



ACQUISITION RESEARCH PROGRAM SPONSORED REPORT SERIES

Curriculum Evaluation of Military-Based Child Development Centers

June 2024

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Department of Defense Management

Naval Postgraduate School

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Prepared for the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA 93943.

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ABSTRACT

The Department of Defense (DOD) strongly emphasizes early childhood development at their child development centers (CDCs). As part of this commitment, the DOD has selected Teaching Strategies' The Creative Curriculum as the cornerstone for delivering high-quality education to military children. With a research-based framework that has garnered the endorsement of educators for over 40 years, The Creative Curriculum is highly regarded. However, research is lacking on how it is implemented or utilized within the military child community. To better understand its quality, this report reviewed historical DOD certification inspections and interviewed Training Curriculum Specialists from two local CDC locations near NPS. It is important to note that the limited number of locations observed may not fully capture the diverse nuances of applying The Creative Curriculum. However, the primary focus of the study is on how teaching specialists apply their techniques from the framework and their personal experiences to provide insight into The Creative Curriculum. Therefore, this research has the potential to offer military families a better understanding of the education provided at CDCs, making them feel valued and considered. It may also spur further research to gather more comprehensive curriculum data.



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To the Training Specialists at the CDCs, discussing your tactics within your operation was an interesting experience. It was eye-opening, and I learned a great deal.



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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AHHI	Army Higher Headquarters Inspection
CDC	Child Development Center
CDP	Child Development Programs
CHEA	Council for Higher Education and Accreditation
CNIC	Commander of Navy Installations
COMSEP	Council on Medical Student Education in Pediatrics
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRS	Congressional Research Service
CYP	Child and Youth Programs
CYS	Child Youth Service
DOD	Department of Defense
DODI	Department of Defense Instruction
ED	U.S. Department of Education
FCC	Family Child Care
GAO	Government Accountability Office
IES	Institution of Education Sciences
LES	Leave and Earnings Statement
MCCA	Military Child Care Act of 1989
MFLC	Military and Family Life Counselors
NICC	Navy Inspection Criteria Checklist
NPS	Naval Postgraduate School
NSAM	Naval Support Activity Monterey
POM	Presidio of Monterey
Pre-K	Pre-Kindergarten
REL	Regional Educational Laboratories
SAC	School Age Care
TK	Transitional Kindergarten
USAG	United States Army Garrison
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization



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I. INTRODUCTION

The military is unique because each member has a different reason for joining. Some may do so for career opportunities, travel, student debt relief, or income stability. Regardless of their reasons, the Department of Defense (DOD) ensures that military members and their families are well cared for. To support military families, the DOD has programs, including education benefits, to help with retention and repayment for their sacrifice. Child education is especially fundamental, given that many military children experience separation during the crucial early years of development. To address these care and education needs, Child Development Centers (CDC) provide childcare services that help bridge the gap and support early childhood development. The DOD employs *The Creative Curriculum* across all branches of CDC services (i.e., Air Force, Army, Marines, and Navy) to promote early childhood development, and this report examines the curriculum's ability to meet that need.

A. PURPOSE

The significance of this research is that it contributes to an understanding of the practical realities of early childhood education. *The Creative Curriculum* is widely used; however, more research is needed on its implementation and impact on children's learning outcomes in different contexts. To this point, "while Creative Curriculum is clearly grounded in research-based practices, it does not appear to be backed by strong or possible evidence" (Gullickson et al., 2018, p. 7).

One such study was conducted by the What Works Clearing House, a team managed by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), a branch of the Department of Education (What Works Clearinghouse [WWC], n.d.). The employees of this organization are experts in evaluating scientific evidence related to education programs, products, practices, and policies (WWC, n.d.). They assess various research studies based on certain criteria and summarize their findings. WWC performed an analysis of *The Creative Curriculum* for Preschool in 2013. The study concluded there are no noticeable impacts on the spoken



language, reading abilities, sound recognition skills, or mathematical capabilities of preschool children (WWC, 2013).

This study aims to build on the aforementioned effort by exploring the practical application of this curriculum, specifically in a military context. This study aims to help educators, parents, and policymakers gain a deeper understanding of its effectiveness and potential to promote a creative and holistic approach to early childhood education.

More specifically, this study focuses on military children aged 0–5 years and their experiences within the framework of *The Creative Curriculum* offered by Teaching Strategies. This curriculum is widely used across various educational venues, including CDCs (Navy Child & Youth Programs [Navy CYP], n.d.). The central problem to be addressed is the need for a comprehensive understanding of how *The Creative Curriculum* is implemented at the CDCs in military-based installations in real-world settings and how it impacts the quality of education received by military children. In September 2021, there were approximately 49,300 children enrolled in military-based CDCs, military-based school-age care programs had 24,700 enrollments, and 2,700 children received care in DOD family childcare (FCC) homes (Larin, 2023). In short, this report intends to contribute valuable insights into how those who operate the CDCs in military-based installations.

B. SCOPE

For this study, I selected two CDCs operated by military installations located near the Naval Postgraduate School: Naval Support Activity Monterey (NSAM) CDC in Monterey, CA, and Presidio of Monterey (POM) Monterey Road CDC in Seaside, CA. These two locations were chosen based on their proximity and similarities in size, age group of children served, and data availability. In Chapter IV, I provide a profile of each location, including its mission and range of services.

C. RESEARCH APPROACH

The Council on Medical Student Education in Pediatrics (COMSEP) “is an international community of educators who are passionate about advancing the art and



science of medical student education in pediatrics” (Council on Medical Student Education in Pediatrics [COMSEP], n.d.). On the COMSEP website, Rudoy and Lopreiato (2019) discuss methods to evaluate students’ performances as influenced by the curriculum. The authors mention program evaluation tools (e.g., accreditation reports), process evaluation tools (e.g., interviews and questionnaires), and participation evaluation tools (e.g., peer evaluation) (para 10). Using their analysis as a guide, this study will employ a mixed-methods approach to investigate the utilization of *The Creative Curriculum* at the selected CDC locations.

This study analyzes Navy Higher Inspection and Army Higher Headquarters Inspection (AHHI) reports and interviews with CDC staff. First, Navy Higher Inspection and AHHI reports were obtained and scrutinized to assess how the curriculum is implemented, educational practices, and compliance with curriculum standards. Data related to curriculum design, educator qualifications, teaching methodologies, and adherence to established educational guidelines were extracted from these reports. Thematic analysis was applied to identify common themes, strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in curriculum utilization.

The second piece involved conducting structured or semi-structured interviews with CDC personnel to gather insights into curriculum implementation practices, challenges encountered, and practical strategies. Each CDC training curriculum specialist must possess a Master’s or four-year degree in Early Childhood Education or Child Development and one to three years of full-time experience working with children or youth (United States Office of Personnel Management, n.d.). These individuals were selected for feedback due to their curriculum development, implementation, and oversight expertise. Interview questions were designed to explore aspects of curriculum utilization, training methodologies, challenges faced, and ways for improvement. Interviews were conducted in person or virtually. Participants obtained consent before conducting interviews, and names were changed to ensure anonymity. Thematic analysis was applied to interview responses, and findings were compared with those from documents studied to enrich the overall analysis. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant anonymity, were followed throughout the research process.



D. ORGANIZATION AND CHAPTERS

The following chapters provide a more detailed analysis and description of this report. Chapter II covers the military childcare background through legislation and current policies. Chapter III provides a comprehensive overview of the existing knowledge and research related to early childhood education, with a particular emphasis on *The Creative Curriculum*. Chapter IV describes the CDC locations analyzed and outlines the methodology for this study, detailing the qualitative methods. Chapter V presents the evaluation results of the two programs based on an evaluation of the documents collected. The last chapter, Chapter VI, synthesizes the key findings from the research and their implications, offers recommendations for reviewing *The Creative Curriculum*'s effectiveness in early childhood education at other CDCs, and proposes avenues for future research in this domain.



II. BACKGROUND

Military childcare has progressed significantly since its inception in the 1950s. However, that progress was slow to happen. For the first 30 years, the services lacked oversight, quality, and staffing requirements that are now incorporated into the operations of all installations. Congress enacted the Military Child Care Act (MCCA) of 1989 to correct those deficiencies (Navy CYP, n.d., para 2).

A. LEGISLATION

The MCCA was established to “improve the quality, safety, availability, and affordability of military child care” (Kamarck, 2020, p. 18). The law required remodeling of practices to include at least one employee at each CDC with a credentialed specialist in training and curriculum. In addition, all employees were required to undergo mandatory training in early childhood development, activities, and disciplinary techniques for different child age groups, child abuse protection and prevention, and emergency medical procedures (Kamarck, 2020, p.18).

