



Everyday Matters

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Practical Life

By Brooke Umanzor

Practical life is very inviting and attractive. This area of the classroom calls to children. No matter what age a child begins Montessori, almost always Practical Life is their starting point. Practical Life is set up with many materials that children are familiar with, such as: cups, bowls, spoons, etc. Children feel most comfortable working with familiar materials.



Practical Life is the heart of the classroom. Children of all ages are attracted by the materials. In Practical Life children learn the feeling of success and build self confidence. When a child pours water for the first time and they do not spill it, they are so excited. When a child realizes that they "can do it" they gain the confidence to try new and more challenging work.

The work in Practical Life prepares the child for writing by allowing the child to build and exercise the muscles necessary for the task. Works such as "tonging" and "basting" allow the child to practice the 3 finger grasp; which is a very important skill needed for correctly holding a pencil. Other works involving tweezers, pipettes, and strawberry hullers further help the child prepare for holding a pencil.

All works in Practical Life are set up "Left to Right" and "Top to Bottom" which prepares the child for reading. An example of this is the "whole hand grasp". In this work a child would use his whole hand to grasp objects in a bowl on the left and move them to the right. Since we read left to right, this early orientation is especially important as it is a motor memorization tool that the child will later recall (indirectly) when learning to read and write.

Building focus and concentration is very important. This skill starts in Practical Life and moves on to other areas of the classroom. Children engage in the Practical Life works and most often focus to completion of the work because it is so interesting to them. When the child starts in Practical Life they may use the "whole hand grasp" work, then eventually will move to longer more engaging works such as "clothes washing" or "baking". The leap between simple and complex work lets the teacher know when it is time to move on to more complex areas of the classroom such as Math and Language.

Practical Life may look like a fun place to play but in reality it is the start of a long learning journey for the child. This area inspires awe and wonder and really sets the child up for years of success.

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Approaching Toileting Skills

by Stephanie Satterfield & Jessica Cushion

What is Nothing?

by Babs Gamez

When children come home at the end of the day and are asked what they did at school, the typical answer is often; "Oh, nothing."

Well, perhaps "nothing" means that I played with my friends. Or counted the number rods or wrote in my journal. Maybe I painted a picture. Or, I heard a story of far away places. Maybe I watched Speedy the hamster playing...or went outside to play ball.

Maybe today was the first time my pencil followed a straight line. Or maybe I worked with the continent puzzles. Could be I just played with a new friend.

Sharing Experiences. Many children find it difficult to share their experiences at school with their parents when they get home. Some of the children would rather keep their school experiences to themselves. It is their thing and sometimes when pressed for information they balk.

If this is the case with your child, try sharing your day with him or her. It helps the child to open up and share with you. Some younger children still lack the ability to verbalize their experiences with their parents. I feel if you ask specific questions, without a note of pressure, you may have a better chance of getting an answer. It helps if you are familiar with the events of your child's day and have some knowledge of what goes on in the classroom. Just by using the names of the areas in their classroom in your question you have added some concreteness that will help your child to visualize. He or she may then be able to recount some event in that area. Just because you are not with your child during school hours doesn't mean you have to miss out on that part of their life.



As my child turned two and I started the toils of toileting I found an article of great inspiration, "Toileting the Montessori Way". I realized from this article that I almost missed the boat – waiting too long to start the process. So, in hoping I can help others avoid this same situation, here is some information I gathered from the article.

Toileting begins far sooner than most parents think. Children can begin showing interest as early as twelve months. Around this age children often investigate the surroundings of the bathroom. They may play in the toilet or follow parents or older siblings into the bathroom. These are early signs of readiness.

A young child's interest with the toilet may lead some adults to lock the bathroom door or to lock the lid, but this sends the message that the bathroom is off limits. Providing water work may curb the child's interest in the water.

Between the ages of thirteen to fifteen months the child may begin to sit on the toilet in simulation of the adults in its life. At this point introduce the toileting routine; pulling down their pants, sitting on the toilet correctly, wiping, pulling up their pants, flushing the toilet, and washing their hands is simple.

Around eighteen months, most toddlers reach a stage where they not only have the ability but the interest in toileting. If given an opportunity to spend time in underwear, they gain awareness of bodily functions. The absorbance of diapers hinders the toddler's ability to feel the wetness of the urination. During this stage if the toddler wears underwear for the majority of the time he/she will pick up quickly the sense of the bladder being full.

Most children will accomplish the goal within a few months, if they are wearing underwear. If as parents and/or teachers, we remain calm, show patience, and reassurance when an accident occurs we will make the process more comfortable to the child. Old towels should be provided for cleaning up accidents. Children develop this skill from their desire for independence.

By providing underwear, access to the bathroom, investigation of the toilet, and the proper equipment the adult shows to be encouraging and supportive. Toileting should be a natural development. It is not something helped through adult endeavors; this is why we stay away from the phrase "toilet training". For this reason punishment and reward are uncalled for.

This period usually ends about twenty-four months. The older a child gets the more complicated toileting gets. For best results adults should give independence, provide underwear, and do away with diapers.

Information found in the "[Toileting the Montessori Way](#)" article by Susan Tracy, M.Ed.

