



# The Practical Life Area in Montessori

## Order, Concentration, Coordination and Independence

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What more could we want for our children than to function as an independent and purposeful member of society? It is in the Practical Life area that the child is allowed to explore the everyday activities of real life, laying a lasting foundation for the child to fulfill this expectation as an adult.

Practical Life is categorized into four areas: **Care of the Self, Care of the Environment, Grace and Courtesy, and Control of Movement.** Grasping the skills within each area gives the child immense satisfaction. He is performing useful everyday tasks he observes adults doing. Children enthusiastically perform tasks that they witness adults doing - thus they take on these tasks with great pride and concentration, learning practical life skills as they go.

**Order, Concentration, Coordination and Independence** are four major goals for students of the Montessori Classroom. In the

Practical Life area, as with other Montessori areas, the child is working toward these core goals - but is also indirectly learning the actual skills involved in the task they are working on. For example, when a child is involved in a sweeping activity he is strengthening and developing OCCI, while simultaneously learning the task of sweeping.

The child learns to take care of himself in the Practical Life area. He learns in a sequential and deliberate way to wash his hands, taking care to get under the nails. When he is finished he examines his environment. He may notice that he has left drops of water beneath his feet. He walks to the teacher, places his hand upon her shoulder (a lesson in Grace and Courtesy), waits patiently for her attention and asks politely for a lesson on the brightly colored sponge and bucket work he noticed earlier. Within these few moments the child has reinforced his independence by learning to wash his own hands and choosing his own work. He has strengthened his concentration in the deliberate and methodical way he scrubbed his hands clean. The child is understanding the importance of order when he sees the spilled water on the floor and chooses to remedy it with the sponge. He exhibits coordination in the task of washing his hands. Order, Concentration, Coordination and Independence leave the child unafraid and willing to participate in the

function of his classroom - thus bringing him closer, every day, to his full potential!

### Pouring with a Funnel



### Sifting with a slotted spoon



Lessons in Practical Life should include **logical analysis of movement**, meaning the teacher presents the activity in a logical and sequential order of steps moving from left to right. This logical analysis of movement creates an **inner discipline** in the child. He may be tempted, for instance, to squirt ten squirts of soap in the bubble making lesson. However, after the child has watched the teacher methodically count the squirts of soap, he feels the need to imitate her. The teacher's goal is the child imitating the activity and not herself or persona. It is for this purpose that the teacher uses as little language as possible in presenting Practical Life lessons, instead focusing on the sequence and the specific movements of the task.

Lessons in Practical Life should also include **Motives of Perfection**, or added difficulty once the child has mastered the initial work. For example, once the child has successfully walked the line (a lesson in Control of Movement), the teacher will demonstrate how to carefully walk the line with a glass of water in her hand without spilling a drop. The lessons should also include **Isolation of Difficulty**. This means the activity should have one area that the child is focusing on. For example, a sorting lesson would include ten marbles of exactly the same shape, size and material, but differing only in color.

Practical Life work gives the child the opportunity to turn his "make-believe" play into **real life work**. Rather than "playing house" the child is learning to do the dishes, clean up messes, set the table, prepare food and care for himself. This provides the child with a **feeling of satisfaction**, boosting his confidence in all areas of his education. The work is designed to suit the intense desire the child is experiencing based on the sensitive period through which he is passing. "Because sensitive periods do not last forever, but are by their very nature transitory phenomena, it is very important that we should be able to recognize them in order to profit to the fullest extent." (E.M. Standing, 1957, pg. 135) The intense desire the child has for purposeful and useful movement, along with his absorbent mind, make it possible for the child to retain these movements and turn Order, Concentration, Coordination and Independence into habits.

Bibliography Standing, E.M. Maria Montessori, her Life and Work, Fresno, CA: Hollis and Carter Limited, 1957



Concentrating on Pouring Work



Walking the Line