

## **Children's House Curriculum**

The absorbent mind and the sensitive periods are the driving force for exploration for the child from three to six years old. Montessori realized that young children take in everything in their environment: physical objects, language, people, sounds, smells. She called this amazing, unique ability of the young child "the absorbent mind." In addition, Dr. Montessori realized that for every child there are sensitive periods for certain experiences that are central to human independence and education. If the sensitive periods are missed, acquiring the knowledge or skill is laborious rather than inspiring to the child. The child from three to six is constructing herself and the lessons are designed to respond to her needs based on the sensitive periods, the power of the absorbent mind, and the human tendency to explore. These sensitive periods include order, movement, grace and courtesy, refinement of the senses, language, spatial relationships, music, and mathematics. The Children's House child is in the process of self-construction and the child's developmental imperative is at the center of her work.

**The Exercises of Practical Life** are fundamental activities that are critical for the development of the child and that lay the foundation of all future work in Children's House. These activities are the essential, ordinary tasks that we adults perform to prepare, maintain, restore, and beautify our environments. These activities, familiar and fascinating to the young child, serve as a link and provide a secure bond between the home and the classroom environment. The multiple aims of the Exercises of Practical Life systematically support the child in the stages of complete development through adaptation and the development of the will, of concentration, and of independence. The Exercises of Practical Life include but are not limited to:

- I. Preliminary Exercises
  - Making a work choice
  - Choosing a working place
  - Carrying materials and trays
  - Handling materials
  - Carrying and setting down furniture
  
- II. Care of Self
  - Independence in hygiene
  - Dressing frames
  - Sewing activities
  - Care of personal belongings
  
- III. Care of the Environment
  - Dusting
  - Scrubbing
  - Window washing
  - Sweeping
  - Polishing
  - Ironing
  - Flower arranging

- Food preparation
  - Plant care
  - Animal care
- IV. Lessons of Grace and Courtesy
- How to walk around a mat
  - How to introduce oneself
  - How to apologize
  - How to observe
  - How to give and receive a compliment
  - How to ask questions
  - How to ask for and offer help
  - How to blow your nose
- V. Control of Movement
- Walking on the line
  - The silence activity

**The Sensorial Materials** are presented to help the child acquire consciousness of the immense wealth of impressions previously absorbed. Activities include pairing, grading, and sorting. Each set of materials focuses on one physical quality of a property, an idea we call the isolation of a property. In this way we help the child classify and distinguish all of these qualities that we perceive as abstractions. It is also through his work with the Sensorial materials that the child's small and large muscle coordination becomes refined. The materials indirectly prepare the child for intellectual activities that will follow in mathematics, writing, and the cultural subjects.

- I. Visual Sense
- Dimension
    - Cylinder blocks
    - Pink tower
    - Brown stair
    - Red rods
    - Knobless cylinders
  - Color
    - Color tablets
  - Form
    - Geometry cabinet and cards
    - Botany cabinet and cards
  - Combined aspects of the visual sense
    - Binomial and trinomial cubes
    - Constructive triangles
    - Decanomial square
    - Superimposed geometric figures
- II. Tactile Sense
- Sensitizing fingers

- Touch boards and touch tablets
- Fabrics
- III. Baric Sense
  - Baric tablets
- IV. Thermic Sense
  - Thermic bottles and thermic tablets
- V. Gustatory Sense
  - Tasting bottles
- VI. Olfactory Sense
  - Smelling bottles
- VII. Auditory Sense
  - Sound cylinders
  - Bells
  - Other musical instruments
- VIII. Stereognostic Sense
  - Geometry solids and cards
  - Stereognostic bags
  - Mystery bag

**The Language Activities** begin with spoken language, including simple conversation about the animals and objects in the environment, vocabulary enrichment through the cultural subjects, and the lessons of grace and courtesy. The children make the sound and symbol association through repeated tracing of the cursive Sandpaper Letters and by playing sound games. Then, because it is easier to write a word that you have in mind rather than to decode a word somebody else has written, the children begin writing short phonetic words with the Moveable Alphabet. They progress to longer words, words with phonemes and at the same time begin reading simple phonetic words and follow the same progression to more phonetically complex words. As the children become fluent readers, they begin to explore the function of words in a sentence. At this point they also begin writing stories and reports, both with the small Moveable Alphabets and in their own cursive handwriting. The progression of presentations is described below:

