

Children's House - A Three-Year Program

The Rationale for Three-Year Attendance in a Montessori Program

Montessori's early childhood approach is based on Maria Montessori's conception of the "absorbent mind," which from 0-3 years of age operates in an unconscious manner and from 3-6 years of age is developed with the child's growing awareness and active participation. The years from 3 to 6 are one phase of growth, with physical, intellectual, and psychological characteristics common to that entire period.

This concept necessitates an educational approach with an extended time frame within which the individual child has room to grow at her or his own pace and have tactile materials that allow the whole child to develop.

The three-year cycle also relates to Maria Montessori's proven theory of age-mixed and non-graded classes. This is not just a simple matter of 3-4 year olds, 4-5 year olds, and 5-6 year olds spending time together in one environment. The younger children learn from older children who, in turn, have come up from "the ranks" (Parent/Infant and Toddler classes) and are well on their way to being self-directed. Such quality is hard to achieve with frequent and substantial turnover.

~ Message from Sonja M. Donahus, a well-known AMS instructor

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Each year of the three-year program prepares the child for the wonderful world of education that will follow. Most importantly, each year gives them experience in building their own character and building their own community, where there is kindness and caring of each individual.

Although there are marked individual differences, the following is a brief picture of Montessori Children's House, year by year:

First year: Three-year-olds enter the school community where they are the youngest members; eager and full of questions. They learn that there are ground rules that never change. They learn that they are free to do what is right. In general, their greatest needs and interests at this time are: 1.) coordination and refined control of movement - given mainly through the **Practical Life** exercises 2.) words, i.e. increasing their working vocabulary - we pronounce clearly and slowly the words they are learning and we engage them in conversations and give them an opportunity to speak in a group 3.) sorting out impressions that have accumulated since birth through the use of the materials for **Sensorial Development**, which is the foundation for intellectual development. Formal lessons are given as the child demonstrates both interest and readiness.

Second Year: They come back to school to discover that they are leaders! In fact, they turn into the lawgivers. They know all the rules and routines and are very helpful in trying to keep the new little ones on track. At the same time they are now more aware of the activities and projects of the older children and through this prepare for what is coming. They are now capable of handling more **complex practical life lessons**, they begin **writing and blending sounds**, the sensorial refinement exercises continue and formal lessons in all areas continue depending on both interest and readiness.

Third Year: This is where it comes all together. If it this is the child's kindergarten year, students are encouraged to enroll in our Extended Day Program that includes the mixed age group in the morning and extended work time in the afternoon with all kindergarten age students. The blending of sounds becomes the joy of **reading and writing**. The counting from the previous year sets the foundation for wonderfully interesting lessons involving the **four operations** (addition, multiplication, subtraction, and division) with manipulative materials. Mathematical concepts are clearly presented, freely practiced, and permanently internalized. Puzzle maps used at age four, (sometimes three) are brought out again so the children can make their own maps and learn names of **continents, countries, and states**. They are exposed to **grammar and written composition, botany, geography, geometry, zoology, and music theory**. They have a watchful eye on the younger children and are lovingly ready to help whenever needed. At six or seven, they are ready to move on to a bigger and **more complex environment** taking with them capabilities and understanding that is the basis of real self-esteem, confidence, and eagerness to discover a **bigger world: Montessori Elementary!**