On the FindLaw website, Spielberger et al. explain the types of care that the MCCA provides as follows:

- **Child Development Centers:** These are similar to day care centers which offer programs for children from six weeks to twelve years old. Their staff is trained in early childhood education and CDCs typically meet professional quality standards. Most CDCs are open between 6 am and 6 pm, although a commanding officer may extend open hours if necessary.
- **Family Child Care Homes:** These are in-home day care centers which are run by individual homeowners. The military trains these homeowners to care for up to six children at a time. FCCs typically have more flexible hours and may be available in areas without a CDC.
- **School Age Child Programs:** These are after school and summer programs for children between six and twelve years of age. Sometimes the programs are run entirely through the military, but sometimes they are run through a local Boys & Girls Club or 4-H club that offers special discounts for military members (Spielberger et al., 2016, para. 1)



In their article, Spielberger et al. elaborate on the availability of these programs for various categories of individuals, including active-duty children, DOD civilians, combat-injured veterans, surviving spouses (gold-star spouses), and DOD contractors. Reservists cannot utilize these programs unless initiated from drill (inactive) status to active duty status (Spielberger et al., 2016). Parents who have children enrolled in military childcare weekly, pay fees for each child enrolled in a program. Fees are based on total family income obtained from reviewing a recent leave and earnings statement (LES) and/or paystub if the spouse is civilian. Costs for military programs vary based on the cost of living. Appendix A provides more details of the cost structure for the CDCs in the Monterey area.

B. CURRENT POLICIES

All CDCs are required to be nationally accredited and DOD certified, with both topics discussed further below. The DOD has an instruction for Child Development Programs (CDP) called the DOD Instruction (DODI) 6060.02. Paragraph 7(3), “Accreditation” of the DODI 6060.02, states that a DOD-approved national accrediting body shall accredit eligible CDP facilities (excluding FCC) (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2014). According to the DODI, the oversight of CDP is mandatory and involves an external accreditation process recognized nationally and an internal certification process within the DOD. Each branch must meet requirements from these processes specific to their installations. This inspection process means that the CDCs are reviewed for the quality of higher education (Council for Higher Education and Accreditation [CHEA], n.d.). The DOD issues certificates for a duration of 15 months, provided that the compliance criteria have been met.

1. Accreditation

The U.S. Department of Education (ED) is the entity in charge of managing anything involving education, including policies on federal financial aid, providing a focus on national education issues, prohibiting discrimination, ensuring equal opportunity for educational access, and collecting and disseminating research (U.S. Department of Education [ED], n.d.). For the accreditation process, the ED relies on the accrediting agencies (accreditors) to oversee the quality of higher education. The Council of Higher



Education (CHEA) oversees the accreditation program. Per the CHEA, the accreditors must follow specific procedures to gain accreditation for a program or institution. These procedures are broken down into a six-step process, and the CHEA lists them as follows (CHEA, n.d.):

- **Establishment of Institutional or Program Eligibility:** Accrediting organizations have specific eligibility requirements, such as state authorization, a primary focus on education, and adherence to specific standards, serving as a preliminary quality assessment before institutions or programs engage in the comprehensive self-study for accreditation.
- **Institutional or Program Self-Study:** Upon acceptance for review, institutions or programs undergo a comprehensive self-evaluation, crafting a detailed report that demonstrates adherence to accrediting organization standards, outlines areas of improvement, and may be treated as confidential, with some institutions opting for publication post-accreditation review.
- **On-Site Team Visit:** The self-study document serves as the focal point for evaluation by an accrediting organization's review team during a campus visit, where team members, often peers with accreditation experience, engage with faculty, students, staff, and administrators to discuss issues arising from the self-study, and the process typically concludes with an exit interview with the institution's leadership.
- **Written Team Report:** Following the campus visit, the visiting team compiles a thorough accreditation report evaluating the institution's or program's strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement; this draft report is typically discussed with the accrediting organization's staff, shared with the campus leadership for input, and, after finalization, submitted to the accrediting organization, where a representative from the institution may participate in discussions and decisions on accreditation.



- **Final Decisions/Appeals:** Following a thorough examination of the self-study document, team report, and institution-provided data, accrediting decisions, ranging from granting to revoking accreditation, are made, with successful institutions or programs being placed in the accrediting organization's standard review cycle, while those not meeting standards may appeal the decision.
- **Monitoring:** Accrediting organizations oversee institutions and programs between reviews, often mandating annual reporting, interim reviews for unresolved issues, and substantive change reports to document significant alterations in an institution or program's scope, standards, or practices.

"In the United States, accreditation is a major way that students, families, government officials, and the press know that an institution or program provides a quality education" (CHEA, n.d., para. 1).

2. Navy CNIC Higher Headquarters Inspection

As part of the Navy DOD certification process, the Commander of Navy Installations (CNIC) Headquarters mandates all CDCs on Navy Installations to adhere to the Navy Child Youth Program (CYP) (2024) Navy Inspection Criteria Checklist (NICC), which the Navy CYP updates and makes readily available on their library website. A team of at least two CNIC CYP Higher Headquarters members is deployed to conduct the annual unannounced inspections. The CNIC CYP Headquarters has designated eight inspection billets for traveling and inspecting CDCs on all Navy Installations. The team members are expected to have a background in early childhood education, though their proficiency could also be concentrated in areas like fire safety or health and sanitation. The NICC comprises three sections, each ranging between two and ten subsections (Navy CYP, 2024). Following is a summary of the sections and subsections from the Navy CYP (2024) NICC:

- General Management
 - Resource Management and Administration
 - Personnel Management
 - Training Personnel
 - Record Keeping



- Facilities, Health, Safety, and Risk Management
 - Background Checks
 - Oversight and Inspection
 - Fire and Safety
 - Inclusion
 - Nutrition and Food Service
 - Faculty Standards
 - Health
 - Child Abuse Prevention, Identification, & Reporting
 - Supervision of Children/Youth
 - Sign In/Out Systems
- Programming
 - Communication with Families
 - Learning Activities & Interactions

Figure 1 shows the requirements for Certification and Accreditation under the Navy Higher Inspection Criteria.

A.1.c	Certification and Accreditation
	Description: The program meets the requirements of DoD certification and the Military Child Care Act for accreditation.
	Intent: To ensure that Child Development Programs meet the standards of DoD and a national accrediting body.

Figure 1. Navy CDC Accreditation Requirement.
Source: Navy CYP (2024)

The Navy inspection process commences with an administrative review conducted via the Inspection Management System (IMS), an online database system. According to Jamie Foster (personal communication, February 22, 2024), the inspection team remotely reviews past reports through IMS before notifying the CDC location of the inspection's commencement. The subsequent week involves an onsite visit where the inspection team evaluates location-specific details encompassing health, staff, family, and payment information stored in a private database. The team closely observes and documents the staff's daily activities, noting the NICC items in their devices via mobile IMS using either a "Met" or "Not Met" grading. Critical discrepancies that are life-threatening are corrected on-site. Non-critical discrepancies will be reviewed thoroughly and documented in IMS



for tracking purposes. Any necessary corrections will be compiled into a formal letter, which will be briefed to the installation and Commander for their attention. An example of the Commanding Officer’s summary letter can be found in Appendix B. The Navy CDC will have a maximum of 90 days to rectify discrepancies. An assigned official must sign off each correction through IMS, and once all corrections are approved and the CDC is 100% compliant, the completion is forwarded for certification approval.

3. AHHI

The Army’s DOD certification also involves conducting higher headquarters inspections, formally known as Army Higher Headquarters Inspections (AHHI), which is an annual unannounced inspection that assesses compliance with many critical areas including, but not limited to, safety, health, sanitation, training, curriculum, environments, interactions, and administration (Faherty, 2022). Figure 2 describes the requirements for Certification and Accreditation for CDC and School Age Care (SAC) under the AHHI Criteria list.

	CDC	SAC
A.1.c	Certification and Accreditation	Certification and Accreditation
	Description: The program meets the requirements of DoD certification and the Military Child Care Act for accreditation.	Description: The program meets the requirements of DoD certification and the Military Child Care Act for accreditation.
	Intent: To ensure that Child Development Programs meet the standards of DoD and a national accrediting body.	Intent: To ensure that Child Development Programs meet the standards of DoD and a national accrediting body.

Figure 2. Army CDC Accreditation Requirement. Source: United States Army CYS (2024)

The inspection period typically lasts for a week, although this timeframe may vary depending on the number of requirements that need to be reviewed. The Army employs a team of five inspectors, each of whom must have a 1701 series credential, which signifies a background in early childhood education. According to Stacy Hudson (personal communication, February 27, 2024), the inspection commences when the team arrives at the location, and notification is provided while they are in route. The size of the inspection team can range from 1 to 11 members, depending on the size of the Army installation being audited. The CDC personnel then undergo the audit process, presenting documentation to



the inspectors for review to ensure compliance. Each section is evaluated on a “Met/Not Met” basis and documented via IMS. Items that do not meet the standards are identified with comments explaining the reasons for this determination. Proficiency and assurance in handling diverse emergency scenarios, such as medical and fire, are assessed through equipment testing and safety protocols. Any non-compliance is meticulously recorded for rectification at a future date, while critical items like fire alarms are promptly fixed on-site. In evaluating the outcomes, each result has been assigned a grade based on the three classifications of Above Standards, At Standards, or Below Standards. The CDC staff and installation commander are briefed on the results upon completion. The Army also uses a summary letter like the Navy, which is shared through a portal but is only accessible under an Army network. The CDC is granted a 60-day window to carry out corrective actions, which must comply with standards and be supported by photographic evidence and official signatures. These documents are uploaded into IMS, reviewed by the inspection team, and submitted for final approval.