- I. Spoken Language
  - Enrichment of vocabulary
  - Three-period lessons
- II. Writing
  - Sound games
  - Sandpaper letters
  - Moveable alphabet
  - Metal insets
  - The art of handwriting
- III. Reading
  - Phonetic reading
  - Phonograms
  - Puzzle words
  - Function of words

- Word study
- Reading classification
- Reading analysis

**Mathematical Concepts and Facts** are absorbed experientially by the children through exploration with concrete materials that proceed from concrete to abstract representations of numerical concepts. The materials first isolate aspects of number and then progress through the basic operations: addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division including fractions.

- I. Quantities 1 to 10
  - Number rods
- II. Symbols 1 to 10
  - Sandpaper numbers
- III. Association of quantities and symbols 1 to 10
  - Number rods with cards
  - Spindle boxes
  - Zero activity
  - Cards and counters
  - Memory game of numbers
- IV. Decimal system quantities, symbols, and their relationships
  - Golden bead material introduction
  - Card material introduction
  - Formation of large numbers
  - Change game
- V. Arithmetic operations with complex numbers
  - Golden beads and card material
  - Stamp game and dot game
  - Word problems
  - Small and large bead frames
  - Division with racks and tubes
- VI. Linear counting and skip counting to 1000
  - Beads and sequence boards
  - Short and long bead chains with arrows
- VII. Arithmetic facts
  - Addition and subtraction strip boards
  - Multiplication and division boards
  - Multiplication with bead bars
  - Arithmetic fact charts
- VIII. Fractions
  - Skittles
  - Fraction insets

**The Cultural Subjects** include geography, music, biology, art, and history. These concepts are also presented through the use of concrete materials with considerable overlap with work in other areas of the classroom. In addition, specialists work with Children's House students and teachers to expand their work in these areas including second language study and, for five year olds, physical education. The following describes work in the classroom as well as work with specialists:

- I. Geography
  - The globes
  - Land and water forms
  - Puzzle maps of the continents
  - Cultural and biome folders
  - Climatic zone materials
  - Flags of the world
  - Homeland study: Minnesota
  
- II. Biology
  - Nomenclature card material
  - Description and definition games
  - Classification and sorting games
  - Life cycles
  - Leaf cabinet and cards
  - Exercises and care of plants and animals
  
- III. History
  - Introduction to the passage of time
  - Days of the week
  - The first timeline
  - My family tree
  
- IV. Music
  - Directed listening activities
  - Movement
  - Rhythm, pitched, and nonpitched percussion
  - Vocal exploration
  - The bells
  - Musical expression
  
- V. Art
  - Drawing line families
  - Observation drawing of simple objects
  - Drawing from imagination
  - Simple printmaking
  - Learning and mixing primary colors
  - Mixing paints
  - Cutting simple shapes

- Collage or repeated design
  - Working with clay
  - Drawing and painting a self portrait
  - Weaving
  - Making simple wood sculpture
  - Art appreciation
- VI. Second Language: French
- Basic vocabulary
  - Cultural topics
  - Holiday celebrations
  - Songs, games, and dances
  - Food
- VII. Physical Education
- Body awareness (balance, spatial relationships, agility, right/left usage)
  - Locomotor movements (skipping, leaping)
  - Non-locomotor movements
  - Manipulatives
  - Rhythmic movement
  - Apparatus activities
  - Simple group games
  - Yoga
  - Fitness and conditioning

During most of the morning, children may choose to participate in large motor activities in the Children's House Garden space, located just outside the classrooms, or in the school gym or cafeteria. Outdoors, they may pursue practical life activities of gardening or simply take their classroom materials out to enjoy working in the open air. When the weather is inclement, a variety of activities and materials focusing on movement skills are set up in indoor spaces. All activities are set up and supervised by Children's House Extended Day staff. Two children at a time from each classroom may participate.