

## The Nordic School Curriculum and Learning Framework

*This curriculum and learning framework is based upon the Nordic School's proven practices and experiences as well as educational resources from the Nordic countries, which include Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. Nordic Pedagogy refers to a Nordic approach to both the theory and practice of teaching and learning. At the Nordic School, Nordic culture, traditions and, for the Nordic speaking children, languages also play an important role within the pedagogy and within the larger framework.*

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## **Key elements of a Nordic pedagogy**

*The key elements outlined below will be incorporated into every aspect of the Nordic School's pedagogical practices. The school believes that childhood has intrinsic value and promotes a holistic approach to child development in which play, care, learning and formative development are integrated throughout all aspects of the school's program. The Nordic School will build on fundamental human values, such as respect for human dignity and nature, freedom of thought and expression, compassion, diversity, equality and solidarity, as these are entrenched in human rights law. Specifically, the Nordic School adheres to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and consistently works to ensure that it is meeting every child's need for security, care, belongingness and respect and enabling each child to participate in and contribute to the school community.*

## **Core values**

### *Equality*

Equality, or the idea that every individual should enjoy equal rights, status and opportunities, is an important value in Nordic societies. All persons, regardless of birthplace, gender, religion, ethnicity, and age should be able to live fulfilling lives. At the Nordic School, children will learn what equality means, why it is important and how to behave and treat each other in order to ensure equal opportunities. Gender equality, the idea that girls, boys, women and men are equally valuable and have equal rights, is at the heart of Nordic values and their education systems. The Nordic School will ensure that children are given equal opportunities to be seen, heard, to participate in all activities, and a chance to be who they are, regardless of gender roles, and will work to challenge limiting gender roles and stereotypes.

### *Democracy*

In Nordic countries, democracy and democratic skills are deeply rooted values in society, home, and school environments. At the Nordic School, we emphasize children's personal and social development as active members and participants in a society that is based on democratic principles. In this context, children learn how to express themselves as they make independent judgments and take personal action. They also learn the importance of compromise and the importance of seeing others as equals. Additionally, children learn to see themselves as an important part of the school and community. These experiences ultimately lay the foundations for lifelong learning and participation in a global society.

### *Diversity and mutual respect*

According to the Nordic value of diversity and mutual respect ("*mangfold*"), children benefit from interacting across different ethnicities, languages, religions, genders and cultures as this helps them to better understand and participate in an intercultural environment. At the Nordic School, each child is valued for being who they are, and each child is a respected member of the school community. As a member of the community, children will discover that there are many ways in which people think, act and live. They will also be encouraged to be curious about and reflect on similarities and differences and recognize the myriad ways that people can learn from one another. Additionally, children are encouraged to understand and respect both small and large differences of opinion and to see how each person's individual characteristics contributes to and strengthens the community and the world we live in. The Nordic School uses diversity as a resource in its pedagogical practice and supports and empowers children according to their respective cultural and individual circumstances. Given its Tanzanian context and Nordic affiliations, the Nordic School is uniquely positioned to focus on the importance of diversity and mutual respect both by integrating it into daily life and by providing specific examples of especially Tanzanian and Nordic traditions, values, customs, religions and lifestyles.

### *Curiosity*

At the Nordic School, children's individual interests are used to foster curiosity, motivation and interest in learning. Children are encouraged to wonder, be inquisitive, ask questions, and seek out answers and information. Through this process, children are also encouraged to be creative, take risks and dare to learn and try new things. Additionally, through the development and implementation of projects that incorporate children's interests and ideas, children develop a desire for acquiring new knowledge and expressing themselves creatively and learn that they can use their own ideas to solve problems, create, and become lifelong learners.

