

# EXERCISES OF PRACTICAL LIFE: 3 TO 6 COMPARED TO 6 TO 12

KODAIKANAL ADVANCED COURSE, INDIA, 1943-44<sup>1</sup>

LECTURE 76<sup>2</sup>

by Mario M. Montessori

*This simple, first-published article by Mario Montessori was written in Kodaikanal, India, and reveals a great Montessori truth that has never been so explicit: There are developmental stages for practical life that cross over into nature study and living experiences. Although more abstract, the second plane has a strong practical life component that connects the six- to twelve-year-old to the real natural world. This emphasis on the second plane makes an even stronger, more unified connection between the developmental continuum that is completely embedded in the natural world before and after elementary.*

## Exercises of Practical Life

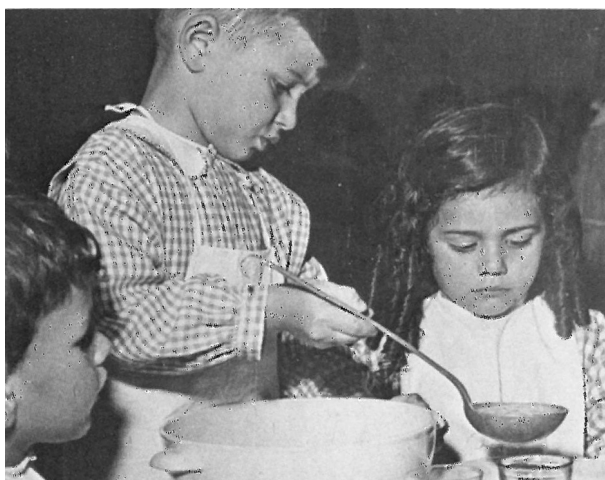
There are parallel exercises between those in the House of Children and the children between the ages of 6 to 12 years.

House of Children, 3–6 years	Elementary, 6–12 years
1. Care of the Person and Care of the Environment	
(a) Hand washing	(a) The systematic care and washing of the feet, as a preparation for hiking
(b) Learning to dress and undress	(b) How to wash, iron, fold and mend clothes, sew buttons, remove stains, and make emergency clothes
(c) Putting everything back in its place, replacing insets back in frames—all the exercises in exactness	(c) Preparing parcels, placing everything so that they take the least possible space and make it easy to carry. The easiest way to carry something heavy is to carry it on the shoulders or around waist. This gives no fatigue. Strap the baggage to the body. Carrying with the hands is very tiring.
(d) Observation of complex actions shown with analyzed movement so that each motion is done with exactness	(d) <i>Exercises in Provisions</i> —Put the things to be used first on top. This is preparation for going out for a night or for a few days so that it becomes imprinted in the memory. Think of every action in sequence and arrange things carefully.

<sup>1</sup>The 1943 Advanced Course in Kodaikanal is universally understood as having been the seminal moment in the development of the Elementary Montessori curricular framework, i.e., Cosmic Education.

<sup>2</sup>As you see, this is a synopsis of a lecture and not the lecture itself. When Maria and Mario Montessori gave an International Training Course, such as the Kodaikanal Advanced Course of 1943-44, there was often an approved synopsis printed and distributed to the students as a help for their study. Most of these only exist now as faded artifacts, having been printed by a mimeograph (inking) technique.