The Montessori Infant & Toddler Environment

by Mrs. Brandi Rutledge

As a person who has spent a considerable amount of time studying child development and working in early childhood education programs, it is strange to me that a majority of Montessori schools do not offer enrollment to children under the age of three years old. Like many people who have studied the facts of child development, I believe that children under three can benefit as much as- and perhaps even more than- children over three.

From birth to about the age of three years the child is in the Absorbent Mind period. That is to say the child is soaking in every stimulus in her environment, from sights and sounds to textures, tastes and smells. This is a period of amazing accomplishments for the child.

During this developmental period such large feats as acquiring language, learning to walk and potty training occur. Additionally it is during these first years that the child develops their sense of social awareness and self esteem. It is crucial for the teacher of these children to have knowledge about child development in order to best prepare an environment that will support appropriate physical, cognitive as well as social development and foster a life long love of learning.

The Montessori infant and toddler environment is sometimes quite different from how we would normally imagine a nursery. There are no high chairs, walkers or bouncy chairs. How could you knowingly place a baby, who wants nothing more than to master a self-chosen purposeful movement, in an imposed position and buckle her down? An educated Montessori infant caregiver understands the necessity of allowing the child freedom of movement and carefully prepares her environment to be supportive of the child's needs. Additionally the teacher understands about letting babies develop at their own rate, not worrying about the date of milestones, not attempting to hurry development with walkers or by propping children in sitting positions.

The untrained eye might look into a Montessori toddler classroom and wonder "Where are the "sippy-cups" and changing table?" Because the Montessori toddler teacher is well trained in child development she understands how damaging a "sippy-cup" is to a child's developing language. In order to build the muscles necessary to properly form words the child must use an open cup for drinking. Sucking a "sippy-cup" uses the tongue muscles to fold the tongue in half from side to side, whereas drinking from an open cup uses not only these, but also the muscles needed to fold the tongue from front to back. This concerted muscle movement allows for proper language acquisition.

As for potty training there is a Montessori quote that is invaluable to remember, "Never do for a child, what he believes he can do for himself." With the absence of the changing table the child becomes an active participant in

toileting. The child is changed standing in front of a mirror so that not only does she see her body and what needs to be taken care of, but she sees how the teacher properly cleans her and is then given a chance to do so for herself. Spare clothing and diapers are stored so that the child can retrieve them herself giving her a sense of her own power and choice in the toileting process. The toddler is naturally curious

Simplicity or the thought that less is better rules in the Montessori infant/toddler classroom. The environment should be familiar, predictable and safe.

about her body and toileting so all the steps and processes in Montessori toilet training help foster healthy self esteem while promoting self toileting and dressing skills.

Now knowing the uniqueness of the structure and equipment of the Montessori infant and toddler classrooms lets talk about the most important piece of equipment- the teacher. Three words can sum up what a teacher should bring to the environment: respect, authenticity and simplicity.

Respect enters into all areas of the classroom. Teachers should talk to children as if they were having conversations. When the teacher wants to pick up the child, or put her down or change her diaper she should first tell her what she plans to do and then describe what she is doing. A baby absorbed in something as simple as studying her fingers should not be disturbed out of respect for her need of uninterrupted space and time.

Authenticity is a must for any Montessori environment. Natural is better than artificial - tree branches or curtains blowing in the breeze are more authentic sights than wind-up mobiles. Babies should spend much of their waking time down on the floor, where they can practice reaching, rolling, crawling and wriggling as opposed to left in devices that place them in inactive unnatural positions.

Simplicity or the thought that less is better rules in the Montessori infant/toddler classroom. The environment should be familiar, predictable and safe. The environment should also be calm and neutral with a quiet background. In an uncluttered (visual as well as auditory) environment babies who can be down on the floor will focus on one another and develop social awareness at an early age.

In closing I am reminded of another of my favorite Montessori quotes, "The professor cannot teach the man, whose mother did not teach the child." And I believe it to also be true that a preschool aged child will learn more quickly and effortlessly if their love of learning and sense of self has been nurtured in a quality Infant/Toddler Montessori program.

Weinacker's Teachers and Directors Reach Milestone!

Weinacker's Montessori School is proud to announce that the following teachers/directors have successfully completed all three segments of the NAMC (North American Montessori Center) training.

Bay Minette

Jessica Cushion*
Ana Hernandez*
Jennifer Roberson

Daphne

Pina Hill*
Tyeshia Pickett

Hillcrest

Tulia Perez*
Alicia Shaw*

Midtown

Mary Santora

Tillman's Corner

Melissa Ellison
Patty Stafford*
Pamela Velaski
Tammy Walker*

Did You Know?

In 2006, Dr. Angeline Lillard (UVA) conducted a study of Montessori and non-Montessori students. The results indicated that the kindergarten-aged Montessori children tested higher in both math and reading than the public school children, using the Woodcock-Johnson Test Battery.

The final practicum meeting was held June 6, 2008 and the teachers presented their synthesis projects. These projects required teachers to present teacher-made materials from across all areas of the curriculum designed to work together to present a specific theme.

The teachers that completed the practicum portion of their certification are noted with an asterisk (*). This involved 72 hours of practicum classes, making materials and practicing presentations. It also included 750 classroom hours and observations of other Montessori classrooms.



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With locations in:

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Tillman's Corner
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Bay Minette**