Curriculum
The following are components of the curriculum used within the Early Learning Center.

Resources from which we draw:
*Early Childhood Curriculum: A Creative Play Model by Catron & Allen* provides the roots from which our curriculum and programming has grown and matured. *Developmentally Appropriate Practices* with its focus on age and individual appropriateness provides boundaries for us as we navigate the immense possibilities for curriculum. *Social Constructivist Beliefs* - how children construct their own understandings of their world through the relationships they form with peers, adults, and materials - permeate our approach. The exceptional *practices and principles of the Reggio Emilia* approach continually inspire us with possibilities for children’s learning. *The Creative Curriculum, by Teaching Strategies*, provides resources to support preschool teachers’ efforts to engage children in activities that are both meaningful and connected to early learning developmental standards.

Principles of the Early Learning Center curriculum:
- Central to our approach is an idea borrowed from the Reggio Emilia approach – all children are competent, capable, and ready to learn, having rich & powerful ideas
- Observation of children - their skills & interests - is the foundation from which our curriculum emerges
- Analysis of our observations of children provides the road map that shows us the direction to go when planning curriculum
- Thorough knowledge of child development in the following areas – emotional well-being, socialization, communication, cognition, perceptual motor, and self-help provides detail for what children need to master and at what ages
- Noticing and appreciating the uniqueness of each child – ability, personality, temperament, style – keeps us focused on providing a range of possibilities for children
- Play is the vehicle through which young children can learn most effectively
- Challenging learning opportunities in the major content areas – literacy, math, science, music & art encourage a foundation for later formal education

What do the classroom and the day look like?
- Investigations
- Learning centers such as drawing & writing, blocks, puzzles & games, books, housekeeping, dramatic play, science, discovery, painting and art are found in each toddler & preschool classroom
- A wide variety of challenging, enticing, creative materials are available in each of the learning centers for children to construct with, examine, and manipulate
- Children are free to choose the areas and materials they would like to work on and may move independently around the classroom, however, there are times during the day when only one choice exists
• Images of children studying & gaining understanding of their world and examples of their work are carefully presented for viewing & reflection
• The day includes a balance - individual, small & large group activities, quiet/active experiences, indoor/outdoor, child initiated & teacher initiated activities, focused investigative work, physical care and routines
• Routines such as lunch & snack times, diapering & toileting, clean-up, rest time, and transitions indoors & outdoors are considered opportunities for learning

Children in the Early Learning Center:
• Form a community living and working with others in their classroom group
• Actively engage in situations which require them to think, plan, experiment, analyze, problem solve, and reflect
• Creatively use words, materials, & art supplies to construct, express, and represent their ideas
• Learn about, interact with, and experience children & adults who are different from them
• Develop skills and dispositions for learning - questioning, study, hypothesis-building, and analysis

Child Assessments and Monitoring System

Assessment: Our goal is to provide an authentic picture of each child's progress on a regular basis from which to understand children's development and learning and to build meaningful curriculum. Our assessment is on-going, dynamic, and linked to curriculum. The teachers in each class work together to collect, analyze, and communicate data about each child's development. Knowledge of each child's interests, abilities, strengths, and levels of development is a critical link in our ability to set goals for each child and to plan effective learning experiences for children. Assessment of children is conducted on an on-going basis by all staff members.
In general, this assessment can include:
1. Regular classroom observations made of each child on an on-going basis
2. Videotapes, photographs, and anecdotal notes
3. Samples of children's work: artwork, constructed projects, conversations
4. Information gathered from parents of what is seen at home
5. Checklists, skill acquisition lists, and individual goal setting
6. Additional assessments as necessitated by the child's developmental progress or by specific approved research projects

