Early Childhood Curriculum and Skills Overview

In the first seven years of life, the child is primarily living in the will, learning nearly everything through physical activity. Waldorf classrooms nourish and preserve a childhood full of wonder, goodness and beauty. Early Childhood teachers support this focus by being a model of will activity and by providing opportunities for children to develop their physical bodies and work with their hands.

Our mixed-age programs are centered around the ongoing celebration of seasons and their corresponding festivals, which are experienced through song, verse, stories, food, puppetry, and celebration. The anticipation of seasonal activities and the changes that occur in the natural environment provide fertile ground for a child's imaginative play.

A rhythmical framework of the day, week, and year allows children and teachers a healthy in-breath and out-breath of activity, energy, and play. An atmosphere of work and play permeates the room and play yard through well-structured and consistent daily, weekly, and yearly routines, healthy nourishment, daily rest, and clearly held boundaries.

Circle Time
Circle time brings the entire class together as a group to participate in rhyming verses, songs, finger plays, imaginative games, and fine and gross-motor movements. These activities help orient the child in space, help integrate midlines and primitive reflexes, and help build capacities in preparation for early elementary school literacy. Singing is woven throughout the day and is often used for transitioning from one activity to another.

Play-Based Learning and Social-Emotional Development
In a Waldorf classroom, a significant amount of learning occurs through the child's imitation of the activities of adults and other children. In Waldorf classes, children in play are free to take on roles they have seen in their daily life to make sense of their experiences. Children also spend time working with their hands to make, build, and create imaginatively and artistically. Teachers provide a safe and warm environment that children can live into during their play.

By respecting one another and presenting a world full of goodness and beauty, EC teachers set the tone of how to interact with both children and adults in one-on-one, small, and large group situations. Children are developing the foundational skills needed to become healthy and successful adults. They learn by example to use kind words and perform kind actions, to be inclusive of others, to use manners, to share, and to work and play cooperatively within a class community.

Storytelling
Each day children gather for story time to hear a fairy tale, nature story, a sequential tale, a puppet show, or to participate in a story play. Storytelling provides the child with a language-rich environment that:

- Builds imagination and enables the children to create inner pictures
- Gives pictures to guide moral intelligence
- Provides opportunities to experience and act out different social situations

Fine and Practical Arts Curriculum
As children settle into the rhythms of the day and week, they are able to take on greater responsibilities within the classroom. Multi-step projects help children learn to focus for extended periods while cultivating their ability to work with increased care and attention to detail. Fine and practical arts activities strengthen capacities for focus, fine-motor movement, stamina, flexibility, and observation.

Children explore a variety of artistic mediums, which include painting, drawing, woodworking, and handwork such as: sewing, felting, finger-knitting, and beeswax modeling

Math
In Waldorf classrooms, children are building strong mathematical reasoning skills through creative play, fostering deep understanding before any formal mathematical algorithms are introduced. Children explore high-level, intangible concepts such as the laws of gravity, mechanics, conservation of liquids/mass, and mathematical concepts such as more vs. less, all through hands-on, interactive play. Concepts are experienced through:

- Categorizing and sequencing objects
- Working with manipulatives like gems and wood blocks to explore concepts of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division
- Working with visual patterns and rhythm
- Counting through finger plays, songs, and verses heard throughout the day
- Jump rope counting rhymes
- One-to-one correspondence used in many activities throughout the day

Literacy
The Waldorf curriculum builds strong literacy skills through stories, finger plays, poems, verses, and songs included in circle time and throughout the day. These vocabulary-rich experiences allow children to experience human language in a non-colloquial form, and daily exposure to rich vocabulary supports the development of fluid expression and strong verbal communication, with emphasis on:

- Repeating and remembering verses and songs sets the stage for the more intense memory work that will be required in elementary school. (Repetition has been lauded as a foundation for healthy brain development.)
- Sound discrimination
- Rhyming sounds and alliteration that are found in poems and songs which educate the ear, forming the beginnings of spelling and phonics
- Timing and rhythm of language (syllables, phrasing, sentence structure)
- Sequencing skills
- Strengthening expressive and receptive language skills
- Mental picturing and open-ended thinking
- Concentration and listening

Skill Development in Preparation for Formal Academic Learning

The Waldorf curriculum and classroom activities are designed to build strong foundational skills which support future academic learning and success. Early Childhood teachers observe and assess each child's individual development as they mature during their time in our programs. Recognizing that children develop in their own unique ways, teachers are ideally looking for the following capacities to be established prior to the start of first grade:

Physical Growth and Motor Development

<u>Children entering first grade should ideally be able to:</u>

- Engage in guided movement activities and follow the lead of a teacher
- Maintain balance and self-control during movement activities

- Cross monkey bars and demonstrate core strength during classroom games
- Skip with alternating feet and jump rope with a rhythmical gait
- Follow clapping and stomping rhythms
- Tie shoes and apron strings independently
- Demonstrate age-appropriate sewing and drawing skills
- Imitate hand gestures for finger plays, circle, beanbag games, and other fine-motor activities
- Sit upright in a chair without rocking, wiggling, or falling

Suggested activities:

- Gross motor & Core strength - balance beam, monkey bars, jump rope, skipping, hopping, ride 2-wheel bicycle, trampoline, crab walk, wheelbarrow, heavy lifting, hopscotch, swimming lessons, climb trees
- Fine motor: shoe tying, sewing, play dough, beeswax, drawing
- Work on body geography, crossing vertical and horizontal midlines, clapping games, and other cross-pattern movements
- Practice bouncing, catching, and throwing balls of different sizes

Social-Emotional Development and Relationships

Children entering first grade should ideally be able to:

- Consistently follow the lead of a teacher during circle and transitions
- Respond willingly to directions/requests from a teacher
- Accept limits and boundaries without argument or refusal
- Consistently seek out help from a teacher when needed
- Stop unkind or rough behavior when asked
- Meet a teacher's gaze and respond when spoken to
- Demonstrate flexibility and an ability to compromise
- Resolve peer conflicts with minimal adult intervention
- Include others in games and demonstrate socially-inclusive behavior
- Share and wait for a turn
- Demonstrate compassion for others and step in to help a classmate in need
- Enter smoothly into play when a game is already underway
- Accept responsibility for their own actions and apologize when needed
- Defer personal wants to the needs of the group
- Separate easily from parent/guardian in the morning

Suggested activities:

- Provide consistent boundaries at home
- Give no more than two choices and follow through without debate
- Model compassionate but consistent responses when challenges arise
- Schedule playdates with friends from class to continue strengthening social confidence
- Utilize age-appropriate strategies for dealing with big emotions (humor, imaginative picturing, therapeutic stories, etc.)

Focus, Attention, and Impulse Control

Children entering first grade should ideally be able to:

- Focus on a task for 15+ minutes without becoming distracted or silly
- Listen respectfully when a teacher or other student is speaking
- Stay attentive and engaged during puppet shows and stories
- Willingly participate in cleanup and identify what needs to be done
- Wait patiently for a turn and raise hand ("quiet candle") to speak
- Transition smoothly from one activity to another
- Regain composure after a silly or surprising event
- Hold inner quiet/stillness when requested
- Respect and easily follow expectations for classroom behavior
- Care for their belongings and self
- Engage in creative play using ideas from their own imagination, rather than relying on characters and themes from tv shows or video games

Suggested activities:

- Consistent home routines and rhythms with plenty of rest and downtime
- Work on impulse control and boundaries that need to be followed, even when it is not necessarily "fun"
- Age-appropriate daily and weekly chores/responsibilities
- Eliminate all media exposure, including TV, phone, videos, iPad, computer games, etc.
- Encourage imaginative, open-ended play at home and in nature
- Avoid exposure to "heady" adult conversation/facts/current events, etc.

Memory, Communication, and Auditory Processing

Children entering first grade should ideally be able to:

- Follow one and two-step instructions from a teacher
- Share a sequential story or memory at the snack table
- Remember the tune and words to familiar songs and verses from class
- Demonstrate rhyming skills and basic phonemic awareness (beginning and ending sounds)
- Remember details from a story told the day before
- Successfully communicate needs/ideas to others (speech can be understood by teachers and friends)
- Generate ideas for games and incorporate others into play
- Remember the flow of the daily rhythm and follow familiar routines

Suggested activities:

- Practice following multi-step directions (repeat back to ensure understanding)
- Encourage a sharing from the day during dinner time - "rose, bud, thorn" (rose=positive memory from day, bud=something you are looking forward to, thorn= something you didn't like that happened)
- Model correct grammar and use a rich vocabulary
- Practice sharing stories with a beginning, middle, and end
- Have fun with rhyming, tongue twisters, and nursery rhymes