In March 2022, two Army CDCs and a Child Youth Service (CYS) earned accreditations to operate at the Detroit Arsenal Installation in Warren, Michigan. The process incorporated four inspections throughout the year. Three of those inspections were completed by a multi-disciplinary inspection team of local inspectors, including Departments of Public Works, Safety, MEDCOM, the Industrial Hygienist, and individuals who look at the curriculum (Klebba, 2022).



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III. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

The science of early brain development, rooted in decades of neuroscience and behavioral research, can guide strategic investments in early childhood by highlighting the foundational significance of child development, especially from birth to five years (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). The Center of the Developing Child, based at Harvard University, researched scientific findings related to early development from various center publications. Based on their research, they provide basic concepts to help illustrate why child development is essential for a foundation of prosperous and sustainable societies. Some key topics discussed in the brief are the brain's structure over time, interactions and influences that shape it, capacity decreases in the brain's ability to change as it ages, emotional and social capacity, and damage from toxic stress.

One of the main points in this work is a concept scientists know as “serve and return.” ““Serve and return” describes the natural interaction when a child under two years old initiates communication through gibbering, facial expressions, and signs, and the caregiver responds accordingly. (Center of the Developing Child, 2007). Adults respond by vocalizing and gesturing back at them. According to the Center on the Developing Child, when babies and young children try to communicate by making sounds, smiling, or using hand movements, they expect grown-ups to respond similarly. This back-and-forth interaction is like a game and is crucial for their brain development. If adults do not respond or respond inconsistently, the brain may not develop as it should, potentially causing issues in how the child learns and behaves. So, these interactions are like building blocks for a child's brain; when they happen regularly, they help the child develop well.

The Regional Educational Laboratories (REL) is a research organization that collaborates with educators and policymakers nationwide to improve student learning. It was established by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and collaborates with school districts, state departments of education, and other education stakeholders to generate and apply evidence. (IES, n.d.). A REL blog states that engaging in shared activities during the



preschool years has been shown to enhance the development of various skills essential for success in modern times, such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, creativity, and confidence. Furthermore, participating in such activities can also positively impact a child's social and emotional development, language acquisition, and mathematical abilities (Caven, 2022).

Researchers from the Society for Research in Child Development define early childhood development as the development of health, learning, and behavior from prenatal to period through transitory primary schooling (Britto et al., 2011). How we understand development as a socio-cultural process has significant implications for politics, curriculum, and educational processes (Jurčević Lozančić & Tot, 2020). Instead of seeing early childhood as a general and isolated development phase, this research maintains we should focus on involving children in diverse environments, relationships, activities, and skills. Part of that development is encouraging creativity, which is a characteristic that is viewed as potential, strength, and essential to all aspects of life and progress in general (Jurčević Lozančić & Tot, 2020). Studies have shown that a lack of this type of quality in child development can lead to poverty, disease, and exposure to violence (Britto et al., 2011).

As a result of the unequal outcomes and opportunities between different countries, there has been a growing focus on global policies aimed at advancing early childhood development (Ahun et al., 2023). The Care for Child Development (CCD) package, developed by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Health Organization (WHO), addresses the growing need for nurturing care for child development worldwide. It includes evidence-based recommendations for caregivers to support play, communication, and responsive interaction with children under 5 years old. The package is designed to be seamlessly integrated into existing services to improve the quality of child development care (Ahun et al., 2023). Ahun and colleagues have highlighted that the CCD program has been effectively implemented in 54 countries and territories with low- and middle-income economies. It has also been executed in government services across a variety of sectors in 26 different countries (Ahun et al., 2023).



B. THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM

The *Creative Curriculum* is a research-based framework provided by Teaching Strategies professionals that has been used for over 40 years. Teaching Strategies is an organization that specializes in early childhood education and provides products for teaching professionals (Bloomberg, 2023). The focus is on implementing teaching methods, learning experiences, and interactions demonstrated through research to effectively enhance the development and learning of children. (Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center [ECKLC], n.d.). The *Creative Curriculum* is offered in five versions: Infant, Toddlers, and Twos Curriculum, Preschool Curriculum, Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Curriculum, Family Child Care Curriculum, and California Transitional Kindergarten (TK) Curriculum. In the context of the Preschool Curriculum, the inquiries that steer the building study can foster a more profound comprehension of buildings. Furthermore, they can potentially promote a more extensive understanding of culture and community (Gullickson et al., 2018). According to Gullickson et al.'s report, *The Creative Curriculum* Foundation manual suggests that learning topics should be based on children's curiosity, social concerns, or unexpected events. The report further notes that the topic should cater to the children's interests, be relevant, and appropriate for their age.

The Marquette University Child Care Center is an on-site non-profit organization dedicated to quality care for all children associated with the Marquette University community (Marquette University, 2024). The center employs *The Creative Curriculum* and provides a reason on its website about the curriculum and its benefits. On the Marquette University site, they outline the essential components of the curriculum as follows:

- Knowing children describes children's social/emotional, physical, cognitive, and language development.
- Creating a responsive environment offers a model for setting up the physical environment for routines and experiences in ways that address children's developing abilities and interests.
- What children are learning — shows how the responsive relationship you form with each child, the interactions you have every day, and the materials and experiences you offer become the building blocks for successful learning.
- Caring and teaching — describes the varied and interrelated roles of teachers who work with children.



- Building partnerships with families — explores the benefits of working with families as partners in the care of their children. (Marquette University, 2024, para 3)

In summary, *The Creative Curriculum* is a valuable tool that helps caregivers and teachers provide high-quality care and education for young children. It assists in creating engaging and responsive learning environments that promote children’s growth and development. The curriculum guide helps caregivers and educators build strong relationships with children, offer challenging and age-appropriate experiences, and work with families in partnership. This ensures that all children receive an excellent education that prepares them for success in school and beyond. It’s important to note that *The Creative Curriculum* is a framework that provides tools for implementing child development techniques. It doesn’t offer strict instructions or detailed schedules for teaching professionals to follow. Educators are responsible for deciding how to use this framework in their teaching.

C. EXISTING RESEARCH ON MILITARY CHILD DEVELOPMENT

For the past decade, there has been an increased interest in military children. Studies conducted focused on topics such as the emotional and social effects on children who are younger than five years old, the effects of co-parenting during deployments, and other circumstances that put military children at risk.

One analysis highlighted the importance of early childcare education (ECE) and the challenges in ensuring program quality, particularly regarding teacher education and training (Ackerman, 2007). Ackerman reported limited research on effective professional development in ECE and a lack of guidance for policymakers. Six CDCs across the three services (Army, Air Force, and Navy) consisting of eight Training Curriculum Specialists and 13 caregivers were interviewed and analyzed on their childcare experience. The study aimed to fill gaps by examining the Training Curriculum Specialist’s training system in its CDCs, which is renowned for its quality but not widely understood. The study also sought to understand the professional development offered in the CDC training model and the supporting contextual factors and policies. This was crucial for informing stakeholders and



policymakers about effective professional development strategies in ECE (Ackerman, 2007).

Ackerman's study highlighted the significance of progression training for fostering professional development. According to the study, some caregivers noted that fundamental aspects of childcare, such as class ratios, CPR, and age groupings, were either introduced for the first time or not emphasized as a requirement in their civilian workplace (Ackerman, 2007). The study also found that civilian ECE annual training requirements nationwide exceed 13 hours, while CDC orientation across services varies from 12 to 43 hours. Moreover, there is a notable disparity in educational prerequisites for teachers, with some states not mandating a college degree, in contrast to CDCs that mandate a degree and years of experience in Early Childhood Education or child development (Ackerman, 2007). Adopting military practices and procedures could lead to improved quality of childcare in civilian ECE settings.

A recent study investigated the long-term effects of transitions with school-age military children (aged five and older) in public schools within a community with a substantial military student population. The research involved conducting semi-structured interviews to delve into the challenges military children face due to frequent relocations and their perspectives on the available support systems. The study identified six key themes: the difficulties encountered, adaptability, the benefits of counseling programs, positive perceptions of school staff responsiveness, the crucial role of family support, and the importance of peer assistance (Thompson-Pluckett, 2022). Thompson-Pluckett underscores that while relocations are not exclusive to military children, they experience a 30% higher average compared to their civilian counterparts. The study emphasizes the importance of focused efforts on partnerships to support military-connected children, framing it "as a matter of national security" (Thompson-Pluckett, 2022, p. 3).

Twelve students in 9th through 12th grade participated in a comparison-based study. They expressed the deep emotional impact of leaving behind friends, making it challenging to form new connections and maintain existing ones (Thompson-Pluckett, 2022). Additionally, differing academic policies and adjusting to a new school culture added to the difficulty of transitioning. This challenge was further compounded by the



diverse cultural norms and behaviors when moving between the States and overseas (Thompson-Pluckett, 2022). Thompson-Pluckett also discovered that sixty-seven percent of the participants were aware of available transition assistance services at their current school, not specifically geared toward military children, and actively sought help. However, only 25 out of the 67% received support from school counselors, non-military, instead of the Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLC), which are military-focused. The MFLC program, established in 2004 by the DOD, “provide [s] non-medical confidential counseling services to military members and their families” (Thompson-Pluckett, 2022, p. 62). The study concluded that resources such as military youth centers, monitored social media, school-based support groups, and parental encouragement play a vital role in easing the transition experience for military children and facilitating connections.