### *Acknowledgement*

At the Nordic School, acknowledgement ("*anerkendelse*") is used as a pedagogical approach through which teachers connect with children on children's terms. The interaction between children and teachers is consistently respectful and empathetic and through supportive communication and trust-based relationships, teachers help children to identify, express and deal with their emotions and thoughts. At the same time, teachers also work to develop children's abilities to see and understand the feelings and perspectives of others as they learn that everyone is entitled to his or her own feelings, experiences and thoughts. By understanding, acknowledging, and taking into consideration children's feelings and perceptions, teachers are able to guide them to use their emotions, thoughts and reactions in a constructive way. Ultimately, this approach enables children to feel seen, heard and understood, and with time, be able to acknowledge, accept, and process their own feelings and thoughts independently.

### *Personal formative development*

Personal formative development ("*danning*") is the molding of an individual's personality, behaviour, moral attitude and emotional well-being through upbringing, socialization, environment and education. It also entails the ability to think independently, seek knowledge, reflect on and challenge adopted truths. Through personal formative development, people are empowered to assess and evaluate their upbringing and preconceived notions and make their own judgments based on what they, in conjunction with others, believe to be right and true. Therefore, it is about developing knowledge, values and norms in the community together, through dialogue and an inquisitive approach. The Nordic School approaches the aspect of personal formative development by facilitating meaningful experiences and encouraging identity formation, positive self-awareness, and social competence in all children. Children are taught to question themselves and others. Through dialogue, their beliefs and perceptions of the world around them are challenged in order to develop their ability to be critical thinkers. The school supports children's involvement and participation in the community and values the varied needs and opinions of all children. Diversity and differences within the group are seen as a strength and used as a starting point for children's exploration, discovery and learning.

### *Childhood*

At the Nordic School, childhood is seen as being one of the most important phases of life. The early skills that children learn in regulating their behaviors, emotions, and attention provide the foundation for later abilities to persist with hard tasks and to pursue interests over a longer period of time. At the Nordic

School, children take center stage and are seen as individuals with their own thoughts, feelings, and abilities to learn and make sense of the world. Integral to childhood is friendship and the numerous interactions children have with their peers. Children should feel that they are important members of their school communities and be able to engage in positive interactions with other children. At the Nordic School, children are encouraged to develop friendships and social relationships and are supported in their efforts to play with others and experience what friendship means to them and their peers.

### *School Meals*

A great deal of food education occurs early in life and the role of school meals is to be a pedagogical tool to teach good nutrition and eating habits as well as to increase consumption of healthy foods. Therefore, the Nordic School takes pride in offering nutritious meals and snacks that are representative of both Tanzanian and Western cuisine. Additionally, and equally as important, mealtimes serve as a social activity and a socializing process. Along with nutritional and language opportunities, children practice numerous social skills. They develop table manners, being considerate of others, self-esteem, and independence. They also learn cultural norms around eating and mealtimes. Finally, a pleasant meal in a calm atmosphere allows children to take their time when eating and helps them to understand how food, eating, mealtimes and spending time with each other helps promote their well-being.

### *Languages*

At the Nordic School, the main language of instruction is English as this is, or will eventually become, the common language of all teachers and children. The school furthermore prioritizes having teachers who are proficient in either Swedish, Danish or Norwegian. The teachers are encouraged to use these languages especially when around children, who are familiar with these three Scandinavian languages. The three languages have many common features and most people who are proficient in one of these will understand the others. The extent to which a language is spoken at the school is dependent on the teachers employed at the moment as the teachers communicate in the Nordic language in which they are fluent or native speakers.

The school has a long tradition of serving multilingual children and families and, as a result, believes firmly that children are adept language learners and that exposure to more than one language is enriching in many ways. For example, early multiple language learners have shown to be better in dealing with other cognitive tasks, their overall mental ability is enhanced, they develop increased

abilities to multitask, they develop higher self-esteem, and acquire cultural understanding that will benefit them for a lifetime. Additionally, through language immersion, children acquire the rules of language almost incidentally, and native accents can be reproduced with ease.