Monitoring: As part of our academic mission, graduate students and senior practica students are assigned a specific group of children to assess and monitor on a semester basis.
Monitoring teacher responsibilities include:
1. Closely observe the child's overall learning, growth, and development
2. Gather and compile anecdotal records, observations, samples of work, conversations
3. Collaborate with other classroom teachers to interpret observations of children
4. Conduct regularly scheduled parent conferences with the child's parents (at least one per year and as needed)
5. Help set individual goals and plan program activities appropriate for each child
6. Make every effort to see that parents receive day-to-day information on their child's experiences in the program
7. Review the child's folder to be sure it is complete and up-to-date
8. Bring any problem or concern regarding the child's development to the attention of other ELC teaching staff

To support our efforts to accomplish these goals, we use the Teaching Strategies GOLD Assessment system, which provides tools for collecting, analyzing, and communicating data about each child's development. Parents may request a conference at any time. It is not necessary to wait for an end of the semester assessment conference.
Classroom Management and Guidance Techniques

Classroom Management: The goals of the classroom management approach used in the Early Learning Centers are to teach children to evaluate and make choices, to take responsibility for their own actions, to recognize and express their feelings appropriately, and to be considerate and fair in solving problems with others. The classroom management program is based on the recognition that a stimulating, balanced, age-appropriate learning environment, an atmosphere of mutual respect and caring, and positive teacher attitudes and expectations will encourage cooperation and prevent most behavior problems. The following procedures are observed in the Lab programs to ensure the safety and welfare of all children and to help the teachers in each program be consistent in setting limits and using management techniques that convey the values of respect, trust, honest, and caring for others.

Goal: Help children develop social skills they can use throughout their lives
- Communication – use words instead of hurting actions to solve problems
- Emotional Well-being – identify, express and manage feelings/emotions, develop coping strategies
- Socialization – learn socially acceptable ways of solving problems, how to be part of a group
- Cognition – analyze situations and solve problems, cause & effect

Understanding and Preventing Challenging Behaviors:
- Establish strong, supportive, caring relationships with each child
- Provide a stimulating, challenging, age-appropriate learning environment – plenty of materials
- Positive teacher attitudes and age-appropriate expectations of children’s behavior

Specific Techniques:
- Redirection – offering other alternatives which may be more appealing or may meet the child’s need in an appropriate way
- Logical Consequences – provide solutions or outcomes to situations, helps children make responsible decisions
- Conflict Resolution – process allows children to identify the problem, what caused it, how it made them feel, how others felt, and how to handle it more appropriately the next time.
- Cool Down/Alone Time – demonstrates respect for the child’s need to be alone, and allows for a “cool down and collect yourself” time

Establish a Climate of Trust
Young children need the security of knowing that adults will set and maintain limits fairly and consistently. Children need to be able to trust adults to give help when help is needed and to be involved in what they are doing in order to protect them from losing control of their actions or emotions. Children need to be able to trust adults to empathize, to allow them to fail, to give encouragement when they are ready to try again, and to give recognitions when they succeed. A trusting climate is one in which there are humane and rational rules for guidance and supervision. A trusting climate also is on that is open, honest, and caring—where feelings and relationships are important—where adults give clear messages, mean what they say, and keep the promises they make. Trust is demonstrated by both verbal and nonverbal communication.

Build Positive Relationships
The following four ingredients are essential for effective adult-child relationships (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1982, pgs. 11-12, 33, 45):
- Demonstrate Mutual Respect: Demonstrating respect for children involves seeing children as worthwhile persons, accepting children as they are, minimizing negative expectations and unreasonably high expectations, and communicating effectively. Treating children as we treat our friends creates positive relationships.
• Take Time for Fun: In the busy days adults and children spend together, it is often easy to overlook this important aspect of building positive relationships. The most important ingredient of time together is quality. Take time for fun! Jointly select some activities both you and the children enjoy to ensure some special quality time together each day.

• Provide Encouragement: We must believe in children if they are to believe in themselves. Encouragement is the process of focusing on the assets and strengths of children to build their self-confidence and self-esteem. Adults who provide encouragement help children accept and learn from mistakes; they help children develop the courage to be imperfect and fully human.