D. SUMMARY

By focusing on this curriculum within a military context, the study delves deeper into how it can address the unique challenges military children face, such as frequent relocations. The insights provided regarding the effectiveness of *The Creative Curriculum* offer valuable guidance for improving early childhood education in military settings. This evaluation is particularly valuable as it can influence policy and program decisions to enhance the educational experiences of military-connected children across CDCs, thereby contributing to the broader effort of supporting military families. These research findings on the impact of *The Creative Curriculum* in military CDCs could contribute significantly to our understanding of how educational programs can effectively meet the needs of military families.



IV. METHODOLOGY

This analysis involved a two-part effort. The first part involved reviewing years of AHHI and Navy CNIC inspection reports to get an idea of how the inspectors from the DOD certification examine the two data sites. The results derived from the criteria lists from both services were then analyzed, specifically focusing on Section C, subsection “Curriculum, Learning Activities and Environments” (Navy CYP, 2024, p. 55; Army CYS, 2024, p.103). The reports’ primary use was to affirm that the curriculum applied at the sites is up to DOD standards and effective for early childhood development. The second half of the analysis involved in-person interviews with the Training Curriculum Specialists at the perspective locations, either supervised or approved by their directors.

A. SELECTION METHOD

To identify suitable interview locations, I visited the Military Childcare (MCC) website at <https://public.militarychildcare.csd.disa.mil/mcc-central/mcchome> and conducted a search under “Monterey, CA 93940, USA” within a 15-mile radius. The search yielded four locations that provide services, including two CDCs: NSAM, La Mesa CDC, and POM, Monterey Road CDC. NSAM is located 1.5 miles from the Naval Postgraduate School (NPS), while POM is 4.2 miles from NPS. These two locations were selected due to their matching operating hours, identical services, and proximity. Furthermore, their oversight by different military branches – Navy and Army – offers a valuable cultural contrast. To obtain consent, I contacted the directors of each location via phone or email to explain the purpose of the report and to disclose the questions that would be asked. I also clarified that no children or family members would be interviewed and that the analysis would solely focus on *The Creative Curriculum*.

B. INTERVIEW AND TRANSCRIPTION PROCESS

Two interviews were carried out, one with each of the Training Curriculum Specialists at their respective locations. These interviews were conducted in person, as the specialists are entrusted with curriculum development, implementation, and oversight responsibilities. Each interview spanned 120 minutes, one on April 18, 2024, and the other



on May 9, 2024. The spacing of the dates is set at three-week intervals due to the official approval granted by the directors on that particular day. The focus of the discussions revolved around curriculum application, training methods, encountered challenges, and prospects for enhancement. The semi-structured questions were crafted to highlight these crucial areas. The questions posed during the interviews were as follows:

- How do you apply *The Creative Curriculum* to your teaching curriculum?
- What are some features you do or don't like about *The Creative Curriculum*?
- How do you know if the child is developmentally advancing?

Responses to the questions and supporting documentation such as lesson plans, teaching guide tools, and other evidence were collected. These items were compared for common phrases, trends, applications, and impressions of *The Creative Curriculum*. All information received, including sensitive information about the children, families, and staff, was redacted.

C. DATA APPROACH

Due to the recent DOD certifications at both locations, along with the expertise of the Training Curriculum Specialists, I presumed that the lesson plans were in line with the objectives outlined in the Teaching Strategies framework (supplied from the package kit). I carefully examined the guide tools and definitions from the curricula, assessing how well they corresponded with the lesson plans at each CDC location. If the lesson plans incorporated keywords, descriptions, activities, or other components that reflected the program's objectives, I considered them to either "Met" or "Not Met" the DOD standard and the Training Strategies defined objective. For instance, Objective 7a for Infants (1 year or younger) entails "Exhibits fine-motor strength and coordination – Utilizes fingers and hands." Fine motor abilities encompass the capacity to grip and release objects with fingers and hands and coordinate movements between hands and eyes (Teaching Strategies, 2021). One of the activities outlined in the lesson plans was "Pat-a-Cake," and the instructions specified the teachers recite "Pat-a-Cake" to the children and demonstrate the hand motions



as in the book. This activity was aligned with the objective's intention, thus fulfilling the requirement.

I also conducted a comparative analysis of interview responses from both locations, examining similarities and differences in years of teaching experience, experience at a military child facility, teaching methodologies, training, activities, and overall perception of *The Creative Curriculum*. My aim was to identify overlapping and contrasting responses to gain insight into how *The Creative Curriculum* is understood and implemented in different settings. Whenever I found consistent responses between the two locations, I carefully documented and discussed these shared perspectives within the context of the respective interviews. This approach enabled a detailed exploration of common themes and variations while ensuring that the unique viewpoints of each location were accurately represented. Additionally, I utilized a cross-referencing technique, referencing and comparing relevant insights from the first interview with responses from the second interview. This methodological approach helped to validate shared perspectives and uncover any divergences or additional insights offered by each CDC location.

D. BACKGROUND OF CDC LOCATIONS

1. NSAM, La Mesa CDC

The first location analyzed is the La Mesa CDC, provided by the NSAM installation. It is located at 2 La Mesa Way, Bldg. 439 Monterey, CA 93940. This location is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), “a professional membership organization that promotes high-quality early learning for all young children, birth through age 8, by connecting early childhood practice, policy, and research. [They] advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.” (NAEYC, “About Us,” n.d.). See Appendix C to review their accreditation certificate from NAEYC. NAEYC accreditation is awarded for five years, and programs must submit annual reports proving they maintain compliance with the NAEYC program standards. Like the DOD certification process, the NAEYC can conduct unannounced visits to review program compliance. According to the Navy Life website, the La Mesa CDC's philosophy focuses on offering



excellent education through its team of experts who design developmentally appropriate programs that cater to each child's distinctive needs, abilities, and interests (Navy Life, n.d.). The La Mesa CDC is devised to meet the individual needs of military children by offering quality childcare. In Monterey, the programs provided are designed to address the specialized requirements of the military community.

The La Mesa CDC website details the four programs offered at the La Mesa CDC location: Infant Program (6 weeks to 1 year old), Pre-Toddler Program (ages 1–2 years old), Toddler Program (ages 2–3 years old), and Full Day Preschool Program (ages 3–5 years old) (Navy Life SW, NSA Monterey, n.d.). The programs cater to military and civilian families attending the Naval Postgraduate School and the Defense, offering them the necessary support they require (Military Child Care, n.d.). The team works hand in hand with parents to provide a secure and caring environment that caters to the unique needs of each child, with the help of a team of experienced professionals to ensure that every child is included.

2. POM, Monterey Road CDC

The second CDC location is the Monterey Road CDC, provided by the United States Army Garrison (USAG) Presidio of Monterey (POM) installation in Bldg. 7693, Monterey Road Seaside, CA 93955. This site is also accredited through the NAEYC. (Army Morale, Welfare, and Recreation [MWR], n.d.). Their goal is to ensure high-quality early childhood programs and promote parent engagement by accepting comments, ideas, and suggestions (Army Morale, Welfare, and Recreation [MWR] POM, n.d.). See Appendix D to review the NAEYC accreditation certificate. The Army MWR POM website offers the following services:

- Full day – 6:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday
- Part-day – 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Preschool programs for children ages three to five years old.
- Strong Beginnings Pre-kindergarten Program 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Monday through Friday
- Hourly care – 7:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Care is available for children six weeks to five years old. (Army MWR POM, n.d., para 3)



CYS programs ensure the same quality of care for children in all programs. The teachers plan a developmentally appropriate curriculum for young children, paying attention to their needs, interests, and developmental levels.

E. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Some limitations warrant consideration for this study, each impacting the findings' applicability and strength. Recognizing these limitations is essential for a comprehensive understanding of the scope and potential implications of the research.

1. Range of Reports

The reports reviewed ranged from 2016 to 2019. In the wake of the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19), inspections were conducted remotely, and on-site visits did not reoccur until sometime in 2021. The years selected were to ensure that the data was cohesive across all relevant sources, ensuring no discrepancies or contradictions could lead to inaccuracies or misinterpretations.

2. Privy of Information

In areas where the inspection reports noted a discrepancy, further review required looking into databases I was not authorized to access. For example, C.3.g.3 of the NICC and AHHI checklists assesses whether the staff members have organized activities suitable for preschoolers' development in the eight domains: physical and health, social-emotional, self-regulation, creative expression, language and literacy, science, math, and social studies. These activities include two or more structured or staff-led games that encourage indoor or outdoor movement (Navy CYP, 2024; Army CYS, 2024). If there is a discrepancy, the inspectors leave a remark for the staff to look in their employment databank to either review or make changes. As mentioned in the Methodology section, sensitive information was removed to maintain privacy, and the lesson plans included children's names.