## **Learning areas**

### **Social Competence**

*social interaction, reflection, empathy, interpersonal communication, norms, boundaries, conflict resolution, self-esteem, respect, self-reliance*

At the Nordic School significant focus is placed on developing children's social competence, which serves as the foundation upon which expectations for future interaction with others is built. Social competence develops over time through interpersonal social interactions and includes prosocial skills, such as being friendly and cooperative, as well as self-control skills, such as regulation of emotions and problem solving. In order to develop social competence, children must have self confidence in their own abilities to navigate social situations and they must feel that they are important members of the group. At Nordic School, children are encouraged to engage in positive interaction with others, develop their listening and reflection skills, express their own opinions, and understand and share their classmates' perspectives and feelings. Teachers guide children to communicate and interact in positive ways with peers and teach them when and how to compromise. Ultimately, children are supported in learning to maintain a balance between looking after their own needs and being considerate of the needs of others. Children are also encouraged to comply with the group's social norms and rules. At the Nordic School, norms for interaction are discussed openly with children who are invited to participate in developing these norms together. Additionally, children are supported as they work through difficult and challenging emotions and interactions with adults and with their peers. Through a variety of conflict resolution emotional regulation strategies, and the use of an acknowledging approach, children are encouraged to identify their feelings, communicate with and listen to others, empathize with others, and work toward solving conflicts in peaceful and respectful ways. The Nordic School is fully committed to preventing, stopping and following-up on discrimination, exclusion, bullying, harassment and unhealthy patterns of interaction.

### **Language & Communication**

*interaction, comprehension, speech, production, linguistic memory, vocabulary, awareness, linguistic identities, symbols, body language, expression*

The Nordic School promotes a versatile language environment in which children are exposed to meaningful interactions in several languages, but with English as the main language of instruction. This environment enables children to explore and develop language comprehension, linguistic competence and a multitude of different forms of communication. In turn, children learn to express themselves, receive, interpret, and send non-verbal and verbal messages, build relationships, participate in the school community, play and experiment with rhythm, sounds, symbols and words, as well as stimulate linguistic curiosity and awareness. Speaking, singing, reading, drawing and writing activities are integrated throughout the curriculum and across all learning areas. Additionally, through weekly visits to the Nordic School Library, the children enjoy reading and storytelling to strengthen comprehension and vocabularies in different languages.

### **Body & Movement**

*well-being, physical activity, health, motor skills, balance, hygiene, body awareness, senses*

Through physical activity that is naturally varied in terms of duration, intensity and pace, children develop balance, body control, coordination, and overall physical capabilities in order to experience joy, motivation and achievement at their individual levels, and to use their bodies to sense, experience, learn and create. Children develop their gross motor skills through running, bicycling, climbing, as well as swimming, dancing and yoga among others. Children also work to refine their fine motor skills through activities like drawing, painting, beadwork, cutting & gluing. Another important aspect of physical health and well-being is the relationship between physical activity and rest. In Preschool, every day after lunch, children are encouraged to rest or sleep, and unwind in a quiet and peaceful atmosphere.

### **Creativity & Art**

*expression, music, song, dance, drama, design, visual arts, curiosity, imagination, rhythm, exploration*

At the Nordic School, children focus on the process, or act, of creation, instead of the end product. Children experience, explore and participate in various musical, visual, verbal and physical forms of expression, both individually and as a group. These varied modes of expression promote children's learning potential, social skills and capacity to understand and interpret the surrounding world. Children are encouraged to be curious, wonder, explore and immerse themselves in creative processes that foster their imagination and creative thinking abilities, and provide them with opportunities to talk about the impressions, emotions or experiences they have had in their interactions with different art forms. As such, activities are both planned and spontaneous in character. Children paint, draw, cut, work with clay,

collage, construct, sing, dance, make music, listen to music, build with blocks and play with natural materials among others.

