

I am quite impressed and have seen first hand how the practical life aspect of the Montessori method actually really works. Having seen my now-11 year old daughter growing up and scores of her other friends, it is quite true that they prefer to 'play' with real life circumstances than plastic toys or make-believe things. We buy them the nicest looking toys but they play with them for a short while and then ignores them completely afterwards. We try to do things for them during their preschool years, thinking that they are too young to be able to handle things like holding their own glass cups, setting their own tables for a meal, cleaning up their toys, etc. but in reality, we are hindering their development towards independence and personal growth. In the process, we contribute to their dissatisfaction as well by not allowing them to do what they most want to learn to do – the practical everyday real things – which leads to tantrums and crying.

One of the most immediate things that struck me about the Montessori method was when I read about the girl who kept on crying because her mom was not wearing her coat the way she always does – the power of the concept of order. Now I understand why young children, including my own, would be upset when things are different. One time, I laid down on my son's bed and used his pillow and he was really upset and was crying for me to go back to my own bed and use my own pillow. If I had not learned the concept of order and read the example of the girl crying because her mom was 'different' on that particular day, I would have been angry with my son thinking that he is being selfish when in reality, his tantrums is due to me being 'out of order'.

And, at least, for certain day-to-day regular activities, it did not matter whether the child is a boy or a girl. What mattered was what they see the adults around them are actually doing and wanting to imitate them. For example, my son, loves to play with the piano. He would pull out the chair, sit on it, and just play around the piano keys with his tiny fingers. On the same breath, he also loves to tinker with the guitar, strumming the strings. He also loves to use the recorder – always seeing his older sister play it as part of her school requirement. I believe it is because he sees his older sister and myself regularly just practicing on the piano at the same time that he sees his father also practicing playing the guitar. Since then, we have bought a small wooden guitar for him as well to strum with along with his father. And I would give him a chair to sit beside me and play the piano as I play. He sees these activities as part of our regular lifestyle and wants to imitate and do the same things.

Another example is his love to play with both what we traditionally expect girls to play with as well as what boys play with. He would go to the kitchen and take whatever kitchen utensil he can find then pretend to cook then pretend to set the table and serve meals. At the same time, he also loves to play with animals, cars, balls, trains, airplanes, etc. The more real the items he plays with, the longer he plays with them. If you give him anything that is a poor imitation of a real

Homework for Montessori Directress/Director Training -- Practical Life

thing, like a yellow-colored plastic dog, for example, he will ignore it (but he will never resist going after real dogs and puppies).

Having learned and realized these things, I now try to let my son explore and do things independently, within the limits of safety and practicality. As an example, whereas during my daughter's toddler years, we always hold her hands tightly when we take a walk for fear she might fall down and get hurt, now we let our son freely walk and run around and allow him to learn on his own how he can develop and control his motor skills. Whereas I used to let my daughter learn about the world more through books, I now bring my son to as much places as possible to observe for his own the real world around him. He loves to chase after birds and gets excited riding the bus and the trains. We used to strap him to his stroller whenever we are on the trains (MTRs) for fear that he will run around inside a moving train as he is a very active boy and in the process gets hurt, but he always throws a tantrum and wants to sit with us on the train seats. Finally, one time we gave in to him and let him sit on his own and we were pleasantly surprised that when we did this, he actually sat still throughout the entire ride until we reached our destination (which was almost a full 30 minute ride). Now we let him sit on his own seat every time and not strapped on the stroller anymore.

Overall, on a personal level, having learned the Montessori methods and concepts, I now understand the rationale why some children are more independent, more self-motivated, more careful and can cope better with life. This has helped me tremendously in how I now deal with my own children, specially my young son. While my older daughter is actually quite good in all aspects of her life, I know I can do even better with my son after learning what I've learned in this training. It will help me avoid certain mistakes and misunderstanding of the behavior of children.

In closing, I would like to point out though that, to me, there is another more important underlying truth that we all need to realize as part of our learning about the practical life aspects of the Montessori method. Children love to imitate adults – not just in the practical day-to-day things we do, but also our behavior, what we believe in, our outlook in life. This has been clear through the ages – that we, adults, can shape the life and future of our children not just in terms of how much freedom and exposure we give them early in life but also in the kind of life we live that they see everyday.