3. Extent of Professionalism

I am not an educator and do not possess an educational background. This study was driven by my curiosity and passion as a parent and a desire to learn about the military education system and inform other parents. Therefore, all information discussed in this report reflects my perspective and does not necessarily align with the thoughts or expertise of professional educators, past or present.



V. RESULTS

I meticulously reviewed each inspection report from 2016 to 2019, specifically focusing on discrepancies related to curriculum quality. The locations passed these inspections without serious deficiencies in how they construct or implement their curriculums. This analysis provided valuable insights into the overall quality assurance processes within the CDCs. Additionally, the inspection reports showed nothing unusual that required further inquiry. There were trends in repeated offenses, such as section B.7.f “Diapering Procedures,” but not related to the curriculum. The succeeding information will include the responses to the interview questions in Chapter IV.

As part of the DOD certification, both services require their CDC locations to incorporate five domains in their curriculums: cognition, communication and language, physical and health, social-emotional, and self-regulation (Navy CYP, 2024; Army CYS, 2024). *The Creative Curriculum* encompasses these domains within its framework. With the purchase of *The Creative Curriculum*, Teaching Strategies includes an assessment tool called *Teaching Strategies GOLD*. *Teaching Strategies GOLD* is a system for evaluating young children from infancy to kindergarten. It allows teachers to observe children in everyday activities to understand their abilities and knowledge better.

Table 1 shows an example of the research foundation that captures the essential research findings relevant to the objective. It offers a comprehensive overview of the developmental and learning aspects from birth until third grade (Teaching Strategies, 2010). However, it’s worth noting that this report specifically concentrates on the birth to kindergarten period. Appendix E contains the full research foundation list except for science and technology, social studies, the arts, and English language acquisition. There are no observances that correlate to those objectives (Teaching Strategies, 2010). They are still used in the curriculum, but results are seen as children progress.



Table 1. Teaching Strategies GOLD research foundation summary example.
Adapted from Teaching Strategies (2010).

Teaching Strategies Gold Objectives for Development and Learning		
Objectives	Dimensions	Age Ranges (Color Codes)
Social-Emotional	1. Regulates own emotions and behaviors	
	a. Manages feelings	●●●●●●●●
	b. Follows limits and expectations	●●●●●●●●
	c. Takes care of own needs appropriately	●●●●●●●●
	2. Establishes and sustains positive relationships	
	a. Forms relationships with adults	●●●●●●●●
	b. Responds to emotional cues	●●●●●●●●
	c. Interacts with peers	●●●●●●●●
	d. Makes friends	●●●●●●●●
	3. Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations	
	a. Balances needs and rights of self and others	●●●●●●●●
	b. Solves social problems	●●●●●●●●

Color Coding Legend	
●	0-1 years
●	1-2 years
●	2-3 years
●	3 (Preschool)
●	4 (Pre-K)
●	Kindergarten

The evaluation framework is founded on 38 objectives for growth and learning, which define academic achievement and are aligned with school readiness criteria (Teaching Strategies, 2010). Figure 3 illustrates an example of development and learning progressions with indicators that showcase expected standard levels of development across the different age groups. Teaching Strategies ensures that these objectives are aligned with the Common Core State Standards, state early learning guidelines, and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework, and teachers use them to guide their observations and decision-making in the classroom.



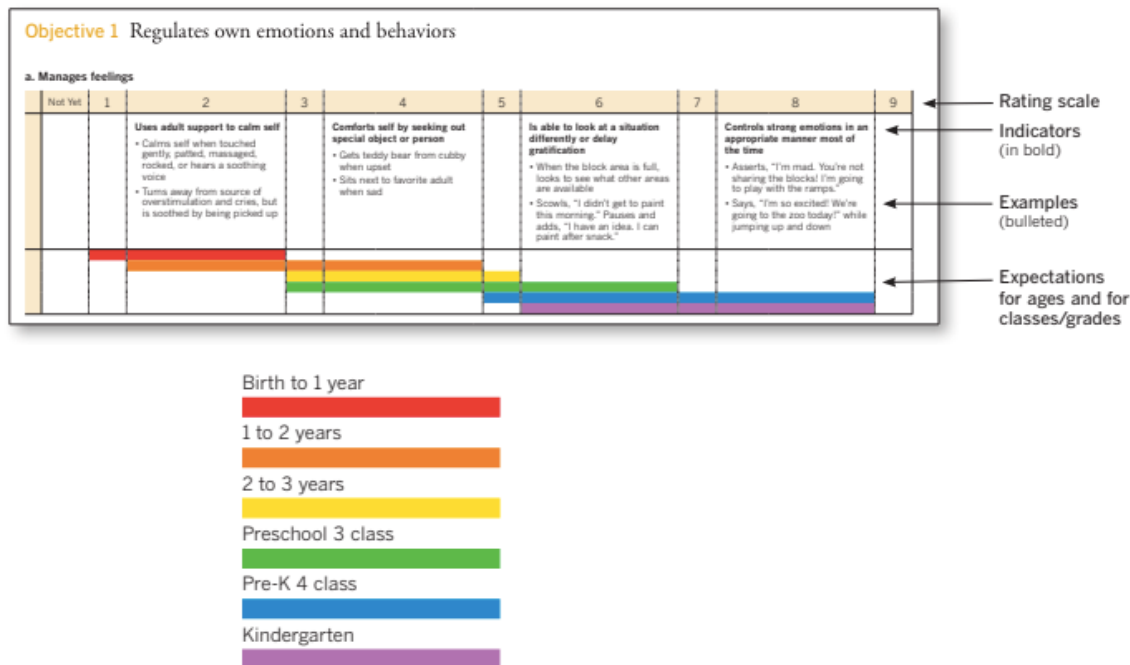


Figure 3. Progression chart for Objection 1 – “Regulates own emotions and behaviors,” Dimension a. Source: Teaching Strategies (2011)

A. HOW DO YOU APPLY THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM TO YOUR TEACHING CURRICULUM?

1. NSAM, La Mesa CDC

The training curriculum specialist at this location has 13 years of teaching experience and has served La Mesa CDC for two years. As part of her role, she carefully reviews and approves lesson plans two weeks in advance, covering individual, large, and small group plans (see Figure 4). The lesson plans also incorporate Family Partnerships to encourage family participation and ensure continuous development at home and during care. To target objectives, instructors must research activities themselves. The Teaching Strategies database is utilized to create these plans, allowing teachers to add objectives for two reasons: (1) for historical and auditing purposes and (2) to help the training specialist understand how the activity aligns with the objectives (see Figure 5). Depending on the class, the lesson plans are tailored accordingly.

April 2024		
Mon 15	Tue 16	Wed 17
Language/ Literacy /Motor Skills	Language/ Literacy /Motor Skills	Language/ Literacy /Motor Skills
<p>Read-Aloud</p> <p>Pat a Cake</p> <p>Read Pat a Cake to the children, use your hands to do the motion of the book.</p> <p>Family Partnerships</p> <p>Share a family photo doing winter activities</p> <p>Bring in family photos from the winter season for our classroom</p> <p>Indoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Language/Literacy-Sign Languages</p> <p>Show some sign language cards with motions and let children explore the cards.</p> <p>Indoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Fine/Large Motor-Sort Toy Exploration</p> <p>Bring some soft toys for children and encourage them to explore by holding or touching.</p> <p>Outdoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Art-Sing Songs</p> <p>Sit outside on a mat. Sing different songs with motions.</p> <p>Outdoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Fine/Large Motor-Push/Pull Toys</p> <p>Go outside! Get some push toys to push around the playground. Give some wheeled toys for the younger to grasp or release.</p>	<p>Read-Aloud</p> <p>Head, shoulders, knees and toes</p> <p>During circle time read "Head shoulders, knees and toes" to the babies. Use your hands to point to each body part and point to the babies body parts as well.</p> <p>Family Partnerships</p> <p>Share a family photo doing winter activities</p> <p>Bring in family photos from the winter season for our classroom</p> <p>Indoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Social/Emotional-Clap with me</p> <p>Start clapping to attract children's attention, once they come closer, start singing rhyming songs while clapping. Older children may clap their hands and younger ones may look at you while doing the actions.</p> <p>Indoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Sensory/Science-Scarves</p> <p>Give one scarf to each child to explore. Let them touch and feel the soft texture. Teacher can toss the scarf in the air.</p> <p>Outdoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Language/Literacy-Body Parts</p> <p>Bring children at one place together and teacher sings the songs "Head, shoulders knees and toes" by pointing to her body parts.</p> <p>Outdoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Fine/Large Motor-Stacking cups</p> <p>Bring out stacking cups for children to explore at the grass area during outside play time. Show how to stack two or more cups. The younger can explore the cups by holding or touching.</p>	<p>Read-Aloud</p> <p>Hands are not for hitting</p> <p>Read the book "Hands are not for hitting" and demonstrate how hitting can make friends and</p> <p>Family Partnerships</p> <p>Share a family photo doing winter activities</p> <p>Bring in family photos from the winter season for our classroom</p> <p>Indoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Fine/Large Motor-Rolling Balls</p> <p>Bring children on the floor to show how to roll balls. Teacher will pass the ball back and forth to each child and let them explore the balls</p> <p>Indoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Language/Literacy-Book Exploration</p> <p>Bring out different books like rubber books, cloth books or paper books. Children can explore the pictures, the pages and the textures.</p> <p>Outdoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Art-Wax Paper</p> <p>Place some pieces of wax paper in front of children. They can touch or grasp the paper books, children can explore the pictures, the pages and the textures.</p> <p>Outdoor Group Experiences</p> <p>Sensory/Science-Water Play</p> <p>Prepare small amount of water in a bucket and place on the grass area for the children to explore. Make sure that there will be a teacher sitting beside the bucket with water at all times while the play time.</p>