## **Nature**

*natural phenomena, environment, sustainability, climate change, science, recycling, experiments*

At the Nordic School, children learn to enjoy nature through a multitude of experiences and activities at all times of year, and, in true Nordic tradition, in all weather. Children use natural materials as an integral part of their play and work. Additionally, children identify, discuss and examine different animals and plants, as well as learn about the various cycles found within nature. Through these interactions and activities, children learn to appreciate and connect with nature and develop an attitude of inquiry, curiosity and respect for their natural and physical environments, as well as for natural phenomena and processes. Additionally, children learn how humans, nature and society interact with and affect each other, with the main focus being on climate change and sustainability. Children learn how everyday choices and actions can reflect a conscious and responsible relationship with nature and develop an appreciation for the value of a sustainable way of living in and with nature as it relates to growing food, consuming energy, recycling, repairing, reusing and reducing waste.

## **Mathematics**

*patterns, quantities, space, shapes, directions, amounts, sizes, sorting, categorization*

The Nordic School promotes mathematical thinking from an early age, as children learn to observe, analyze, structure and understand relationships and patterns in their surroundings and in their everyday lives. Children are encouraged to ask questions, reason and seek solutions related to mathematical ideas, concepts and dilemmas. To this end, children explore and play with spaces, shapes and patterns as well as numbers. Children also compare quantity and size as it relates to toys, materials and objects in daily situations and engages in sorting activities and get familiar with the concept of categorization. Additionally, they are exposed to concepts of time as they discuss and participate in activities related to the times of day, months, and seasons.

## **Society & Culture**

*local community, commitment, engagement, worldviews, traditions, diversity, norms, respect*

The Nordic School focuses on increasing knowledge about the richness of communities, traditions and lifestyles within different countries and especially within our host country of Tanzania. Children are encouraged to take pride in their cultural affiliations, as an important step in their identity development.



They are also invited to explore and better understand Tanzanian culture and customs as well as learn and use Swahili. The Nordic School promotes an understanding of and respect for cultural diversity, different ways of living, different religions and traditions and different family structures represented by our children and staff and their various countries of origin, as the school firmly believes that diversity enriches and benefits the entire school community. Additionally, daily life at the Nordic School gives insight into being a part of a community and participating in a democratic society. Children are challenged with ethical questions and discussions related to issues of justice and equity such as friendships, determining between right and wrong and reflecting on and engaging in rules and rulemaking.

## **Learning approaches**

### **Play**

Play is a key focus at the Nordic School and the inherent value of play is recognized as beneficial in and of itself. Play is what children do, and when children play, they learn about themselves, each other, and their environment. Play promotes children's autonomy and capacity. As children make choices about what and how to play, they are also deciding what and how to learn. Play also offers children the space to explore their most important social and emotional ideas and feelings. Nordic countries have a long tradition of play-based school programming, and the Nordic School prioritizes maintaining time and spaces for independent, child-directed play through which the children can grow and learn.

### **Teacher-led**

At times, it is also important for children to participate in structured, teacher-led activities that allow them to further develop more specific learning outcomes. The planning of these activities is based on children's interests and needs, and the learning areas described above lay the foundation for the planning process. For example, each morning during circle time, teachers review the day's activities and discuss the date, weekday, year and weather. Depending on the interests and needs of the group, teachers may facilitate a more directed conversation on the characteristics of a particular season, or they may choose to focus on the number that represents the date and ways to count or quantify the number. Teachers often use this more structured time to ensure that all of the learning areas are being developed by all children through a variety of activities including, but not limited to, sports, reading, arts and crafts, introducing letters and numbers or interacting with nature and the environment.

## **Project-based**

At the Nordic School, project-based learning is an in-depth investigation and exploration of a topic, question, problem, or challenge in which children are actively engaging in the learning process. In this context, teachers serve as guides rather than instructors and encourage children to take risks and embrace creativity. Children work together and with their teachers to negotiate, plan and work through various phases of a project.

## **Assessment**

The Nordic School believes that formal, standardized assessment too narrowly and oftentimes unfairly describes children. Therefore, the school has a long tradition of using informal assessment measures to capture and describe children's well-being and development. Teachers focus on getting to know children in the context of their play and in their interactions in small groups in order to observe, reflect on and document children's interests, thinking, learning, and needs. They then use these records and documentation to provide differentiated goals that relate to socio-emotional well-being as well as to specific learning areas. These records and documentation are also instrumental in formulating activities, determining teaching methods, developing learning environments, and planning structured parent-teacher conferences.

