

Creating Positive Learning For the Young Child

Create an atmosphere for learning and be sure your child is interested. Let the child lead the activity; stop when the child is bored, tired, or frustrated.

Repeat those activities that your child wants to do again. They may be boring for you but enjoyable for the child.

Encourage your child. Assure your child that making mistakes is a normal part of learning.

Encourage active play. Running, jumping, and other active play is better than sitting in front of the TV or watching adults play.

Keep a variety of toys and books on low shelves where your child can reach them. Introduce new toys one at a time. Too many toys can overstimulate a child.

Help your child use the senses - hearing, seeing, touching, tasting and smelling - to explore objects. Focus on one sense at a time.

Talk a lot as your child explores. Talk about what is happening and what you are doing.

Provide toys that allow your child to see cause and effect. Pushing a button to make a cat appear is not as stimulating as hitting a pan with a spoon and seeing it move, or hearing the noise.

Provide activities at the child's developmental level. Allow the child to choose which toys to play with.

Work as a team with your child's teacher or therapists. Share ideas and solutions. Together you can help your child live up to full potential, at school, at home - and in life.

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Practical Life Rationale

Maria Montessori believed that the foundation of her teaching method was the Practical Life area of the classroom. She believed that children have inner drives and urges which are satisfied through the interaction with their environment and movement within that environment. In this way, children construct themselves. It is through the use of specific materials that the direct aims of Montessori Education are achieved. These direct aims: order, concentration, coordination, and independence are then supported by specific categories of activities. These are Control of Movement, Care of the Self, Care of the Environment, and Grace and Courtesy. All the works and materials found in the practical life area of the classroom then lay the groundwork for the skills required in other areas of education including math and language. When the skills learned in Practical Life are mastered and the urges are satisfied, the next phases of education seamlessly and naturally follow.

The activities in the Practical Life section of the classroom have four specific and direct aims which are the child's development of order, the development of concentration, the development of coordination, and the development of independence. Order is one of the most essential elements of the Montessori method because children go through a sensitive period in which order is established. When actions are ordered, the mind is ordered. If the physical environment is experienced as orderly and the children are helping to create and maintain that order, the mind therefore follows suit. Concentration is closely related to order, because each child must focus their attention on their work. This concentration is witnessed by the child's repetition of the activity, the

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eager return to it after an interruption, and the child's feeling of satisfaction and refreshment after its completion. Each activity in Practical Life also requires a certain level of coordination. Maria Montessori concluded that movement and the use of the hand have an integral relationship to the mind and the ability to learn. Coordination is achieved in the physical environment by the many Practical Life activities which focus on fine motor, gross motor, and perceptual motor skills. The repetition and concentration on the various movements involved in the activities of practical life ensure the development of each child's coordination. A feeling of independence is achieved by the children when they feel successful in their ability to perform the tasks they set out to do. Due to the Montessori's acknowledgment of the intrinsic motivation of the children and their desire for independence, they enjoy free choice when selecting an activity. Once a lesson has been presented, the children may then choose that work whenever they desire. All works in the classroom environment are self-correcting and are controlled for error therefore, the teacher is confident in the children's ability to perform the work. The children are also confident in their budding self-sufficiency.

The activities in the Practical Life environment are divided into four sections: Control of Movement, Care of the Self, Care of the Environment, and Grace and Courtesy. These activities allow children to feel a sense of confidence because they're performing purposeful and meaningful work as well as contributing to their communities. Control of Movement involves fine motor movements, gross motor movements, and perceptual motor movements. These exercises include walking on the line, pouring works, and table washing. Care of the Self is fairly self-explanatory and involves an element of independence in which children learn to be self-sufficient in their own

hygiene and daily routines. All cooking exercises, stitching, and hand washing activities are included in Care of the Self. Closely related is Care of the Environment. Children learn to respect their personal spaces and their shared environment by taking an active role in maintaining it. Activities related to this category include caring for outdoor spaces as well as maintaining an orderly indoor environment. Caring for outdoor spaces include: raking, gardening, and picking up litter. Maintaining an orderly indoor environment include: sweeping, dusting, polishing, and dish washing. The final section for the Practical Life activities contain a social aspect and that is Grace and Courtesy. The children realize they are a part of a community and there are certain social graces which keep that community peaceful, happy, and cooperative. The teacher helps facilitate Grace and Courtesy by being a role model in good manners and demonstrating respectful interaction with others. Some of the activities included in this element of Montessori education are moving a chair for a friend, passing food at snack time, asking for help, giving assistance to others, and opening doors. All the exercises in Practical Life fall into at least one of these four sections.

The Montessori classroom is a place where multi-aged children between the ages of three and six work both separately and together as a community. The motivations of the various age groups are different. Young children are busy constructing themselves and are absorbed in an unconscious process. They are driven by an inner need and repeat the exercises many times until those needs are satisfied. As a result, the finished product is unimportant, it's the process of doing the work and refining the skill involved which are important. The older children on the other hand, are applying earlier skills mastered in their environment and are more product-driven. They also have a bigger sense of

community and society and so there is a larger social aspect to their work. Older children enjoy fulfilling the needs they perceive in others.

The genius of the Montessori method of education is how the skills obtained in the practical life area of the classroom prepare the children of future lessons in other areas of education. The direct aims taught in all the sections of Practical Life translate well into the subsequent areas of Sensorial, Math, Language, and Culture. Order is involved in sequencing, placement, and patterning. The pencil grip is used throughout many Practical Life lessons and the lessons are taught left to right and top to bottom which prepare the children for reading and writing. As concentration intensifies, the materials progress from concrete to abstract. The children can recognize differences in letters and numbers because they've sharpened their senses in Practical Life. Many children have experiences in the classroom which broaden their perspectives by interacting with a wide range of materials and they learn to experiment in their environment to develop specific abilities. They naturally make gradual progress on their way to developing themselves.