OMS Montessori

The Casa Program

PRACTICAL LIFE

Practical life activities and materials help the child to master everyday tasks. They range from learning how to greet someone, how to squeeze a sponge or how to pour from a jug to more complex activities such as how to serve tea to a classroom guest. Practical life activities vary from culture to culture, but children the world over are naturally drawn to these activities. Children have seen their families performing these tasks of "daily living" and they have an inner urge to imitate the work of the adult.

Practical life activities are the first exercises introduced to the child when he enters the Montessori environment.

Preliminary Exercises Using Basic Movements

Each exercise is broken down into simple parts and presented in a precise way, which allows the child to successfully master the task through practice. These include:

- Pouring
- Squeezing a sponge
- Carrying a tray
- Cutting
- Rolling and unrolling mats
- Folding

Care of the Environment

- Indoor Environment
    - Sweeping
    - Dusting
    - Polishing
    - Washing the table
    - Care of plants
    - Arranging flowers
    - Washing windows
    - Laundry

- Outdoor Environment (activities vary by class)
    - Feeding the birds
    - Watering flowers
    - Sweeping or raking the leaves
    - Planting and weeding the garden

Care of the Person

- Hand washing
- Dressing frames - buttons, zippers, snaps, buckles, bows, and lacing frames
- Hanging up a coat
- Brushing teeth

Grace and Courtesy

These lessons are the customs and behaviours of society that allow the child to interact socially. These activities help him find his place in society and permit him to live harmoniously with other people. This includes:

- Greeting people
- Offering help
- Giving and receiving compliments
- Waiting one's turn
- Conflict resolution
- Coughing/Sneezing politely

Education of Movement

- Walking on the line
- Silence game

SENSORIAL

The sensorial activities are materials designed to help the child refine all of his senses. They include exercises for the discernment of size, shape, colour, texture, weight, sound, pitch, odour and taste. Most activities involve both matching and sequencing. All activities provide opportunities to introduce accurate vocabulary and to improve fine and gross motor control. In addition, many of the sensorial materials provide specific preparation for math and geometry. The sensorial area is classified by the following categories:

Visual Sense: discrimination of:

- Size
    - Cylinder blocks
    - Pink tower
    - Broad stair
    - Red rods
    - Knobless cylinders
    - Binomial and trinomial cube
- Colour
    - Colour boxes 1 to 3
- Shape
    - Geometric cabinet
    - Constructive triangles
    - Botany cabinet

- Tactile Sense
    - Touch tablets and boards
    - Discrimination of fabrics

Complex Senses: discrimination of:

- Weight
    - Baric tablets
- Temperature
    - Thermic bottles
    - Thermic tablets
- Shape:
    - Geometric solids
    - Mystery bag
    - Progressive exercises
- Taste
    - Tasting bottles
- Smell
    - Smelling bottles
- Sound
    - Loudness: sound boxes
    - Pitch: The bells

Art

The child is introduced to a variety of art techniques.

- Using a paintbrush
- Mixing colours and paints
- Printing
- Modeling with various mediums
- The life and times of the great artists
- Art classified cards

Music

The child is introduced to basic musical concepts.

- Listening activities
- Movement and music
- Rhythm instruments
- The bells
- Reading music
- Writing music
- Introduction to the orchestra and musical instruments
- The life and time of the great composers
- Directed listening to classical music

MOVEMENT PROGRAM

Movement opportunities are essential for the Casa aged child because movement is an integral part of human brain development. Montessori was a pioneer in recognizing this and observed that a child learns through all activity, not just sports-like movement.

The Casa curriculum provides the child with many opportunities to practice refining and co-ordinating their movements as they carry materials to their workspaces and return them, manipulate intricate pieces carefully and put them in their place, perform walking on the line exercises, and generally engage physically with their classroom environment.

In addition, a Casa Movement Program held in the Multi-Purpose Room, focuses on activities that promote and develop body awareness, gross motor and eye-hand co-ordination, co-operative play and listening skills. This is achieved through musical games, dancing, activities that develop hopping, skipping, jumping and running skills, playing with tunnels, hoops and scarves, running obstacle courses and activities that develop ball handling skills and general physical fitness. The program recognizes that each child is at their own stage of physical development and the emphasis is on listening, participation, doing one's best and having fun.

LANGUAGE

The Casa environment, and its many activities provide rich opportunities for the enhancement of language and vocabulary. Practical life and sensorial exercises help to train the hand to ensure that a child will be able to manipulate a pencil easily before he is asked to reproduce letters on paper. The sounds of the letters and their cursive formation are introduced with the sandpaper letters. Once children can communicate their own ideas in written form they are ready to begin to decipher what others have written. Some children discover how to read simply by the repetition of using the movable alphabet and others benefit from specific lessons and materials to assist them to make the leap into reading. The language curriculum also introduces children to the rudiments of grammar.

Vocabulary Enrichment and Self-Expression (Exploration of Language)

This area of the program helps the child expand his vocabulary, his ability to express himself and his phonological awareness. The activities include:

- Stories told by the teacher or by the children
- Stories read by the teacher or others
- Question games
- Sound games
- Classified picture cards
- Songs, finger plays & poetry

Writing: Making the Child's Thoughts Visible

Learning the code

- Hearing the sounds of the language
- Sandpaper letters, matching letters to the sounds

Self-expression

- Movable alphabet, creating words, exploring spelling
- Writing stories

Handwriting

- Sandpaper letters
- Metal insets
- Writing on chalkboards
- Writing on paper

Reading: Understanding the Thoughts of Others

After writing many words with the movable alphabet, many children begin to read spontaneously. If they do not, a series of exercises is introduced to assist them. We use a sequential approach to help each child become a fluent reader.

