

Early Learning: 3 Months to 3 Years

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June 15, 2016

Name:

Jennie Monness, Center Director

How your clients refer to you:

Jennie (in the past it has been Ms. Jennie when I worked with older children)

Company:

[Explore + Discover](#)

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How many years have you been in business in NYC?

Our school opened September 2014

How did you get your start and what was your initial inspiration?

Explore + Discover was opened by Daniel Koffler (and his family); he is our General Manager and Founder. It was opened on the basis that NYC was missing a program that offered high quality learning and care for children in their earliest years. We researched all that was out there for “best practices” and put it into a program that appealed to not just the working parent, but also the parent who wanted their child to be exposed to socialization, stimulation and respectful care all in one program. Daniel hired me to run the program as the Center Director and implement what we feel is the most optimal approach to group learning for children three months old to three years old.

We are inspired by the RIE® approach which was founded in 1978 in Los Angeles by infant specialist and educator Magda Gerber. RIE® stands for Resources for Infant Educators “which honors infants and young children as equal members in relationships....When allowed to unfold in their own way and in their own time, children discover, manifest and inspire the best in themselves and in others.”

*While we are **NOT** a RIE® certified program, this approach inspires us in how we treat children under our care. However, we also are inspired by other “best practices” in the field of Early Childhood, such as the Reggio Emilia approach which is more applicable to our students who are over 18 months old. We incorporate music and art in our everyday life at E+D as well. Overall, we feel that we have created our own combination of what we feel is the most optimal approach to social learning.*

What do you feel differentiates you from others in your field?

Everything about our program is different from what else is out there in New York for many different reasons. We offer a high quality program for a wide range of families. Whether it be the parents who both need to work, for parents who want something other than a nanny, for parents who want their child exposed to a social atmosphere and educational setting at an early age or for the parent who just needs some time to herself. Our staff are highly

qualified in early childhood education and almost all of our head teachers have a Master's degree in the field. We are able to give babies and toddlers the attention they so much deserve by having three to four teachers per classroom.

Another remarkable part of our program is how we incorporate music. We not only have a music teacher who visits each classroom twice a week, but many of our teachers have been trained and learned to play guitar; they are able to utilize the many instruments hanging in the classrooms so that musical experiences can happen throughout the day. Additionally, we have named our own program called "Music Before Words" with saxophone player, Jonathan Ragonese, and have different musicians visit the children in their classrooms several times a month. These include a harp player last month and a recent visit from a percussionist. Our end of the year "Music Before Words" concert will take place at the end of this month.

One more aspect of our school that really stands out is our "Open Art Studio" which takes place every Friday from 8:30-10:30 a.m. This is a time when our families can stop by with their child and participate in whatever is happening in our art studio (with Brooke, our art teacher). It is also something we invite outside families to and some friends of mine even attend with their children to expose them to some creative (and messy) play. You'll often find our infants and toddlers covered in paint in their diapers during Open Art Studio because it's a time where we really want to allow them to explore the materials in whatever way they want. (We obviously use all non-toxic and many organic materials).

What do you feel gives you longevity in this big city with so many options?

That my staff and I truly love what we do. We will never stop researching and learning the best ways to approach care and learning for children 0-3 years old. We also offer a program that does not exist: by approaching early learning in a way that is unique, combining respectful care, confidence in young children as capable individuals, and adding enriching activities such as "messy art" and our "Music Before Words" program for even our youngest babies.

How do you positively impact your students?

Parents know I relate to them on a level of deep understanding that we are caring for their most prized possession. They know my staff and I will always implement new enriching activities and opportunities for the children under our care. They trust that we will continue to love these children as if they were our own. Parents feel confident and secure in the fact that their children are not only under the care of highly qualified staff but that they are around other children and learning every second of the day.

What is your favorite part of your job?

My favorite part is when I get to meet new families, mostly first-time parents, often when they are just pregnant. It is such a special time in their lives and such an important decision they are making in finding what care they want for their baby. Being able to give them a tour of our program and show them that high quality learning does exist even for babies who are 3 months old is a pleasure. Whether it's a family who immediately knows that they are seeing something special or if it's a family that comes back and tells me "we've seen 100 programs and this is where I want my baby to be", that's the best feeling in the world.

My most favorite part, of course, is being around these adorable children every day and seeing them grow. It's a remarkable experience to be a part of.

What is your favorite secret NYC spot?

If you mean for children, its Explore + Discover. We're still a "start up" and I still consider us a "secret" for that reason. The feeling you get when coming into our school is really powerful, you just feel like "wow, this place really

gets it” when it comes to early learning. I believe in offering beautiful things in a beautiful setting for young children and that’s what you’ll find at E+D.

How do you benefit mamas?

There are moms out there who find the “perfect nanny” and there are moms who don’t. There are moms who want a nanny for the flexibility and “one-on-one” care but who also want their child exposed to more of a learning environment that is more social. There are moms who just need some time to get things done, but have a lot of guilt about that. For all of these reasons and so many others, we benefit all the different types of moms out there: the mom who must work full time, the mom who needs flexible scheduling options because she works part-time, the mom who wants a balance between a nanny and socialization for their children, or the mom who wants to meet other moms (we offer many opportunities for parents to meet each other and we have a very robust family community).

What is the most memorable feedback a client has given you?

One mom once told me “Jennie, this job isn’t what you do, it’s who you are” and to me, that meant that by doing what I love, I am making an impact on not only the children under my care but their entire family. By doing what I love every day, it is evident to my clientele that I don’t do this because it’s my job, but because I absolutely love children, especially ones who are just figuring out the world for the first time!

Pay it forward and name your top colleagues in the same field or related field:

Daniel Koffler, E+D founder

Renee Bock, E+D Chief Academic Officer

Jonathan Ragonese, musician and co-founder of “Music Before Words”

Anna Ruth Myers, RIE practitioner

What is the best advice anyone has ever given you? Or what is your "mantra" / words to live by?

My professional favorite is “Be careful what you teach, it may interfere with what they are learning” by Magda Gerber. This quote helps me and my staff (and should help parents) understand that at this young age, the children write their own curriculum and that the learning is in their self-initiated play. Allowing them room to play and explore on their own is not only ok, but incredibly valuable to their learning process.

As moms, the day can escape us, what is your best time-saving trick?

I’m not a mom yet but I’ve been around enough of them to know what some of the best tricks are. The best time-saving trick is having patience. It may sound like a contradiction, being patient takes longer, right? But the minute a child senses our patience is running out, it adds time to the clock. Toddlers (and even infants) can sense when we’re rushing through anything from a diaper change to putting their coat on. By giving them and ourselves more time to breathe and taking a moment to include them in the process of everything we’re doing with them, we are actually saving time, headaches, and a lot of stress.