manuals and materials provide a framework for teachers to develop and provide an enriched and developmentally appropriate program for young children. This includes the use of curriculum-based assessment materials, through which teacher’s observe, record, and evaluate each child’s skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments. Using these assessment tools, teacher’s inform their practice, adjust teaching strategies and methods where needed, and develop individual plans for children.

Is Early Foundations® Preschool and Prekindergarten curriculum aligned to State and/or Common Core Standards?

The programs are built on a comprehensive scope and sequence of 120 learning objectives, mapped across 6 learning domains, and aligned with state early learning standards and K-12 expectations.

Based on the introduction of Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Knowledge Universe is currently undergoing updates/redevelopment of these programs, to align to the new Kindergarten readiness expectations. Program updates are scheduled to be ready Fall 2014, in line with CCSS implementation expectations.

What should we know about the background of Early Foundations®? E.g., who developed and what are their credentials; how long has it been in use in KU-US (KCLC and CCLC)?

Early Foundations® was created by Knowledge Universe’s Education Department. The department includes a compliment of curriculum developers and editors, all holding Master’s degrees in Early Childhood Education.

The Early Foundations® Preschool program, developed in 2004/2005, was implemented in the 2005/2006 school year in KCLC centers. The Prekindergarten program, developed in 2005/2006, was introduced in KCLC centers in the 2006/2007 school year. CCLC centers began utilizing both programs at the same time.
How have students participating in Early Foundations® at KU benefited? (Any summary survey results/stats?)

Because KU does not currently have a formal curriculum data collection system, there are no available stats or data related to the comprehensive benefit of children utilizing the programs. This is an outstanding need that is currently being addressed through the 2012 Early Childhood Assessment project. In the interim, Champions could have finance pull data related to the numbers of children actively participating in the program.

What are the benefits of transitioning to EF for Champions, our clients and customers?

- Children’s learning experiences follow a logical and developmentally appropriate sequence through the Early Foundations® program.
- Scope and sequence aligns to national standards for Infancy through Prekindergarten.
- Activities address specific learning objectives
- Each activity within the program introduces or provides practice for each learning objective.
- Multiple activities for each objective are written into the curriculum, providing the practice and repetition children need to solidify each skill.
- Assessment Tools
- Developmental checklists, portfolio collection, anecdotal observation.
- All assessments link to program scope and sequence.
- The Early Foundations® program demonstrates the connection between Early Learning Standards, K-12 educational experiences, and lifelong learning.

How do teachers plan and use the curriculum?

Early Foundations® supports and guides teachers in making decisions about the experiences they provide for children, through the use of the Teacher’s Guide, program manuals, and curriculum-based assessment materials.

The Teacher’s Guide provides an overview of each program, including implementation expectations related to daily schedules, group times, routines, family communication, classroom materials, environment, learning objectives, and assessment practices.

Program manuals are organized into theme-based units that encourage teachers to plan programs that have variety and reflect the content knowledge essential to a high-quality early childhood education. The units begin with topics most familiar to the children and then address more complex topics as the children develop skills and confidence. Age-appropriate activities are presented through teacher-directed whole- and small-group instruction, the children’s exploration of learning centers, outdoor play, and daily routines and transitions.

The assessment practices and tools assist teachers in observing, recording, and evaluating each child’s skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments. They reflect common activities and expectations in classrooms that are developmentally appropriate. Tools and practices include observation, portfolio collection, and the use of a developmental assessment.

What areas of children’s development and learning are covered in the program?

Early Foundations® focuses on the development of the whole child through age-appropriate activities, covering the following domains:

- Approaches to Learning
- Social and Emotional Development
- Physical Development
A carefully created framework of educational objectives ensures development of academic skills, social and emotional skills, language and communication skills, cognition and general knowledge, and physical and motor skills. Each activity in the program is selected for its ability to introduce or provide practice of one of these important skills.

**How does the program support the physical learning environment?**

A classroom’s design and arrangement sends important messages about the program to the children and their families. Our classrooms are neat, attractive, and child-oriented, conveying a sense of belonging and esteem to the children. Toys and equipment are neatly displayed in areas appropriate to their intended use.