- Phonetic words (object boxes, phonetic reading cards)
- Phonograms (booklets)
- Sight words
- Reading classification
- Books

Further Exploration of Language

When the child can read, there are further exercises to explore the intricacies of language.

- Reading classified cards
- Word study (awareness of the structure of words)
    - Compound words
    - Prefixes
    - Suffixes
- Function of words
    - Nouns
    - Verbs
    - Articles
    - Adjectives
    - Prepositions
    - Conjunctions
    - Adverbs
- Sentence analysis (awareness of the structure of sentences)

MATHEMATICS

Mathematics and geometry activities follow the Montessori pattern of providing concrete experiences to introduce abstract concepts. The beginning math and geometry materials build on the sensorial exercises and lead directly into the

elementary curriculum. Children at the Casa level are introduced to numerals, quantities and counting up to the thousands. They learn what addition, multiplication, subtraction and division mean using concrete materials. The materials used for memorizing math facts help the child to recognize numerical sequences, patterns and relationships.

- Numbers to 10: Quantities & Numerals
  - Number rods
  - Sandpaper numerals
  - Number rods and numerals
  - Spindle boxes
  - Numerals and counters
  - Memory game of numbers
- Decimal system
  - Introduction to the decimal system
  - Association of quantity and numerals
  - Addition, multiplication, subtraction & division exercises using the decimal system materials
  - Stamp game
  - Dot game
- Numbers to 100
  - Teen beads & boards
  - Ten boards
  - Short bead chains
- Numbers to 1000: Linear counting and skip counting to 1000
  - Long bead chains
- Exploration and memorization of arithmetic facts
  - Addition and subtraction strip boards
  - Multiplication with bead bars
  - Multiplication and division boards
- Fractions
  - Fraction insets
- Passage to abstraction
  - Small and large bead frames

CULTURE

Cultural activities build on the practical life and sensorial experiences and introduce the child to music, art, cultures and traditions of peoples of the world, as well as basic concepts in geography, history, science, zoology and botany. For example, children learn about land and water forms, continents, countries, flags and the basic parts of plants and animals. The culture curriculum focuses on the interconnectedness of all life on earth and how important it is that the child becomes a caretaker of the earth. The child learns about habitats, ecosystems, their

relationship to each other and themselves and how they affect our sustainability on the earth.

We introduce relevant language after the child's sensorial experience in order to provide further language enrichment. After the child acquires reading and writing skills, he will pursue aspects of the curriculum that particularly interest him by writing short stories, doing projects, colouring maps and flags etc..

GEOGRAPHY

Geography in the Casa classroom is a study of cultures of the world and physical geography.

- Sandpaper and coloured globes
- Land and water forms
- Land and water form definitions
- Puzzle maps of the continents
- Picture envelopes of peoples, flora and fauna of the world, continents, countries and child's city
- Flags of the world

HISTORY

Since history is a study of the past and the young child has very little concept of time, Maria Montessori focused on instilling a sense of time in a broad sense.

- Seasons
- Months of the year
- Days of the week
- Daily calendar
- Timeline of child's life
- Life cycles

PHYSICAL SCIENCES

Science is not highly specialized at this age. It is based on simple experiments using everyday materials. We help the child understand his environment by equipping him with the beginning stages of the scientific method. We do this by exploring and making observations. These experiments vary depending on the classroom and could include:

- Exploring magnetism
- Sink/Float
- Freezing, melting, evaporation and condensation
- Raising and lowering water levels (Archimedes Principle)
- Dissolving salt, sugar and sand in water
- Weather

ZOOLOGY

The child is introduced to basic animal physiology, behaviour and habitat.

- Living/non-living classification
- Plant/animal classification
- Vertebrate/invertebrate classification
- Characteristics of fish, amphibians, reptiles, mammals and birds
- Parts of a fish, frog, turtle, horse and bird
- Classification of vertebrates
- Matching animals to continents

BOTANY

The child is introduced to plants and what they need to grow.

- Botany cabinet (leaf shapes)
- Parts of a plant, leaf, tree and flower
- Care of plants and the outdoor environment
- Planting experiences

TECHNOLOGY

OMS does not advocate nor incorporate technology for children under the age of six. Dr. Montessori's observations of children of this age indicated how important movement and sensorial exploration of the real world were to a child's optimum development. While 'screen time' was not a factor during Montessori's life, her observations of children have borne the test of time and scientific inquiry. Current brain and pedagogical research support what she could only observe.

"Young children - infants, toddlers, pre-schoolers – need to develop strong, loving relationships with their parents; they need to develop muscles to support their bodies and movement; they need interaction with other children and adults to build language and social skills; and they need play to develop imagination and creativity. Children learn best interacting with people they know – parents, teachers, friends and family – and exploring the world around them using all of their senses. They require hands-on problem solving activities to support cognitive development" (Screens & the Early Years, 21 Feb. 2014[i]).

Technology can be useful for the adults in a Casa class, in record keeping, planning and communicating, but young children need to be in contact with concrete objects and human beings to develop optimally and to lessen the chance of the development of learning challenges such as attention deficit. In a Montessori Casa class, children are actively engaged in learning about themselves, their world and their community.

[i] "Screens & the Early Years." *Screen Smart*. Screen Smart, n.d. Web. 21 Feb. 2014. <http://www.screensmart.ca/early_years>.