• Communicate Love: It is important to communicate to children often, through words and actions, that they are cared for. To feel secure children must have significant adults to love and to be loved by. Express caring through words and through non-verbal signs such as pats, hugs, and kisses.

**Communicate Effectively**

The following are general guidelines for good communication to be followed when interacting with young children (Cherry, 1983, p. 30-31):

• Always be sure you have the attention of the child or children to whom you are speaking. Place yourself on the child’s eye level.

• Say exactly what you mean using words that are appropriate to the age and understanding of the child. Enunciate clearly.

• Speak slowly and with patience. Modulate your voice so that it is low and gentle.

• Use “I” messages; let children know how you feel. Help them expand their vocabulary for expressing feelings by your own use of varied, accurate terms. (Avoid ambiguous words, such as “upset,” which might really mean worried, frightened, or angry; or saying you feel “good” when you really mean enthusiastic, relaxed, or amused. Striving for accuracy conveys your own honesty as well as your respect for your listeners.)

• Solicit verbal feedback and look for nonverbal feedback. Don’t go on until you’re sure that what you said was comprehended.

• Listen to what children say to you. If you don’t understand them, help them to clarify it for you by repeating or rephrasing what they said. Don’t rush them. Give encouragement. Reserve your response until you are sure you understand their intent.

• Don’t be judgmental. Don’t base your response on predetermined conclusions, but rather on what is said to you at the time.

• Touching is an important form of communication, especially with children. A gentle touch while you are speaking adds emphasis and improves children’s ability to recall what you say.

• Other types of nonverbal messages are also important. Your demeanor and expressions should match your words so you don’t give conflicting messages. Nod. Smile. Lean toward the child slightly. Look directly into his or her face. Attend - don’t let your attention wander.

• Always speak to children with respect.

**Set Clear Limits**

With the cooperation and knowledge of the children, set explicit and understandable limits and rules for personal and group conduct, such as the following:

• Here we talk
• Inside the building we walk
• Here we replace our materials
• Here we clean up
• Here we take care of each other

**Prevent Inappropriate Behavior**

Positive alternatives to punitive discipline include the following strategies for preventing behavior problems in the classroom (Cherry, 1983, pgs. 73-98, 99-107, 117-121):
• **Anticipate Trouble:** Know individual children and their responses to situations, plan and arrange materials and activities to motivate productive behavior, minimize stress and promote trust and cooperation, and be alert to changes in the emotional environment.

• **Give Gentle Reminders:** Use short phrases as gentle reminders (example: Inside we walk). Gentle reminders are never sarcastic or demeaning. Not all gentle reminders need to be spoken. Some effective nonverbal techniques for giving gentle reminders are:
  - Nodding your head
  - Catching a child’s eye from across the room
  - Smiling as you gently shake your head
  - Touching gently on the shoulder

• **Ignore Minor Annoyances:** Deliberately ignoring minor annoyances and misbehaviors (examples: pleading, crying, tantruming) means not giving any reinforcement. That means:
  - You don’t say anything to the child
  - You don’t look at the child
  - You don’t display any emotional reaction to what the child is doing
  - All adults present cooperate in ignoring the behavior
  - You are careful to give the child praise and acknowledgement during periods of acceptable behavior

• **Praise Effort and Accomplishment:** Pay attention when children are behaving appropriately, doing something difficult, or helping another child. Verbal praise should be sincere and given in as few words as possible. To be meaningful, praise should not be overused. To express nonverbal praise:
  - Smile approval at a child
  - Nod approval at a child
  - Give a squeeze, a hug, or a gentle pat on the shoulder

• **Inject Humor:** A cheerful attitude, lighthearted phrases, and controlled humor can often alleviate a tense situation. Children flourish in an atmosphere that allows laughter, joy, and a little silliness. Gentle humor can go a long way to helping adults and children cope with stressful days.