Figure 4. Sample of Infant Lesson Plan. Source: NSAM, La Mesa CDC



Mon 15	
Language/ Literacy /Motor Skills -	
Read-Aloud	Pat a Cake
	Read-Aloud
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2b Responds to emotional cues • 2c Interacts with peers • 2d Makes friends • 2a Forms relationships with adults
Family Partnerships	Share a family photo doing winter activities
	Family Partnerships
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1a Manages feelings • 2b Responds to emotional cues • 3a Balances needs and rights of self and others • 3b Solves social problems
Indoor Group Experiences	Language/Literacy-Sign Languages
	Indoor Group Experiences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 8a Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary • 10a Engages in conversations • 10b Uses social rules of language • 8a Comprehends language
Indoor Group Experiences	Fine/Large Motor-Soft Toy Exploration
	Indoor Group Experiences
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2c Interacts with peers • 2d Makes friends • 11a Attends and engages • 14a Thinks symbolically

Figure 5. List of objectives that reflect the lesson plan for the different activities. Source: NSAM, La Mesa CDC

2. POM, Monterey Road CDC

The training curriculum specialist at this site has taught for at least 25 years and worked at the Monterey Road CDC for four years. She requires the teachers to have lesson plans drafted and ready for her review and approval two weeks prior or earlier. The lesson plans are theme-based, meaning activities and overall structure revolve around a specific topic. For example, the objectives would be incorporated with trees as the highlight if the theme is trees. Themes can be assigned for the week or month, depending on the children respond to the activities. Monterey Road CDC could not provide a copy of their lesson plan, but a copy of La Mesa's was provided during the interview. The training specialist did not specify which parts but stated it's "similar to" La Mesa's lesson plan, as shown in Figure 6. Only the training specialist signs, prints, and posts the approved lesson plans.

However, if any changes were to occur, the teachers are authorized to make changes in situ due to being trained on which activities are safe for future use. The teachers are also encouraged to create original material for their lesson plans, not rely entirely on the Teaching Strategies material, and display their creativity.

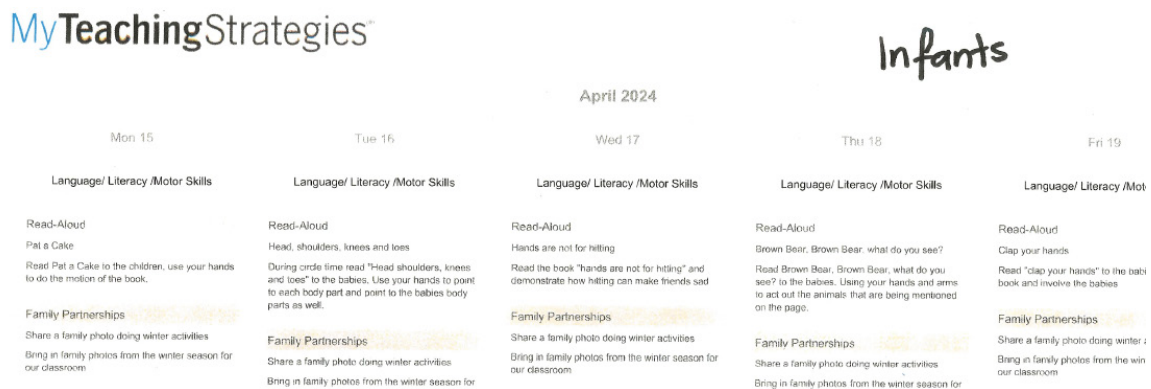


Figure 6. Sample of Infant Lesson Plan. Source: NSAM, La Mesa CDC.

B. WHAT ARE SOME FEATURES YOU DO OR DON'T LIKE ABOUT THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM?

1. NSAM, La Mesa CDC

This site's positives include activity cards for lesson plans, the specificity of objectives, and ease of use. The facility procured the activity cards for pre-toddlers two weeks before the interview. The activity cards are formatted for a specific objective and give instructions and guidance, such as the materials needed and steps to implement them. Figure 7 shows a preschool activity card for Objective 18, "Comprehends and responds to books and other texts," using clotheslines. The site is currently in the process of retrieving activity cards for infants and toddlers.

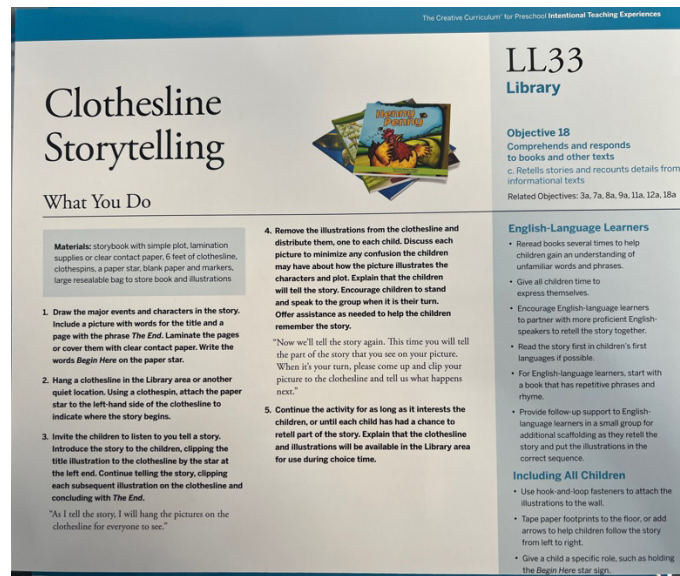


Figure 7. Activity Card LL33 for Objective 18, “Comprehends and responds to books and other texts.” Source: Teaching Strategies (2021)

Each objective is explained in detail, including its meaning, why it is important, and how it progresses a child’s development. Since the objectives are detailed, it makes the mission of researching activities less difficult to develop lesson plans. For a newly employed instructor, this framework provides substantial benefits by having a generous amount of information and ease of understanding and application.

The main negative discussed was the interpretation of the progression chart (from Figure 3). The training specialist explained how the teachers can easily determine the levels that explicitly specify the indicators across the various age groups. The examples provided further explain what the children should demonstrate at that level, so the instructors know where they stand in their development. However, the levels that show no indicator, what Teaching Strategies refers to as “in-betweens,” are left up to the educators to determine if the children fall into that bracket based on their professional expertise. Teaching Strategies considers these “in-betweens” to “allow for more steps in the progression, so teachers have a way to show that children’s skills are emerging in [an] area but not yet solid” (Teaching Strategies, 2021, p. xiv).

A suggestion that the training specialist would like to see from Teaching Strategies is a more interactive live feed of activities. Bright Wheel, a software for childcare management, has that capability and is very well known in the childcare field. The program makes operations more efficient, saving time for staff, enhancing communication with families, and streamlining administrative duties (Vasen, 2024). My daughter was enrolled in daycare in the private sector that utilized Brightwheel in their program. Figure 8 is a view of the app and shows multiple days where the facility sent notifications of her activities throughout the day, such as the food she ate, diaper changes, and even “accidents.” The software also provides a gallery for photo uploads, a calendar for upcoming events, an option to assign lesson plans, management of documents, message chat, and the ability to make payments.

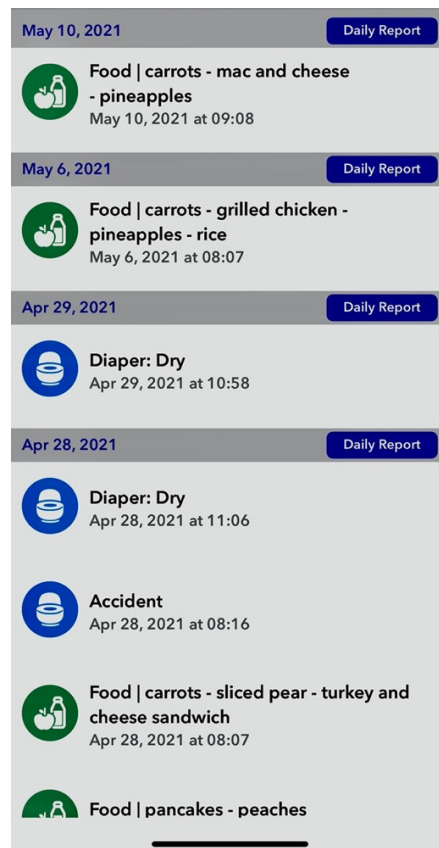


Figure 8. A screenshot of the app displaying various activities. Note: taken from personal account. Source: Brightwheel app (2024).

