

EARLY CHILDHOOD OVERVIEW

Morning Gathering

Each morning, we gather together, outside during the warmer months or inside in colder weather. This is an interactive group time that engages each child. New concepts are introduced and monthly themes are explored through books, hands-on materials, demonstration lessons, and games. Songs are sung throughout the gathering and children have a chance to share their insights and make connections to other things they are learning or experiences they have had.

Snack Time

Throughout the morning work cycle, children are able to choose when they want to have a snack. The snack process is intentionally designed to foster independence. The children first wash their hands, and then they proceed to serve themselves snack. Little chalkboard signs indicate how much food to take. The children use small tongs to serve their own snack. In this process, they are strengthening their fine motor skills, as well as identifying numbers and practicing one-to-one correspondence counting. The children sit at a small table with a few other children to enjoy their snack, engaging in conversation and laughter. When they are finished, the children proudly wash their own dish before they move on to their next activity.

Practical Life

The Practical Life area of the classroom is designed to teach children the skills they need to care for themselves, for others, and for their environment. This area lays the foundation for students in the class to gain confidence and independence, along with a sense of responsibility. Often times, children will be doing activities in this area that mirror real life:

washing dishes, sweeping, preparing food, scooping and pouring, to name a few. All of the activities aim to increase the children's coordination, concentration, manual dexterity, independence and ability to follow a sequence of steps.

Art

Rather than engaging in product-oriented art activities or "copycat" artwork, which can discourage a child's individual creativity, the children will be encouraged to create art through a variety of mediums, focusing on the process instead. Through encounters with a wide range of art media and materials, children will become more comfortable and skilled, and begin to use these materials to communicate or represent their understandings, emotions, discoveries, and interests.

Sensory

The sensory table is a hands-on play experience engaging the children's senses of sight, touch, hearing, and sometimes smell. A variety of materials (such as sand, water, rice, leaves, acorns, pompoms, etc.) and tools (measuring cups, tongs, bottles, scoopers, etc.) are prepared weekly, allowing the children to explore and learn in a tactile way. As they engage in play, children are strengthening their fine motor skills, developing their logical thinking skills, and exercising creativity.

Science

Children are born naturally curious and eager to explore the world around them. In this area of the classroom, children take on the role of scientist. They can observe, experiment, create, construct, classify, compare, and question. Using scientific thinking helps children make sense of the world, and learning the skills to support this scientific thinking is an important part of a young child's development. Bringing in natural elements from outdoors and investigating them enables children to appreciate the awe and wonder of the world around them, and provides an environment where children can develop their natural curiosity.

Geography

We believe it is essential that we begin teaching children at a young age about the world they live in, not only to gain knowledge of the physical and cultural aspects of it, but to gain an understanding of their place within it. One of the most valuable lessons a young child can learn is their interconnectedness to others and to the environment. A focus on peace education goes hand in hand with the study of the world and its people. Our hope is that the children will learn to appreciate the beauty of the world they live in, and will become people that strive to create peace.

Peace Corner

Conflict is a normal part of the early childhood classroom, just as it is a normal part of life. As children are learning how to share space with others in the classroom community, it can be difficult to share materials and to navigate the diversity of personalities. It is important to provide a structure and routine for conflict resolution – just like we do for all the other normal and expected things in the classroom. The peace corner allows children the space to resolve conflict, express their feelings, and listen to another's point of view. It provides a process that allows children to gain healthy tools for resolving conflict.

Math

The Math area follows mathematical concepts from simple to complex and concrete to abstract, which is typical in the Montessori approach. As the child's mathematical mind develops, the concepts are presented in an increasingly abstract way. When a new math concept is presented, it is broken down into three parts. In this way each separate concept is isolated for the child to understand clearly before introducing the next. First, the quantity is presented in a concrete way, then the symbols that represent those quantities are introduced, and finally the association between the quantities and symbols is presented. This last step shows that a specific symbol represents a specific quantity.

Language

The main goal for students in this age group is to have them become comfortable in expressing themselves through written and spoken word. From this freedom of expression and communication, the children then experience an “explosion into reading”. In the language area, children are introduced to letters and the sounds they make. They have many opportunities to practice writing on chalkboards, whiteboards, and on paper with a variety of writing implements. The other areas of the classroom are intentionally designed to help children develop strong foundational skills that will prepare them for reading and writing. In the reading corner, the children will be exposed to high quality literature starting at a very young age. We also read many stories aloud during our large group gatherings. Reading to children exposes them to the power that written language holds to express ideas.

Building

There are many benefits for children when they have the opportunity and space to construct with blocks and other materials. As they build, they are strengthening their fine and gross motor skills, as well as using hand-eye coordination and engaging their spatial sense. Important math concepts and skills are practiced and strengthened through block play – length, measurement, comparison, number, estimation, symmetry, and balance. Children are given the opportunity to exercise their problem solving skills when they come up with an idea, and figure out how to execute it using trial and error. Children often work together in this area to accomplish a common goal, which allows them opportunities to collaborate and cooperate. Creativity is also sparked in the the construction area as the materials can be combined and recombined in countless ways, especially with the extension of other loose parts.