• **Offer Choices:** In order to help young children develop decision-making skills, they need to have opportunities to make choices about things which affect only them (examples: which story to read, whether to point, play with dolls, or build with blocks). Whenever possible, offer children small, simple choices. It is just as important to help children recognize that there are times when you can't give them choices. Be clear and explicit in telling children when there can be no choice and the reason for not giving a choice.

**Logical Consequences**

Logical consequences are based on the recognition of mutual equality, mutual respect, and order in the classroom and can help children develop self-discipline. Natural consequences are based on the natural flow of events and are those which take place without adult intervention (example: after tipping the tricycle over - “When you make a fast turn with this tricycle, it tips over"). Logical consequences are structured and arranged by the teacher. Children must experience these consequences as being logical in nature. It is important that the adult verbalize and clarify the logical consequences of children’s behavior (example: after spilling another child’s glue during an art activity - “You can share your glue with Betsy since she doesn’t have any now”). Consequences involve a learning process for the child and distinguish between the deed and the doer (the child is accepted, but his or her behavior is not). The teacher must remain objective, calm, and be firm yet fair. The use of consequences allows the child to make responsible decisions and helps the teacher remain an educator rather than becoming involved in power struggles with the children.
Conflict Resolution
When conflict occurs, children and adults need to know how to resolve it peacefully and without displaying negative behaviors. Conflict resolution is an opportunity for the children involved to evaluate what caused the disagreement and to figure out an alternative for the next time the same or a similar situation arises; discussing the situation is a means of helping children learn to verbalize their feelings and solve their own problems with the support of one another and an adult (Cherry, 1983, p. 148).

“Teaching children to describe their own emotions and motives, to listen empathetically to what others have to say and to find common ground on which differences can be resolved are among the most important skills teachers can impart.” (Cherry, 1983, p. 147).

In a conflict situation, encourage children to (Cherry, 1983, p. 160):
• State what they think happened
• Listen to what you think happened
• State what they intended to accomplish by their actions
• State how they feel
• Listen to how you felt
• State how they think others might have felt
• Decide on an alternative behavior to use in the future that would accomplish their intent by more acceptable means

Prompt and model for children to help them learn to substitute discussions for conflict.
Suggested prompts (Cherry, 1983, p. 152):
• “Tell him. Tell him with words.”
• “Talk to each other. Tell what happened. Tell how you feel.”
• “Listen to each other.”
• “Make a plan for what you can do the next time something similar happens.”
Gradually, children will carry on discussions and resolve conflicts with less and less help.

Mealtimes and Food Program - ELC Program Philosophies for Meal Time

Children in our programs are served a nutritious lunch as well as mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks. Children in the infant program are fed on demand; schedules are established gradually over the year. Both centers have full service kitchens and meals and snacks are prepared on site.

The food service program is administered by chief cook, George. The chief cook prepares menus, procures food and supplies, coordinates and assists in the preparation and distribution of food, supervises on-site cooks, oversees the professional development and training of all kitchen staff, and ensures that each cook/kitchen maintains TN Health Department, TN DOE licensing requirements, and OSHA standards. All food service related requests, suggestions, and concerns are directed to the chief cook. Each site has a full-time cook—Jen at White Avenue and Arlene at Lake Avenue. Menus are posted on the ELC website.

Honoring Competence
Mealtimes offer many opportunities for us to respect the growing competence and independence of children. Allowing children to choose where to sit gives them the opportunity to interact and develop relationships with multiple children; asking children’s permission to place a food choice on their plate signals respect for their emerging preferences; facilitating children’s ability to serve their own food honors their desire to be treated as competent and capable; providing the appropriate utensil/bowl/plate for the foods served signals our understanding of their rights as competent diners.
Building Relationships
Children build relationships with food just as they do with peers, adults, and their environment. They may not like or even want to try a new food the first few times it is introduced, but it is important to remember that every time the child sees and smells and vicariously experiences that food they are building a relationship with it. For many children the visual relationship must be well established before they are comfortable having the food on their plate or tasting it.