2. POM, Monterey Road CDC

The positives discussed by the training specialist about *The Creative Curriculum* are easy setup, the ability to create libraries for activities, and gives early childhood development profession legitimacy. The easy setup refers to the ability to create and manage lesson plans to include the ease of archiving activities used in previous lesson plans. For example, if the theme is “bugs,” then you can create a database for “bugs” and add activities such as “Finding bugs,” and this would be saved into the database for others to review. Teachers can document activities as a measurement tool for future use and progress tracking. Profession legitimacy was a positive because early childhood development is not recognized as vital. According to the training specialist (personal communication, May 9, 2024), states such as Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee do not consider early childhood education a critical requirement. *The Creative Curriculum* allows the public to understand the importance of embedding learning early into our youth.

The negatives of *The Creative Curriculum* expressed by the training specialist are that it’s impersonal, expensive, and lacks training on the material. The training specialist believes teachers should create curriculums based on their connections and knowledge of the children and shouldn’t be put in a “box.” She believes that being confined to *The Creative Curriculum* creates a “box curriculum” mindset, which limits creativity and personality. Instead, she thinks ideas should be shared rather than being stricken by what research shows works. The Teaching Strategies product is expensive, and not all material is easily accessible (contrary to the other site). The activity cards, for example, are sold separately, so those can cost a few thousand dollars and are about 15 years old. To circumvent this, hand-me-downs are donated by other educators (personal communication, May 9, 2024). There is no training on *The Creative Curriculum*, so educators are left to rely on self-teaching to understand how to use it.



C. HOW DO YOU KNOW IF THE CHILD IS DEVELOPMENTALLY ADVANCING?

1. NSAM, La Mesa CDC

When the activities from the lesson plans are implemented, teachers document the students' outcomes. Those notes are transposed into the Teaching Strategies GOLD system, and the progression chart analyzes the results. The system displays will then provide a snapshot of the child's progression based on the teacher's feedback. If the child meets the standard, no further action is needed besides proceeding with the lesson plans. Parents will be notified and asked to assist with the development track if the child does not meet the standard. Due to privacy regulations, I could not view the location's database firsthand, but Figure 9 shows an example of how the progression chart would look with the instructor's inputs.

Social-Emotional

Objectives/Dimensions	Age or Class/Grade	Not Yet	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1a. Manages feelings	1 to 2 years (Orange)						Alicia Morgan				
	2 to 3 years (Yellow)								Eleanor Frias		
	Preschool 3 class/grade (Green)	Sally Field	Brandon New	First Last		Jonathan Wu Bobby Smith					
	Pre-K 4 class/grade (Blue)				Abby Knabe			Charles O'shea			Rusi Batoloni
	Kindergarten (Purple)				Goldie Shue						
1b. Follows limits and expectations	1 to 2 years (Orange)										
	2 to 3 years (Yellow)			Eleanor Frias							
	Preschool 3 class/grade (Green)		Sally Field	Brandon New		Bobby Smith					
	Pre-K 4 class/grade (Blue)		Abby Knabe							Charles O'shea Russel Batolomew	
	Kindergarten (Purple)					Goldie Shue					
	1 to 2 years (Orange)										
	2 to 3 years (Yellow)				Eleanor Frias						

Figure 9. Example of Teaching Strategies GOLD assessment. Source: Modern Signal, (2024)



Over time, the lesson plans are tailored to meet each child's individual needs based on their current level. The objectives serve as the foundation for determining the weekly topics, ensuring that activities are inclusive to the entire class, regardless of their developmental level.

2. POM, Monterey Road CDC

The team at this location follows the same procedures to input progress for each classroom. They also run a basic report in Teaching Strategies GOLD twice yearly for the training specialist and her team to review. The graph report tracks every observation growth over time, providing details such as the time to progress to the next level. This report can be filtered to show various data types, such as the overall class progress and their weak points. For example, a toddler class (2 – 3 years) could be at 83% across all the objectives, but the weak points, Social-Emotional and Cognitive, are preventing the additional 17%. The team would then review historical lesson plans and create a new strategy to improve those objectives.



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VI. CONCLUSION

A. CONCLUSION

The two CDC locations offered contrasting yet somewhat overlapping viewpoints on *The Creative Curriculum*. La Mesa CDC strongly endorses the curriculum and commends its overall quality. On the other hand, Monterey Road CDC acknowledges the Teaching Strategies framework as a useful tool. Still, it is not considered the foundation for creating a high-quality learning environment. Both locations expressed the importance of parent involvement with a child's development, but military life can make that challenging due to obligations such as deployments or constraints like separate living.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS

Three main recommendations emerge based on the insights from contrasting perspectives at La Mesa CDC and Monterey Road CDC.

1. Ensure Transparency of Quality

It would be beneficial to make the AHHI and Navy CNIC higher headquarters results accessible for parents to review, possibly through Parent Advisory Boards or by providing more detailed results on the military childcare website. This effort should include a rating system that indicates the quality level of each location, similar to platforms like Yelp. Additionally, parents should be introduced to the Teaching Strategies system to better understand how their child(ren) is being taught and developed. This could encourage parents to be more involved if the locations are more susceptible to putting their efforts on display.

2. Enhance Parental Involvement

Encouraging greater transparency may result in increased parent engagement. Currently, the primary motivator for involvement is financial, such as sign-on bonuses or reduced childcare fees. Instead, parents should be introduced to the Teaching Strategies system to gain insight into their child's educational and developmental experiences. It is important to advocate for enhanced transparency to cultivate parental involvement, shifting



away from solely financial incentives to a more inclusive approach that empowers parents through knowledge. This could involve initiatives such as organizing introductory sessions for parents to familiarize them with the Teaching Strategies system and exploring ongoing communication and feedback methods, utilizing digital platforms like Brightwheel. A program like Brightwheel would significantly benefit military families since it provides real-time updates on a child's progress, whether deployed or living separately.

3. Expand Assessment Scope

Assessing other CDC locations nationwide would provide a broader perspective. Collaborating with government agencies such as the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and Congressional Research Service (CRS) to conduct comprehensive evaluations across diverse settings would facilitate benchmarking and knowledge exchange. Leveraging insights from these assessments would identify best practices, address operational gaps, and refine techniques beneficial for CDC operations nationwide.

C. CLOSING REMARKS

The contrasting perspectives observed at La Mesa CDC and Monterey Road CDC regarding *The Creative Curriculum* show that while widely utilized, there remains a significant need for deeper research into its implementation and impact on children's learning outcomes across other military CDCs. The recommendations mentioned aimed at enhancing transparency, fostering parental involvement, expanding assessment scope, addressing immediate operational considerations, and contributing to the ongoing dialogue on refining educational practices within military CDCs.

The Defense Contract Management Curriculum (815) at NPS highlights the contracting officer's key responsibility of ensuring that contracts are deemed "fair and reasonable." This involves the amount that a prudent business person (buyer) would expect to pay when engaging in competitive business (seller) under specific circumstances and considered acceptable by the seller (Yoder, 2023). Therefore, in childcare, the parent (buyer) anticipates quality care from the facility (seller) based on the agreed-upon prices upon enrollment. It represents a binding relationship that both parties are expected to adhere to, as outlined in the agreements signed by the parent when enrolling their child(ren)



at the childcare establishment. The scope of quality care includes early childhood development education.

Striving for continuous improvement and a deeper understanding of educational frameworks like *The Creative Curriculum* acknowledges the importance of rigorous research and collaborative efforts in shaping a more effective and responsive learning environment for our children, both within the military community and beyond.



