

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

OUTLINE- PART ONE

- a) Work and adaptation of humans**
- b) Child's adaptation to the environment**
- c) Montessori's approach**
- d) Practical life activities**
- e) Inner purpose and self construction**
- f) Series of steps**
- g) Concentration**
- h) Independence**
- i) Principles that govern the materials**

OUTLINE- PART TWO

- a) Different groups of practical life**

Elementary activities

Care of self/person

Care of the environment

Grace and courtesy

- b) Activities for self control**

Walking on the line

Silence game

- c) How to offer the practical life activities**
- d) Types of presentation**
- e) Steps for presentation**
- f) Analysis of movement**

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

WORK AND ADAPTATION OF HUMANS

Early humans worked with their hands, cultivated the soil etc with whatever resources they had and that's what gave life to a unique environment.

Humans across the world , wherever we are, we make this environment our own and work upon that place, Montessori called this adaptation, we own that place, spiritually and physically, but we are not happy with it, we want to improve and make it better, and we become responsible for that environment. It makes us responsible, also if we have done it as a group, we begin to nurture it and better it.

We want to make our house better and we try to beautify it, we are constantly looking to improve the environment we live in, this way, we are also keeping up our culture and tradition. It becomes a part of who we are. It is a way that we express our care and love for the environment.

The work that we do has become mechanical, we are in a rush and we try to multitask simultaneously, we don't even remember what is happening, but the love and care remains.

We got that speed out of practice, and each activity we do we do it because of utilitarian purposes. Without the mind the body won't function, this is unique to us humans.

CHILD'S ADAPTATION TO THE ENVIRONMENT

A child that is born in any environment, he absorbs and is attracted towards the work people around him are doing, he adapts himself to his immediate environment and the next layer of adaptation is to the wider community and then to the cosmos.

The child is attracted to basic activities like sweeping, cooking, wiping, dusting etc, and this may vary from house to house and even culture. The child is unconsciously pulled towards the work and he watches our movements and their movements will have a special kind of rhythm and it's cyclic. They strive towards replication of these actions, he's trying to create himself according to his surrounding, he incarnates these movements, he is creating and becoming these movements (the spirituality of the movements) it becomes a part of the child and it happens because of repetition. Initially it may look like imitation, but they repeat and some point that movement becomes uniquely theirs.

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

What feels effortless is actually born out of repetition, it involves both body and mind and it is unique to humans. The sensitivity helps the child to repeat effortlessly.

MONTESSORI'S APPROACH

Montessori believed a lot in practical life, what made children repeat, she wondered? It's because they were attracted to the movements and she started studying it and thereby the practical life activities were born. These activities were designed to suit the need of the children.

PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

Practical life means something that is utilitarian, useful, and purposeful and in reality, this is the way we live, so basically practical life implies that it is the use or basis of livelihood that leads us to purpose that are useful and functional. Everyday activities are sensible and useful that helps us in survival. We bathe, brush, sweep, cook everyday and all these are purposeful, these are necessary for our everyday living. To survive we need to do them. They serve the need. Only if we cook we can eat. Unless I clean/groom myself, I can't stay in the environment. We need clothes to cover ourselves. Practical life activities are related to satisfaction and freedom. We don't repeat unnecessarily but we enjoy. Only the purpose is finished it's done. We do it only for utilitarian purpose, to satisfy our needs. We don't go back until it calls or needs something.

INNER PURPOSE AND SELF CONSTRUCTION

We live in the environment and we need to clean it, to satisfy our needs, the practical life activities are related to satisfaction, we don't go back to that work unless necessary.

For children it satisfies an inner purpose, which is not visible to our eyes.

The child's approach to practical life is different; they work for a deep inner purpose, to create those faculties that are making them uniquely human and that's why they tirelessly work, and leads to construction of personality. When they have mastered the movements they become like adults. At this age we can see the beauty of creation.

Another thing that's evident in young children is they want to do things on their own, they resist when we try to help, and if we try to help, it becomes a hindrance. Our understanding of what they need and what we give them is different. They are attracted towards daily chores rather than toys. What we think as play, it is work for the child, says Montessori, this creation is the foundation for their whole life. All this is work of life.

The child that enters the casa at 2 n a half years has already absorbed and learnt something at home. We restrict the child from doing so many activities and we do this out of love and force them to play with the toys. The child needs to work on the developmental needs.

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

There are activities of practical life that help the child in self construction. All the activities have a utilitarian purpose, they are not toys, and they have a hidden purpose that is to support the developmental needs of the child. We can even do this at home, and we will have a willingly cooperative child making contribution to his family and that makes him feel important. It helps them to think, plan and execute and become helpful facilitators in the environment. Coordinated movements are one of the main purposes of the practical life activities. The mind dictates then body to move and the body responds, it's not something that they are born with, they work towards achieving it.