House of Children, 3–6 years	Elementary, 6–12 years
<b>1. Care of the Person and Care of the Environment</b>	
(e) Observation of the environment and orientation in time; to know the daily division of work	<p>(e) To observe practically and scientifically distances and climates; to track the apparent path of the light of sun, possibly by instruments, and to orientate by sun and stars. The art of tracking back your way in a forest. Using a sundial in the open to tell time from the sun.</p> <p><i>Forest Sense</i>—One may or may not have acquired a sense of direction; It is acquired when one is small. Trees have one side covered with moist greenery with the other side barren, depending on the direction of moist wind. Orienting to one's position and direction using a pocket compass.</p>
<b>2. Social Relations</b>	
(a) How to greet each other, to be polite and mannerly	<p>(a) <i>The Moral Field</i>—Special social behavior and special social rules:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. To respect old people;</li> <li>2. To help the weak;</li> <li>3. To care for the wounded;</li> <li>4. To help generally;</li> <li>5. Respect the animals and plants in the place we go through;</li> <li>6. Not to try always to be the first;</li> <li>7. To avoid useless discussion;</li> <li>8. To withstand with dignity one's own failures;</li> <li>9. Not to whine or to grouse.</li> </ol>
(b) Development of <i>obedience</i> and the habit of decision based on the conscience of the individual	(b) Development of the sense of faithfulness and fidelity. This leads to fulfillment of aims and collaboration with many acting cooperatively. Energy becomes multiplied in the collective effort. <i>The social instinct</i> is satisfied. Discipline becomes a social science.



Children serving soup, Laren, Holland, 1940, courtesy of Margot Waltuch collection



Children silver polishing. Laren, Holland, about 1938, courtesy of Margot Waltuch collection



Preparing a new garden after the war, Paris, 1918

House of Children, 3–6 years	Elementary, 6–12 years
3. Movement	
<p>(a) Analysis of movement. One acquires perfection of movements by eliminating unnecessary movements, which gives elegance.</p>	<p>(a) Analysis of one's thoughts, words, and impulses. These must be controlled by the mind. One must not offend another person. Do not contradict another or use violence. Games of mental control should be practiced. Not to take part in what others are doing when there is no need to do so and not to get in the way of others.</p>
<p>(b) Walking on line</p>	<p>(b) Disciplined marches (this teaches order and the synchronization of movement). Rhythmical songs should accompany these marches, as the boredom of the forced march tires much more than physical fatigue. It is the spirit that gets tired more than the body. Remembering the rules of the road. When camping out, religious songs come out automatically, especially when it is dark. This affects all people, especially primitive ones. This is one exercise for the children at night.</p>
<p>(c) Silence lesson</p>	<p>(c) To keep perfect silence by perfect immobility and to know the different sounds of the environment, especially at night. The stars and the moonlight help the children to meditate.</p>

House of Children, 3–6 years	Elementary, 6–12 years
<p>4. Exercises of the Senses of Smell and Touch</p>	<p>The corresponding exercises are very vital to the spiritual life of the child. Walking by night with grass or rock under one’s feet, walking astride on a narrow path, walking without making noise, not to strike on the heel, or press on the toe but to walk flat, on the middle of the feet, bending slightly forward at the knees (this distributes the weight of the body and thereby lessens fatigue). Walk with toes slightly pointed inwards (the Native Americans<sup>3</sup> are great experts in proper walking). Learn to walk in a forest without disturbing twigs; if the path is narrow, then walk sideways, stepping from rock to rock. Go up or down hills with sideways steps, putting legs into the hillside sideways. (This gives a cutting edge and also the leg cannot bend sideways.) Recognize the sound of water and judge the height of a waterfall if near it in dark. Finding one’s way in dim light.</p> <p><i>Use of hands:</i> This is very important in going through forests and in hill climbing. To be able to hang on three fingers, flatten and hug against a rock wall to put as much friction as possible between you and a fall. Learning to get a firm grip. Learn to pull one’s self up by the arms only as the feet are apt to slide.</p> <p><i>Use of rope:</i> To be able to use it vertically or sideways. When using a rope sideways, one must be on the inside of the rope between it and the wall, holding the rope with both hands. If the rope is taut and the individual slips and falls, he will fall against the rope, which will support him and stop him from falling down the precipice. In the case of vertical climbing, the child should be taught to place the feet against the wall and walk up holding the rope tight. This is not at all tiring and it is like walking on level ground. This gives good leverage and is an impetus to overcome gravity. The feet must be used and not the knees.</p> <p>These things should be done as a preparation for an outing: scaling a wall, throwing a rope (tie an iron ring and throw it, jerk, and set the ring), getting dry wood down from a tree for fire, etc.</p>
<p>5. Exercises of Order: Putting Everything Back in Its Place</p>	<p>Learn everything: Learn to leave things as found without leaving any mess behind. Leave not a trace when striking a camp. Learn to cut turf as a square or a circle, lifting up the whole turf. Leave the ashes and rubbish in the pit and cover it up with earth and the turf again. Respect the purity of water.</p>

<sup>3</sup>Montessori used the term “Red Indians,” which has since fallen out of favor and is now viewed as a pejorative. In 1943, however, this terminology was socially acceptable. “Red” was used to distinguish American “Indians” from East Indians, or people from India.

