

Practical Life in The Casa dei Bambini Environment

Table of Contents:

[Practical Life Materials](#)

[Practical Life Lessons](#)

[Preliminary Exercises:](#)

[Care of the Person:](#)

[Care of the Environment:](#)

[Grace & Courtesy:](#)

[Movement:](#)

The Practical Life area in the classroom is full of opportunities for a child to exercise their mind, their body and their will.

Practical Life Materials

The Practical Life materials are:

Real, familiar, breakable and limited:

Real materials mean real work - this is not make-believe. They are porcelain, glass and wood - textured, weighted, breakable and beautiful. We are not handling the materials carefully because we have simply been *told* to do so. We know that if we tip the tray and the jug falls then it will break. There is one of each tray on the shelf - if you would like to work with something that is unavailable then you need to wait. When you return a material to the shelf it must be neat and ordered (and in the correct place) for the next person to enjoy.

- Sequential and Complete:

There is an order to each activity -- a logical sequence of steps which needs to be followed in order to complete the activity. Each piece of work has all of the components needed for the work. If the child has used tissues or cotton balls or has dirtied a cloth in the process of their work then they must restock the material for the next person to enjoy a complete tray.

- Beautiful, Ordered, Colour-coded:

We want to entice the children to the work. Children have an internal order at this age - they like to organise; neatness and beauty are extremely attractive to them. Colour coding trays or choosing bright and matching patterns for the various elements of one activity will draw the child and encourage repetition. The beauty of a material also encourages the children to maintain the quality and presentation of the material and the tray.

- Culturally relevant:

The children are developing skills which will enable them to live fully and more independent lives within the context of their culture and their environment. The materials are directly related to the child's home and social environment.

The materials are designed to support the physical development needed for writing - strengthening pincer grip and fine motor skills - as well as enriching vocabulary and encouraging the development of strong communication skills. The sequential nature of the later exercises as well as the carefully ordered presentations indirectly prepare the child for Mathematics and Science work. By developing concentration and focus we are helping the child to build a foundation for all areas of academic work.



Practical Life Lessons

The Practical Life lessons can be broken down into the following sections:

1. Preliminary Exercises:

The Preliminary Exercises open the door to the new environment by giving the child a clear understanding of what is expected of them. These exercises give the children simple instructions on how to fulfill those expectations. These lessons might seem basic but they are vital for building a foundation of confidence and trust. The child has all of the information needed to be successful in this new space and with all of these new people.

Some examples of the very first lessons include:

- How to walk
- How to push in your chair
- How to unroll and roll your mat
- How to carry a tray
- How to pass someone in a tight space
- How to go to and from the toilet.
- Pouring & spooning activities
- Opening and closing bottles and boxes

All future activities in the classroom depend on mastery of these exercises. For example, in order for a child to work with a material on the shelf the child must first know that walking over to the material and selecting it by himself is permitted. Then; the child needs to hold the material and carry to an empty seat (carrying material with 2 hands), putting the material on the table, pulling out the chair out with 2 hands, sitting properly on the chair so the legs are facing the right way and starting the exercise. These acts sound simple to an adult, but to a child they are complex tasks. Knowledge of the ground rules and having the ability to perform basic tasks unaided allows the child to move (and consequently learn and develop) confidently in his classroom environment.

2. Care of the Person:

“Any child who is self-sufficient, who can tie his shoes, dress or undress himself, reflects in his joy and sense of achievement the image of human dignity, which is derived from a sense of independence.”

Maria Montessori

By working with the materials in this section, the child is refining the skills needed to care for the body and to meet the body's basic needs. The child is taking further steps towards independence - building confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem and further establishing the 'can-do' attitude to work and to everyday challenges.

Some examples of these lessons include:

- Dressing Frames - featuring a variety of increasingly difficult fastenings eg. Buttons, clips, zips, velcro, bows.
- Polishing shoes.
- Preparing a snack to share with the class
- Washing hands and nails.

3. Care of the Environment:

Your child is a member of a vibrant mixed-age community in a child-sized environment. The children are the caretakers of this environment and they have responsibilities towards the other members of their community. They help each other to tidy up and to keep the classroom clean. They make choices regarding the decoration of the classroom. They notice when the polishing cloths are dirty and will wash and dry the cloths in order to replenish the shelves. There is great value in having the skills and tools to identify and solve problems without waiting for adult instruction. There is even greater value and satisfaction when one is working for the common good.

Some examples of these lessons include:

- Polishing metal/wood
- Dusting
- Sweeping
- Washing a Table
- Arranging flowers
- Washing cloths
- Washing dishes

4. Grace & Courtesy:

Many of the Grace & Courtesy lessons are given in the first hours of a child's first day in Casa dei Bambini. Just as the Preliminary Exercises give clear guidelines for the physical behaviour within the classroom, the Grace & Courtesy lessons give clear guidelines for the social behaviour within the community. Grace & Courtesy lessons guide the child in how to treat other human beings, both adults and children, while taking their own needs into

consideration. They practice the language and the steps for interacting positively with the other independent bodies moving through the environment. These lessons guide the children in moments of conflict and provide vocabulary for their emotions in times of confusion or excitement. They show the child how to be responsive to the needs of others, fostering awareness and developing empathy. The Grace & Courtesy lessons continue throughout the child's three years in Casa dei Bambini and are eventually incorporated into everyday life. Grace and Courtesy make the world a better place.

Some examples of Grace & Courtesy lessons include:

- Greeting someone
- Use of 'Thank you'
- Picking up a dropped item
- Use of 'Excuse Me'
- Walking around another child's work mat
- Offering something

5. *Movement:*

"Movement, or physical activity, is thus an essential factor in intellectual growth, which depends upon the impressions received from outside. Through movement we come in contact with external reality, and it is through these contacts that we eventually acquire even abstract ideas."

Maria Montessori

"Mental development must be connected with movement and be dependent on it. It is vital that educational theory and practice should be informed by that idea."

Maria Montessori

The Casa dei Bambini child chooses their materials and their work space and is therefore moving freely around the environment. The work itself often requires large body movements - washing a table, carrying the long rods, playing distance memory games. Children need to develop their coordination and spatial awareness. The Montessori environment is equipped with a large ellipse, the circumference of which provides a walking track designed to refine the child's coordination and gross motor skills. The children can choose to use this line individually and during the work cycle, as with the rest of the materials, but might also be introduced to various exercises as a group activity:

- Walking toe to toe
- Walking holding an object
- Walking to music

- Walking balancing on object on one's head.

Montessori also recognised the importance of developing the skills needed to be silent and still. Constant noise and motion can take its toll on all human beings. Finding peace and calm in a turbulent world is an important skill for maintaining mental health. Children do not often experience silence with the modern day hum of electronics and the constant distractions from smart-phones and tablets. In the Casa dei Bambini environment, the children practice the Silence Game once the teacher has observed that they have reached a level of self-control where they can be successful at being still and silent for just a few moments. As the children practice and seek out this activity without the teacher, they will learn to cultivate mindfulness and exercise self-control.