## **Home and school**

The Nordic school works in partnership with each child's home to meet the children's needs and to ensure a holistic approach to development based on care, instruction and education. While parents and guardians have the primary responsibility for their child's development and learning, the Nordic School and its staff shall complement and support the home by facilitating the best possible conditions for each child's rich and diverse development. Through ongoing collaboration, parents and guardians will be given opportunities to influence the planning and implementation of school-based activities in order to best meet the needs of all children. The best interest of the child shall always be the primary consideration in all interactions between home and school.

To this end, the Nordic school staff will encourage a healthy and meaningful relationship between school and home that is based on mutual trust and respect. Parent and guardian engagement will be facilitated at the individual level as well as at the group level. On an individual level, staff will create time and space

for dialogue concerning all children on a regular basis, typically, but not limited to, drop-off and pick-up. Additionally, staff will contact parents and guardians when there are concerns about a particular child's development or well-being. Furthermore, parents and guardians of Preschool children will be called in for conferences twice annually. Parents and guardians of After School children will be invited to request a conference, or asked to meet with teachers as needed. At the school and group level, the Nordic School will invite all parents and guardians to parent meetings twice per school year. Also, through participation in the Annual General Meeting, parents contribute to shaping the priorities of the school.

### **Nordic School traditions**

- Tanzania Culture and Traditions with Culminating Ngoma Event
- Nordic Christmas Traditions including Lucia Celebration and Child/Staff Christmas Lunch with Visit from Santa
- "Fastelavn" & Carnival Celebrations
- Nordic Easter Traditions including Child/Staff Easter Lunch
- End of the Year Project (Fairytale or Circus)

### **Transitions**

#### **Transitioning to the Nordic School**

In cooperation with parents and guardians, the Nordic School works to give each child a safe and successful start in the preschool and Afterschool. Initially, teachers establish relationships with families and students through an exchange of experiences, expectations, general routines and individual needs. Then, children enter the Nordic School gradually, through a settling in process that is tailored toward each child's individual needs. This settling in process encourages home and school to work together to ensure that each child has a positive transition to the Nordic School that is based on safety and trust.

#### **Transitioning within the Nordic School**

Within the preschool children transition between the younger Kidogo group and the older Kubwa group. This transition generally happens around the age of 3, but will ultimately be determined by the Nordic School staff's evaluation of a child's overall readiness. Readiness is assessed based on numerous factors including, but not limited to: The child's interest in and ability to participate and follow the routines of the group, the child's ability to follow instructions, and the child's ability to be self-reliant in situations such as dressing and undressing, washing hands, and taking initiative to go to the toilet. Once children



leave Preschool and begin attending elementary school elsewhere, they may transition from the preschool to Afterschool. Here, too, children enter the Afterschool program gradually, through a settling in process that is tailored toward each child's individual needs. During all of these transitions, teachers and staff closely monitor children to ensure that they feel safe and welcome. At the same time, teachers and staff also provide children with the space and time they need to acclimatize, form relationships with adults and children in a natural context, and, when ready, engage in play, explore and learn.

### **Transitioning between the Nordic School and Primary School**

The Nordic School recognizes the need to work with the oldest children in Preschool so that they can be as prepared as possible to enter primary school. To ensure a smooth transition, children should be familiar with what will happen when they start primary school and should have a positive outlook toward this transition. To this end, the Nordic School has created a "Darasa" program that involves preparatory classes in which children nearing the primary school age are introduced to a classroom environment. During Darasa, the teacher promotes children's abilities to focus, concentrate, and maintain interest for longer periods of time. The teacher also encourages children to have the confidence to work and solve problems independently. With regards to academics, children are introduced to the alphabet, foundations for reading, writing and basic mathematics through a playful approach. Ultimately, the Darasa program helps children to look forward to starting primary school with curiosity and excitement while also helping them find closure from their preschool experience.