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APPENDIX A. MONTHLY FEE CHART FOR CDC SERVICES

HIGH COST FEE STRUCTURE - SCHOOL YEAR 2023-2024						
SY 23-24 CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTERS (CDC) Monthly FEE CHART (2 Week Vacation Option)						
Total Family Income Categories		Full Day	Part Time*	Part Day Toddler/Part Day Pre-School "Enrichment"***		
				5 Day 3 Hr	3 Day 3 Hr	2 Day 3 Hr
CAT 1	\$1 – \$45,000	\$243	\$170	\$109	\$66	\$43
CAT 2	\$45,001 – \$55,000	\$274	\$192	\$123	\$74	\$49
CAT 3	\$55,001 – \$65,000	\$335	\$234	\$151	\$91	\$60
CAT 4	\$65,001 – \$77,500	\$395	\$277	\$178	\$107	\$71
CAT 5	\$77,501 – \$90,000	\$469	\$328	\$211	\$127	\$84
CAT 6	\$90,001 – \$102,500	\$547	\$383	\$246	\$148	\$98
CAT 7	\$102,501 – \$115,000	\$621	\$435	\$280	\$168	\$112
CAT 8	\$115,001 – \$130,000	\$700	\$490	\$315	\$189	\$126
CAT 9	\$130,001 – \$145,000	\$791	\$554	\$356	\$214	\$142
CAT 10	\$145,001 – \$160,000	\$882	\$617	\$397	\$238	\$159
CAT 11	\$160,001+	\$973	\$681	\$438	\$263	\$175
DoD Contractors and Specified Space Available	Not Applicable	\$ 1,477	\$1,034	\$665	\$399	\$266
HOURLY RATE: \$8.00						
Multiple Child Reductions and Total Family Income Categories do not apply to Hourly Care.						
FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE: All patrons must disclose their total Family Income. Failure to disclose the Total Family Income will result in the denial of care. MULTIPLE CHILD REDUCTION (MCR): 15% MCR is offered to the 2nd and subsequent children in regularly scheduled programs. Full fee is charged for the child in the most expensive care option, e.g., Full Day CDC care vs. SAC. 15% MCR is offered to 2nd and subsequent children in Youth Sports programs occurring during the same season. DoD Contractors and Specified Space Available Patrons are not eligible for the MCR. LATE PICK-UP FEES: Family fee of \$1.00 per minute for first 15 minutes then \$8.00 for next 45 mins. per child/site. If Family has children at different sites, late pick-up fees are assessed per site. Fee is payable before the child is readmitted to care. LATE PAYMENT FEES: Payment for regularly scheduled Full Day, Part Day/Part Time and Before/After School Care is due by the 5th business day of the payment cycle. For services billed twice a month (1st and 15th), a one-time \$10.00 per child late payment fee will be assessed on the 6th business day of each missed payment cycle. For any regularly scheduled activities billed on a monthly basis, a one-time late payment fee of \$20.00 per child will be assessed on the 6th business day after the 1st of the month billing. *PART TIME CARE: Applies to specialized Part Time programs, includes Part Time Kindergarten care (for children attending a part day [AM or PM] Kindergarten program). **PART DAY ENRICHMENT: Also applies to Installations that operate on a 4 day a week schedule (e.g. 4 Day 3.5 Hrs.)						

Note: The fees charged by different CDCs vary based on the cost of living near the installation.

Figure 10. Cost Fee Structure – School Year 2023–2024.
Source: Monterey Road CDC (2024).



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APPENDIX B. SAMPLE COMMANDING OFFICER'S SUMMARY LETTER

**Child and Youth Programs
Annual Unannounced HQ Inspection
1 – 5 January 2022
COMMANDING OFFICER'S SUMMARY**

The Commander, Navy Installation Command (N926) Headquarters (HQ) annual certification inspection, required by the Military Child Care Act, is part of the ongoing comprehensive quality cycle that ensures military children and families receive the highest quality services possible.

The HQ inspection evaluates compliance with current regulations and requirements as measured by Inspection Criteria in the following areas: General Management; Facilities, Health, Safety & Risk Management; and Programming.

Programs Inspected

Child Development Center
School Age Care Program
School Liaison Program
Youth Programs

Quality Assurance *(CDC, 24/7 Centers, and SAC only)*

CDCs and 24/7 Programs must be accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). NAEYC is a nationally recognized accrediting body for child development programs. They set and monitor industry standards for high quality early childhood education programs and accredits programs that meet the standards.

School Age Care Programs must be accredited through the Council on Accreditation (COA). COA is a nationally recognized accrediting body for child and youth development programs. COA sets and monitors industry standards for high quality after school and youth programs and accredits programs that meet the standards.

CDC	All programs have accreditation from NAEYC as required.
SAC	Program has accreditation from COA as required.

Utilization as of 1 January 2022 *(CDC, 24/7 and SAC only)*

Age	Currently Enrolled	Capacity
0 – 5 years	150	200
6 – 12 years	75	100

Age	Immediate Need	Unmet Need
Infant	262	260
Pretoddler	248	201
Toddler	187	154
Preschool	156	112
School Age	39	16

Page 1 of 2

Figure 11. Example of Commanding Officer Summary Letter, page 1. Source: Navy CYP (2021).



Youth Programs Usage

	Users	Average Daily Attendance
Teen Programs	150	10
Youth Sports Enrollment	200	Soccer

CY22 Inspections are not being scored

Detailed Program Level Reports of all inspection findings have been provided to the Installation and Region CYP Managers. Best Practices have been shared with program personnel, as appropriate.

COMMANDER ATTENTION ITEMS

- Maintenance issues are not corrected, or mitigated, in a timely manner, creating health/sanitation and safety issues.

Sustaining DoD Certification

CY Programs must correct all identified deficiencies within 90 days of identification, providing the response to CNIC (N926) 60 days from the date of the Executive Outbrief.

If deficiencies, such as playground renovations, require longer than 90 days to correct, an extension request for additional time to make the correction must be submitted to CNIC (N926) along with the response to the inspection report. The request must include a detailed POA&M and interim safety measures that have been put in place, if applicable.

Once the program is in 100% compliance with CNIC inspection criteria, programs will receive a DoD Certificate to Operate/Navy Compliance Letter.

Thank you for the opportunity to visit your CY Programs. The programs are offering a variety of developmentally appropriate activities to support the children and youth attending. Should you have any questions, please contact your Installation CYP Director or the POCs below:

Marc Meeker
CYP Inspection Team Lead
Marc.meeker@navy.mil
901-xxx-xxxx

Dr. Janie Heisner
CYP Inspection Team Supervisor
Janie.heisner@navy.mil
901-600-9538

Page 2 of 2

Figure 12. Example of Commanding Officer Summary Letter, page 2. Source: Navy CYP (2021)



APPENDIX C. NSAM LA MESA CDC NAEYC ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATE



Figure 13. NSAM La Mesa NAEYC Accreditation Certificate. Note: Photo taken in person at the facility.



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APPENDIX D. POM MONTEREY ROAD CDC NAEYC ACCREDITATION CERTIFICATE



Figure 14. POM Monterey Road NAEYC Accreditation Certificate. Note: Photo taken in person at the facility.



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APPENDIX E. TEACHING STRATEGIES GOLD RESEARCH FOUNDATION CHART

Table 2. Teaching Strategies research foundation summary. Adapted from Teaching Strategies (2010).

Objectives	Dimensions	Age Ranges (Color Codes)
Social-Emotional	1. Regulates own emotions and behaviors	
	a. Manages feelings	
	b. Follows limits and expectations	
	c. Takes care of own needs appropriately	
	2. Establishes and sustains positive relationships	
	a. Forms relationships with adults	
	b. Responds to emotional cues	
	c. Interacts with peers	
	d. Makes friends	
	3. Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations	
Physical	a. Balances needs and rights of self and others	
	b. Solves social problems	
	4. Demonstrates traveling skills	
	5. Demonstrates balancing skills	
	6. Demonstrates gross-motor manipulative skills	
	7. Demonstrates fine-motor strength and coordination	
Language	a. Uses fingers and hands	
	b. Uses writing and drawing tools	
	8. Listen to and understands increasingly complex language	
	a. Comprehends language	
	b. Follows directions	
	9. Uses language to express thoughts and needs	
	a. Uses an expanding expressive vocabulary	
	b. Speaks clearly	
	c. Uses conventional grammar	
	d. Tells about another time or place	
Cognitive	10. Uses appropriate conversational and other communication skills	
	a. Engages in conversations	
	b. Uses social rules of language	
	11. Demonstrates positive approaches to learning	
	a. Attends and engages	
	b. Persists	
	c. Solves problems	
	d. Shows curiosity and motivation	
	e. Shows flexibility and inventiveness in thinking	
	12. Remembers and connects experiences	
Literacy	a. Recognizes and recalls	
	b. Makes connections	
	13. Uses classification skills	
	14. Uses symbols and images to represent something not present	
	a. Thinks symbolically	
	b. Engages in socio-dramatic play	
	15. Demonstrates phonological awareness	
	a. Notices and discriminates rhymes	
	b. Notices and discriminates alliteration	
	c. Notices and discriminates smaller and smaller units of sound	
Mathematics	d. Applies phonics concepts and knowledge of word structure to decode text	
	16. Demonstrates knowledge of the alphabet	
	a. Identifies and names letters	
	b. Uses letter-sound knowledge	
	17. Demonstrates knowledge of print and its uses	
	a. Uses and appreciates books	
	b. Uses print concepts	
	18. Comprehends and responds to books and other texts	
	a. Interacts during read-alouds and book conversations	
	b. Uses emergent reading skills	
	c. Retells stories	
	d. Uses context clues to read and comprehend texts	
	e. Reads fluently	
	19. Demonstrates emergent writing skills	
	a. Writes names	
	b. Writes to convey meaning	
	c. Writes using conventions	
	d. Understands and uses place value and base ten	
	e. Applies properties of mathematical operations and relationships	
	f. Applies number combinations and mental number strategies in mathematical operations	
	20. Uses number concepts and operations	
	a. Counts	
	b. Quantifies	
	c. Connects numerals with their quantities	
	21. Explores and describes spatial relationships and shapes	
	a. Understands spatial relationships	
	b. Understands shapes	
	22. Compares and measures	
	a. Measure objects	
	b. Measures time and money	
	c. Represents and analyzes data	
	23. Demonstrates knowledge of patterns	

Color Coding Legend	
	0-1 years
	1-2 years
	2-3 years
	3 (Preschool)
	4 (Pre-K)
	Kindergarten



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