SERIES OF STEPS:

Cycle of movement-repetition, seek perfection and willingly do

The will- wanting to do pushes to persevere, to overcome challenges. The mind body and the will work in unison.

Children look for challenges, they strive towards overcoming that. Challenges help in development of both body and mind.

The goals are set by their inner push, not by adults, this perfection is the achievement of the spirit of the child and the will is guided by intelligence to achieve perfection.

CONCENTRATION

Another purpose is concentration, if there is an optimum amount of challenge, the attention of the child is completely polarized, and suddenly the child doesn't know what's happening around him, this is what Montessori called birth of concentration. This is the beginning of the great work that the child is capable of. This child who has tasted this kind of concentration comes back willingly with joy and re energized, they come back as a converted child and the faith in the environment increases. When this happens, unification of the personality happens and this child cannot be distracted easily.

INDEPENDENCE

They strive for independence from the start, the aim of practical activities is to help the child become independent physically and mentally, it's about self reliance and believes that they can do things on their own. The child resists help, and asks us to stop troubling them. They need time, endless time to create themselves, it isn't easy, this is also temporary, they will overcome the challenge and do things on their own, and this child is free to do it themselves until they are satisfied, next they are able to choose the right kind of challenge . When we give opportunities they become self reliant and self reliance leads to self assurance.

When they become independent, they want to help others. They just give the right kind of help and withdraw immediately. This is also something they gain by operating in a prepared environment.

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

When this entire thing works, there is a byproduct/skill that the child becomes adept in everything they do. It is the inner timetable/ teacher that makes the child do things. Our job is to follow the child. The child will perform when he is ready and the skill is always achieved through repetition and practice.

It also helps the child be socially adaptive, it's a mix age group and each child works at their own pace. It's a community and they are always conscious of the others, who are working,

How to live in the environment is presented to the child in practical life activities.

PRINCIPLES THAT GOVERN THE MATERIALS

1. To check if its purposeful, does it end in a cycle is it satisfying a purpose
2. Do we have enough variety and choice, different and culturally appropriate?
3. Are these, material size proportional, can they handle it? To offer a functional material is the best gift we can give children, we need to have fragile objects, it is that things do break and the children learn to be careful, and makes them aware of movements.
4. They must have progressive challenge that will pull him into the activity.

PART -2

The aims are common to all practical life activities and we divide them into groups for our convenience.

GROUPS OF PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

One of the first activities are

a) ELEMENTARY ACTIVITIES

These activities are the early activities that are offered to the children. They do not have a direct purpose, but by doing that we are preparing the child to do later complex activities. They are a short cycle of activities. The activities satisfy all the aims of practical life activities also psychologically the child gains the ability to sit for a longer period of time.

b) CARE OF SELF/PERSON

We offer children opportunities to take care of ourselves. To groom ourselves, for ourselves and others. It's important for survival, self confidence, self esteem increases, and self confidence increases too.

c) CARE OF ENVIRONMENT

They may not do the activity for purpose initially. They are attracted towards the movement. As days go by they will start cleaning and working on their own. We must help

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

children connect with the environment; show them how to interact, how to relate with the environment and the child responds to it immediately. Cultural aspects are also important, so that they will be able to fit in the environment, and help them belong. Both indoor and outdoor activities are essential and to feel a sense of responsibility and feel the love is important as well.

d) GRACE AND COURTESY

It mainly focuses on how we relate and how do we communicate

Interaction includes both movements and speech. There are unsaid rules we follow which helps in the smooth functioning of the society. These rules help us to function, it is the glue that binds the society together, to socially adapt is a very important part for young children. The children look up to us adults, we must be good examples. They gain grace once it becomes a routine, it comes naturally, and we must give them enough opportunities to practice. These activities are like lubricants that help the society function smoothly. To gracefully move and behave courteously is what we offer, without any external pressure. The presentations are always done in a group, and we give them a safe space to practice these skills. It becomes a part of them and then they start practicing it in the society. They bring back order spontaneously. After some practice the children feel “I can do it, and I will do it.

ACTIVITIES FOR SELF CONTROL

a) Walking on the line

It's not similar to other practical life activities but they belong to practical life activities because it's related to movement. To increase the emerging will of the child. To walk in coordination of people behind and ahead of them. It also helps them to gain equilibrium and balance.

b) Silence game

We encourage children not to move their body and control their movements by helping them control their movements and body voluntarily. Both those activities help them become aware of themselves and self restraint that they impose upon themselves.

HOW TO OFFER THE PRACTICAL LIFE ACTIVITIES

Most of the activities are individual presentations and some are group activities. Every presentation is like an offering to the children who are a powerful force who is forming themselves, so that they can engage with that activity and begin the work of self construction.