Offering vs. Forcing
Children must be offered each food that is available at meal time; however, they do not have to accept every food. For example, if a child is offered carrots and declines the teacher should not put carrots on the child’s plate. Instead, the teacher may say, “Okay, I am going to place the bowl of carrots next to you in case you change your mind.” We must respect the child’s choice.

No Game Playing or Bargaining
Children should not be tricked into eating. For example, initiating a game during lunch by saying, “Who can drink all of their milk before I count to 10?” is not an acceptable way to encourage eating. Likewise, we do not want to bargain for children’s food consumption. Few can be expected to grow to love broccoli by being forced to eat some before they can have more peaches.

Healthy Encouragement and Modeling
Meal times are a great time to encourage and model trying new foods and the importance of healthy choices. For example, a teacher may say “I have never eaten parmesan tilapia before, but I am going to try it,” or “Green beans are not my favorite vegetable, but I know that they are good for my body so I am going to eat a few.” Talking about the relationships that we have with foods encourages children to explore their relationships with foods in a positive way.

Meal Times are Relaxed and Conversational
Meal times should be a time of conversation and enjoyment. In our culture, sitting down for a meal with your family or a group of friends is an important time of the day. We share stories about our lives and strengthen our relationships. Modeling this behavior during meal times teaches children about our cultural practices. It also shows the children that we are interested in their lives and the communities, practices, and events they experience.

Outside Classroom Play

Playscapes: Outdoor spaces at the ELC are designed to serve as extensions of our classrooms and curriculum. We are actively transitioning our outdoor spaces to natural playscapes, increasing children’s exposure to natural materials and a variety of plant life, and providing multiple avenues for physical, social, emotional and cognitive development. The playscapes feature varying natural surfaces that include grass, wood mulch, packed dirt, tree cookie pathways, and stationary boulders. There are areas of loosened dirt, sand, and gravel. Natural loose parts are available in abundance, such as small tree trunk sections, small branches, hollow tree sections, pieces of bark, natural wood blocks, and smooth stones available for the children’s use. Other materials are introduced as available throughout the changing seasons, including collections of pumpkins and gourds, leaves, pods, and seeds.

Children need chances to move in big ways, to think and create play opportunities, to breathe open air. In natural outdoor classrooms these are inherent possibilities. Physical challenge, motor stimulation, coordination, balance, strength, risk taking, divergent thinking, imagination, resourcefulness, social responsibility, caretaking, compassion, negotiation, collaboration, reasoning, spatial awareness, kinesiology, mathematical thinking, biological understanding, physical knowledge—the experiences and understandings available from the outdoor classroom are vast and varied; the freedom of play unequaled. We consider these experiences a right of childhood, and our responsibility to ensure them for every child at the Early Learning Center.
Weather: Children in our programs spend time in outdoor play each day – even in very cold and hot weather. A daily responsibility of ELC teaching staff is to assess the many factors that must be considered in providing safe outdoor play opportunities for young children. Our general rule is to provide extended outdoor play opportunities when the temperature range is between 32 and 95 °F and 95 °F after adjusting for wind chill and heat index. Because we are committed to natural play experiences and consider these experiences a vital part of curriculum, we will also provide shortened outdoor play when the combination of temperature and wind chill or heat index is between 20 and 100 °F. Children will participate in outdoor water play if the temperature is 80 °F or above. This will include opportunities to play in the rain if no storm activity is present.

Appropriate Clothing: Adjusting to changing weather temperatures and conditions will necessitate a variety of clothing weights and layers for young children. Be sure to provide appropriate selections - lightweight clothing for warm weather; socks, hats, mittens, jackets and coats for cold weather; rain boots and rain jackets for wet conditions- for your child each day.