Learning centers allow exploration and discovery at the child’s pace and also allow teachers to individualize attention by encouraging children to make choices appropriate to their needs. Our classrooms are arranged into learning centers that reflect the curriculum focus areas. Each thematic unit within the Early Foundations® program manuals contains specific guidelines for teachers to enrich learning centers. At a minimum, our programs include the following learning centers:

- Language and Literacy Learning Center
- Library Learning Center
- Math and Manipulatives Learning Center
- Block Learning Center
- Science and Sensory Learning Center
- Dramatic Play Learning Center
- Creative Arts Learning Center
- Computer Learning Center

**How will children’s learning be assessed to determine school readiness?**

The Early Foundations® programs include three levels of curriculum-based assessment materials. These assessment tools include:

- **Observation** - Teachers consistently observe and collect samples of each child’s accomplishments throughout the year. Constant interaction with the children allows teachers to appropriately assess their skills and development levels. Their observations influence the way they adjust/modify curriculum, the work samples they collect for portfolios, and help them fill out Developmental Assessments.
- **Portfolio Collection** - Every child enrolled in the Early Foundations® curriculum has a portfolio folder. The portfolio folder is maintained by the child’s teacher(s) and stays at the center throughout the child’s entire experience. The portfolio folder includes an inventory of specific skills that should be observed and documented over time. The collection of photographs, anecdotal notes, and the child’s work within the portfolio illustrates the child’s abilities at the time each item was collected and should be used to show progress over time. Portfolios support the program’s developmental philosophy about how children learn by reflecting social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth.
- **Developmental Assessment** - The Early Foundations® Preschool and/or Prekindergarten Developmental Assessment is designed to assist teachers in observing, recording, and evaluating each child’s skills, knowledge, behaviors, and accomplishments. It reflects common activities and expectations in classrooms that are structured around developmentally appropriate activities. The behaviors and skills described in the assessments are those considered to be important and developmentally appropriate for most preschool and/or prekindergarten children, as well as behaviors and skills expected for school readiness.
**How is diversity addressed and included in the programs?**

Children of all races, religions, family backgrounds, and cultures are treated with equal respect and consideration in our classrooms. The Early Foundations® programs include thematic units, such as All About Me, and My Home and Family, which allow children opportunities to talk about and share their individual family and home experiences and traditions. Through classroom discussions, activities, and family visitors, children learn about different types of families and homes, and explore how their homes and families are alike or different from others’. Additionally, diversity is celebrated in featured book selections and the fine-arts appreciation strand of the programs. Diversity is also reflected in the classroom material choices, for example, photo cards, finger puppets, learning-center posters, and more.

**How do the programs include children with diverse developmental/ability levels?**

The Early Foundations® curricula are based on developmentally appropriate practices, knowledge of the developmental continuum and an understanding that children are individuals and develop at varying rates.

Daily featured activities include each of the following:

- **Teacher’s Notes:** provide valuable information for fostering an understanding of young children’s development and serve to highlight special considerations for implementing an activity
- **Learning Connections:** provide extensions to the activity’s objectives and content by way of music, technology. Teachers are able to tailor extension activities for children who learn through different capacities
- **Tips for Observation and Assessment:** provide assistance to teachers in knowing what to look for while implementing each activity, and are linked directly to the aligned objectives

Teacher training emphasizes individual practices, focusing on each child’s unique needs and how to address those needs through individual planning and daily interactions. Teachers use Enhancement Plans to take note of a child’s challenges and successes and to provide further opportunities for the child to practice a skill or move to the next skill level. Assessment tools within the program identify a core framework of objectives for each age group and help teachers identify the range of ways children develop from emerging to mastery.

**Are tests, workbooks, and ditto sheets used in the programs?**

The Early Foundations® programs focus on the development of the whole child. Children participate in whole-group and small-group settings, as well as individual learning time. Tests, workbooks, and dittos are not used in this program. Learning opportunities are hands-on and child-directed, with the majority of the child’s day spent in learning centers.