House of Children, 3–6 years	Elementary, 6–12 years
<p>6. Gymnastics: jumping, climbing up small trees, cycling, swimming</p>	<p>Climb tall trees or high rocks with the help of ropes, pole vaulting, technical swimming (different strokes), rowing boats and canoes. Swimming must be compulsory as otherwise they will lose all the fun of the excursions. The school must prepare them for these outings and the preparation must be intense.</p> <p>Where possible, ice-skating and roller-skating must be taught. Different kinds of sport such as boxing, target shooting, fencing, all athletic games, stick, javelin, dart, and disc throwing, cycle racing, riding, jumping over hurdles, driving horses (facing the tail of the horse), driving cars, pitching tents, taking them down and packing them up, making parcels, loading and unloading animals. The latter is an art for if there is no equilibrium the animal will unload itself, especially if it is a donkey! Laws of gravity, the triangle of forces and other such scientific things must be taken into consideration.</p> <p>Learn to light a fire especially when it is raining (during rain make the fire big enough). If there is a huge fire, then the raindrops cannot reach it as they will become vapor before they reach the fire. For this, a large amount of wood is necessary. This is a secret of the Native Americans.</p> <p>Improvise plates for eating, to make and create a place for sleeping on ground. The cowboys make a pit in which they put their bottom while sleeping and they are comfortable for the whole night, that is, if the ground is not damp.</p> <p>The child should learn how to lay a trail for others. One of the ways is to push the plants down on either side with the feet. To build a raft for crossing the river—this has its own technique. If two trunks are put together they float and the space in between is to be filled up with another. They should learn how to build shelters from rain, build permanent shelters, build bridges, and gauge distances.</p> <p>Children should be taken on one or two trips in the year. Everything should be planned out beforehand: the itinerary, the expenses, timetables, and so forth. On these trips children will put into practice what they have learned, their knowledge of plants, animals, the lives of the insects, and observation of nature in general. They can also collect specimens, biological, botanical, and their collections may be for the school, the house or the museum. They can observe facts of geography and collect geological specimens. They should observe the animals in the zoo and on the farm, visit botanical gardens, see how the cattle are looked after, know how to fish, go to historical places and also see the pre-historical excavations in the neighborhood, if any.</p>



House of Children, 3–6 years	Elementary, 6–12 years
<p>6. Gymnastics: jumping, climbing up small trees, cycling, swimming (continued)</p>	<p>Children between the ages of 10-12 should visit the places of work and production, i.e., industrial centers and factories to see how the minerals are extracted from their ores and to come in touch with the products of civilization and learn under what conditions man produces different articles. To live with commercial fishermen and help them in their work, and to do the same with the miners. To visit farms where agriculture is carried out scientifically, to visit printing presses and to see how the dailies are being printed and distributed. To visit the centers of exchange and trade, to clock the arrival and loading and unloading of boats in the harbors, to travel in bullock carts and boats, to row and to be towed along.</p> <p>All this is directed at helping the individual to prepare for the period of rest between the ages of 12 and 14 years. This helps the child to gain an intimate contact with the world. The child must explore the social conditions of man and the different aspects of society and of nature.</p>

---

*Dr. Mario Montessori (1898-1982), son of Maria Montessori, dedicated his life to the preservation, dissemination, and application of Montessori's works.*

*Copyright © 1944 Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company. NAMTA would like to express its gratitude to the Montessori-Pierson Publishing Company and the Maria Montessori Archives held at AMI for suggesting this lecture and making it available. Special thanks to Annette Haines for reviewing and updating the article for clarity and historical context.*

