

# Family Connection

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## Practical Life: Purposeful Skills that Empower the Child

By Heather White



*“We do not teach the children these things [practical life activities] to make little servants of them, but because we have observed that of their own accord children actually take the greatest interest in perfecting all the movements of daily life .”*

—MARIA MONTESSORI

*Maria Montessori Speaks to Parents, p. 49*

Children have an incredible knack for remaining present in the moment and helping others do the same. They take nothing for granted and are amazed by seemingly mundane things, including everyday routines and practices of daily life.

One of the hallmarks of Montessori capitalizes on the child’s immense interest in everyday life, utilizing their motivation to support their continued growth and development. The practical life curriculum encompasses the “domestic” work necessary to maintain the home or classroom environment, to care for oneself and for others, and to demonstrate grace and courtesy.

Practical life activities are introduced at each age level, offering purposeful activities that empower the child in the pursuit of these skills as they continue to learn and grow.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

Young children are innately drawn to practical life skills. They find great purpose and meaning in these activities, developing confidence and self-determination with their successful completion.

For them, these tasks are not work. They do not have the same negative perception of chores that adults possess, for they are completing the task for the experience, rather than to simply get the job done. These practical life activities are something young children need and crave.

Practical life activities also hold great value for a young child’s development. They promote the child’s growing independence, helping them master practical skills for daily living. And, they aid them in communicating effectively with others and in forming the basis of later abstract learning through the establishment of concentration, coordination, and order.

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Through practical life activities, young children experience what it feels like to make a choice and complete a task. Through that cycle, they build their confidence and endurance.

Perhaps most importantly, practical life activities help define a child's role in the classroom, creating a sense of belonging. Young children feel such an immense sense of joy when they are capable of contributing in meaningful ways to the world around them.

**Some examples of practical life activities in the Early Childhood classroom include:**

**Care of self:** brushing one's hair, dressing oneself, handwashing

**Care of the environment:** plant watering, flower arranging, dishwashing, table washing, sweeping

**Grace and courtesy:** how to greet someone, how to politely interrupt

## ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

Elementary and Secondary students also crave this sense of belonging and have a strong desire to understand their place in the world, while simultaneously asserting their autonomy. Though the nature of practical life activities changes a bit for children of this age, the purpose and the impact remain the same.

Some examples of practical life activities for Elementary students and adolescents that help foster their blossoming independence as they learn to work with others and give back to their communities include:

- ◆ Preparing a snack or cooking a meal
- ◆ Composting
- ◆ Using a planner/scheduling
- ◆ Planning a school, family, or personal event like a party
- ◆ Public speaking
- ◆ Searching the internet
- ◆ Organizing and participating in community service projects
- ◆ Leading classroom or school tours
- ◆ Creating a class or personal business
- ◆ Grocery shopping
- ◆ Mowing the lawn
- ◆ Household repairs (changing a lightbulb, painting, fixing a leak, assembling furniture)
- ◆ Making and receiving phone calls and taking a brief message
- ◆ Doing laundry

References: Montessori, Maria. 2019. *The Absorbent Mind*. Netherlands: Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company.



By Cynthia Conesa

**G**eography studies, like all areas in the Montessori curriculum, are inherently tied to lessons across the curriculum. **Physical geography**—land and water forms, the water and rock cycles, etc.—is connected to studies in physical science; and **human geography**—cultural, social, and political phenomena—is intrinsically linked to history. There are myriad math, language, and art extensions built into the geography work, allowing children to grow these skills while enjoying learning about the world around them. As such, Geography is one spoke of the curriculum wheel of which Cosmic Education is at the center. Following is an overview of the main components of the Montessori Geography curriculum which may be found in Early Childhood or Elementary classrooms.



**Sandpaper and painted globes** give the child a visual and tactile impression that Earth's surface consists of land and water. From here, the child begins to learn the names of the continents and oceans.

**Land and water forms** are a series of models depicting corresponding land and water forms:

lake – island

strait – isthmus

bay – cape

system of lakes – archipelago

gulf – peninsula

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The models often use clay to represent the land, and a space wherein the child pours colored water to see the corresponding water form.

**Three-part cards** illustrating and defining the parts and types of glaciers, volcanoes, coastlines, mountains, rivers, etc.

**Continent folders and boxes** are collections of photos and artifacts representing a variety of cultures, introducing children to differences in people's food, clothing, shelter, etc. This sets the stage for the Fundamental Needs of Humans work (history) and appeals to the older child's emerging global perspective.

**Flags** include parts of the flag and how the colors, symbols, images, emblems, and words used on a flag represent the elements of a place—its people, its history, its land. Learning about the flag is one component of a larger study of a state or country.

**Puzzle maps** feature the countries of each continent, depicted with an individual puzzle piece. A small knob for handling each piece is placed at the location of the country's capital. Additional puzzles exist for the U.S. states and for the provinces of Canada.



**Pin maps** are a more abstract work as the child works with the pin maps to locate or identify countries, capitals, major rivers, seas, mountain ranges, and other notable land and water forms.

**Map Skills** cover everything from basic lessons like left-right, cardinal and ordinal directions, to latitude, longitude, and coordinates. The history of navigation and cartography is included for older students.

Next cohort deadline is September 28

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