Presentation should be slow and smooth and with utmost clarity, we need to analyze our movement.

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

TYPES OF PRESENTATION

DIRECT PRESENTATION: Presenting the activity directly to the child

INDIRECT PRESENTATION: Children absorb/ notice even when it's not directly shown to them.

STEPS FOR PRESENTATION

PREPARATION: Prepare the material prior, get the materials ready, and the presentation should be done smoothly and should flow from our hands.

INVITATION: It is a beautiful concept; we offer the invitation with utmost respect and love and most importantly with a smile, initially we shouldn't give them a choice, because they are still learning to adapt to the environment. They take time to gain faith in the environment, later on its ok if they refuse the invitation, but love and respect shouldn't be compromised. Our support is important; we must encourage and push them to the activity, but must never force them.

PRESENTATION:

Language is the most important aspect in a presentation; it has to be precise, descriptive, and should be explained well with rich language. There shouldn't be speaking and moving together. We invite the child to watch, and only our hands should speak. After the presentation we must invite the child to do the activity, we must push the child,, never force them.

WINDING UP:

The child's work begins now; they must be allowed to do it as many times as they want to. We must not allow the child to misuse the materials. We must stop immediately. Repetition, engagement, focus, and concentration, all will happen once the child is allowed to engage in the activity. When the child is ready to finish, we help them to wind up. Winding up is also there for pouring, folding cloth etc, we must check if vessels are dried completely. Is the soap too wet? If it's a wet cloth, dry it, roll it and put it back. Help the child wind up and put it back, in the right place.

POINT OF INTEREST

Offering useful help with quantity, for polishing, the right amount of polish, for washing the amount of water, amount of soap etc. It is an essential part of a presentation which helps the child engage and move on towards concentration.

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

CONCLUSION

When all Practical life activities come together, the child is likely to attain patience and perseverance; it also builds the will of the child. The child gains self control and becomes a contributing member of the society. They gain the ability to think logically. Order, confidence, perseverance, is attained. They become empathetic, well adapted to the environment. These are the benefits they gain in a mixed environment. The older one helps the younger child. Children love to offer help; they rush to pick up things. Younger ones being around give an opportunity for the older ones to help. So the older and the younger one mutually co-exist.

ANALYSIS OF MOVEMENT

We work for speed and efficiency and we multitask. We need to be graceful and slow to show the children. It's important that they know the details so we shouldn't work slow. Breakdown the steps in the movement to offer clarity and precision. The flow must be there, we should show the steps one by one, the frequency must be the same from the start to the end. Unnecessary movements must be avoided. When we place something we must gently do it with clarity, only then will the child acquire the techniques. To attain graceful movement, we must practice a lot. The presentation is according to the needs of the child. We look for readiness. Presentation works only when we offer the right activity at the right time.

When we examine something in great detail, we need to examine our movements too in detail. How we open/ close the box, screw/unscrew a lid, fold a cloth etc. Movements are also created in detail with steps. This creates a difference between steps and analysis. It's just like the case of a dancer or a musician. Every single detail is part by part and that's what makes it whole. It involves every single movement necessary to perform that activity. We extract only essential movements and eliminate all unnecessary movements. By focusing on essential movements we become graceful.

The other thing is when we do a long activity with many steps we need to look at the logical sequence of movements. What needs to be done first? The focusing of essential movements is what Dr.Montessori calls analysis of movements. There is a quote that says" In every complex action accompanied by a series of distinct movements, one follows the other."

Analysis is referred to as an economy of series of distinct movements, one follows the other. It is referred to as an economy of movements. So it's like putting together essential movements, by doing so, we reach higher degrees of perfection in our movements, with complete control it becomes graceful movements.

We must prepare ourselves to offer these presentations to children. Presentations are gifts, we love to give and receive gifts. Giving and receiving are intangible things. It is easy to get bored since we show the presentation again and again. But every time should be like the

INTRODUCTION TO PRACTICAL LIFE

first time. The child must feel that we enjoy doing the presentation. The preparation that we have to do before presenting is called analyzing.

Often we tend to be careless with our movements. We move more than we need to. We need to practice to give beautiful and graceful movements until we make them perfect and precisely to the child. We must be like a dancer, so graceful. The child absorbs our movements and tries to imitate us. By seeing us they can perfect their movements. Adults move around us quickly. Children don't get opportunities to watch them. We are not performing to entertain the child, we aren't clowns, and we are just performing graceful movements for the child to absorb. This is such an important concept. It guides the child in their everyday movements. We must start looking at ourselves in whatever we do, only then will be aware of our body and movements and learn to control them.