Our classrooms -indoor and outdoor- provide a wealth of hands-on play opportunities with natural materials, and children will engage in various messy experiences throughout the day. It is important that children’s clothing not interfere with their ability to have full, rich experiences in our programs. Please dress your child for active and messy play, in clothing that you understand may be potentially stained or damaged. You will also need to label and provide multiple changes of clothing to be kept at the center so your child can be changed into his or her own clean clothing as necessary. Teachers will assist children in changing out of clothing that is wet, messy, or very dirty.

Overview of Parent Involvement

Parent involvement is a vital, enriching, and necessary component of any good early childhood education program for young children. Parent support, participation, involvement, and ideas are desired, needed, and valued in our programs. We search for ways to honor parents and the variety of ways they contribute to our programs and to their child’s education.

Our goals:
1. Welcome all parents and family members into our centers and help them experience our environments as warm, inviting spaces for children and adults alike.
2. Provide many avenues and opportunities for parents to be a part of the child’s early childhood education and to work with us to improve our programs.
3. Draw upon parents’ expertise as their child’s first teacher and collaborate with parents to provide the best early learning experience for each child.
5. Keep channels of communication open among parents, teachers, and program administration in order to build positive relationships.
6. View parents as resources and ask for their support, participation, and input into our educational programming.

Opportunities for Involvement:
Communication - Daily conversations, parent conferences (Pre-enrollment, assessment, other), bulletin boards, classroom charts and journals, documentation, parent advisory committees, informal discussions with teachers and staff, newsletters, listservs, memos

Participation - Field trips, walks, assisting in the classroom, sharing family holidays/traditions and special talents, visiting the program, attending parent meetings, participating in committees, attending events, and planning/organizing special events and projects.

Resource - sharing professional expertise: medical, legal, technical, musical, educational, etc., procurement of supplies and materials, arranging opportunities for children (workplace fieldtrips, zoo mobile, your farm, etc.), generation of ideas, recommending our program to others.
UT Principles of Civility and Community

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville affirms the value of each member of the University community and recommends that all UTK community members adhere to the following Principles of Civility and Community.

1. Inclusivity
We are welcoming to all and hostile to none. We foster an open community in which educational goals may be pursued.

2. Diversity
We respect the diverse backgrounds of all members of our community and welcome the opportunity for interpersonal and group interactions.

3. Dialogue
We value and encourage, and facilitate free exchange of diverse ideas and points-of-view along with free speech and expression. However, we discourage uncivil speech or expression that infringes upon the ability of others to express themselves.

4. Collegiality
We value an environment that facilitates collegial relationships, encourages mutual understanding among diverse individuals and leads to addressing issues and differences in an atmosphere of mutual respect and civility.

5. Respect
We believe that a person’s views, ideas, and behavior best reflect the goals of the academic community when the dignity of each individual is respected and when members of the community are considerate of the feelings, circumstances, and individuality of others.

6. Knowledge
We encourage development of a civil community that values critical inquiry, debate, discovery, and innovation to better the world through teaching, research and service.

7. Integrity
We value academic honesty and integrity by all members of the academic community.

8. Learning
We believe that learning is an interpersonal growth experience that fosters appreciation for diversity.

9. Awareness
We believe it is important to recognize how others view and relate to the community and recognize that we are part of a larger community.

10. Response
We encourage all community members to speak out against incidents involving bigotry and other types of incivility so the university can fulfill its responsibility of responding in a fair, timely and consistent fashion.

Adopted Fall 2011 Designed to work in concert with existing University of Tennessee, Knoxville codes of conduct including: UTK Faculty Handbook (Chapter 1.1 Nature and Purpose and Chapter 2.25 Professional Conduct); UT Faculty and Staff Code of Conduct (HR Policy HR0508); and Hilltopics Student Handbook (General Standards of Conduct)