

# EXERCISES OF PRACTICAL LIFE: INTRODUCTION AND LIST

by A.M. Joosten

*Albert Joosten wrote this article in 1968, and it is still the most comprehensive article on practical life to date. He develops his thesis beginning with “daily activities” leading to “developmental and creative activities.” At the same time, Mr. Joosten establishes the psychological backdrop for the practical life exercises as he continues to describe the physical dynamics with an implicit demand for perfection. He definitively presents the indirect aims of the practical life exercise and looks at the coordination of movement, the integration of personality, emotional enrichment, the strengthening of the will, and the social relations that flourish while doing practical life with other children and the adult.*

## INTRODUCTION

### **What Are Exercises of Practical Life? What Is Their Function?**

In the Montessori House of Children we call exercises of practical life those simple, daily performed activities which man-the-adult carries out in his environment in order to maintain and restore proper conditions. His purpose in doing so is, therefore, purely conservative and utilitarian; they have an “outer aim” as far as the adult is concerned. They serve this preservative and restorative function not only with regard to things (conditions), but also with regard to persons (relations). As they form a part of the adult’s daily activities, the child practically from the moment it is born and enters into a man-made and man-maintained environment has observed them and has become exceedingly familiar with them.

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*Albert Max Joosten (1914–1980) was one of Maria Montessori’s earliest students and promoted the Montessori method worldwide. Mr. Joosten directed training centers in India, Sri Lanka, and Minnesota. He was also a member of the AMI Sponsoring Committee, AMI International Pedagogical Committee, and an AMI examiner.*

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One need not be a conscious and trained observer to have noticed that man-the-child shows already at a very early age an undeniable and strong urge to associate himself with these activities. The child shows great interest in them, tries to take part in them, "offers his help" to those carrying them out, in the first place his mother, elder sisters, servants, etc. We should ask ourselves why the young child is strongly attracted to them and that all the more as we ourselves perform them more because of their outer necessity than out of genuine inner interest.

The adult will have to re-learn and practice the manner in which these activities have to be carried out.... He has to absorb this manner in his own life and be fully aware of the fact that the most effective presentation is not that which is given intentionally, but the much more frequent, almost constant "presentation" given unintentionally when he carries out these activities in the child's presence.

In the young child's case these very activities have a much more important and more personal function. They are not merely preservative and restorative, they are truly constructive, not with regard to the environment of course, but with regard to the child himself. Those simple daily activities are for the child *developmental*, even *creative* activities. In that function we call them "exercises of practical life."

When the child carries them out, he is wholly and totally *engaged*.

Why does he "choose" them, what is it that attracts him so irresistibly and what enables them to play so constructive and developmental role in the young child's life?

Three factors have to be recognized: their simple, clear and concrete *purpose*, their easily *understood* course from start to finish (across a comparatively short span of time), the prominence of physical, therefore visible, *movements* which lie well within the child's capacity already at this early age, make these activities *intelligible* to the young child, therefore *desirable*, that is an attractive invitation to his *will*, and he can carry out the movements required to perform them in view of their understood and willed purpose. If done for

this understood and willed purpose they therefore give *direction* to his movements and impose a self-accepted discipline on them which leads to greater perfection, great skill not only of those movements, but of and in the child himself, of and in his “person” as a whole. Therein lies their developmental function. They strengthen and develop, or rather serve the child in his effort to strengthen and develop the characteristically human foundation of his personality, of unity between thought, will and action.

### Four Groups

This formative function of the exercises of practical life is realized in the vast, common and universal field covering basic relations between the child and his environment from birth onwards. They offer opportunities to actively and personally

- |                                     |                                   |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Establish —                         | 1. Elementary Movements           |
| Maintain — Relations with regard to | 2. The Environment<br>(inanimate) |
| Restore —                           | 3. Oneself (animate)              |
|                                     | 4. Others (animate)               |

There are therefore four distinct groups of exercises of practical life with regard to which the child has a right to receive assistance from us so that he can realize himself in obedience to the inner urge of self-development and its creative laws. It is they which direct his selective interest towards these activities. It is they which enable him to recognize in these activities an answer to his needs and therefore they also which make him move towards them irresistibly, even in spite of misunderstanding and obstruction on the part of the environment (adults and elders).

The four groups then:

1. Elementary Movements  
(holding, carrying, putting down, picking up, etc., of all that forms part of his daily environment, walking, sitting down, getting up, etc.)

2. Looking After the Inanimate Environment  
(dusting, cleaning, washing, polishing, etc.)
3. Looking After Oneself  
(dressing, undressing, bathing, combing, etc.)
4. Social Relations  
(greeting, offering, accepting, apologizing, etc.)

### **Adult Responsibility**

In recognition of the child's need to perform these activities, man-the-adult has an active responsibility. This consists mainly in:

1. The *preparation* (maintenance and development) of the *environment*, i.e., both place and adequate tools (material).
2. The *presentation* (establishing contact) of the *material* so that the child can make use of it for his developmental purpose which implies with respect for its aim and function.
3. Granting the necessary *freedom* of choice and repetition and this in a *prepared* environment and *after* adequate (and where necessary repeated) presentation.

Only if the adult fulfills this threefold responsibility can these exercises of practical life fully carry out and preserve their true and vital function as "means of development."

### **Preparation of Environment and Tools**

When accepting his responsibilities, the adult's first task is to prepare and maintain the environment in and on which and the materials with which these activities are carried out. The environment has to offer sufficient space (both indoors and outdoors) and scope for them. The environment of a Montessori House of Children prepared according to the requirements of the Montessori method (set forth in brief in "The Montessori House of Children, its function and requirements," publ. Indian Montessori Training Courses, Rs. 1.50) does so and need not be described here. The *tools* with which the exercises or

practical life have to be carried out will have to be prepared mainly by the adults themselves according to the following criteria:

1. **Physical proportionateness** which determines whether the child can handle them physically (reach, lift, move, etc.) and therefore purposefully. It considers his physical capacities.
2. **Psychical proportionateness** which refers to the child's intelligence. The functional purpose of the material should be comprehensible at first glance. Unnecessary complications, fancy shapes and "disguises" should be avoided. The things should be "straight forward."
3. **Maintenance** which refers to a continuous activity on the part of the adult who has at all times to be vigilant that the material be kept *clean, intact, complete*, and be always seen in the condition in which it should be. Therefore, cleaning, repairing and replacing missing or irremediably broken parts remains a duty of the adult. Anything requiring to be done in this sense has to be done *at once*. If it should be impossible to do so at once, the dirty, damaged or incomplete material should be removed from the environment until it has been restored to its proper condition. This duty is of great importance as it decides whether the will is free to move towards the activity. Dirty, damaged, or incomplete material repels.
4. **Attractiveness.** *Functional* decorations attract the will and help the child choose. They stir the child to developmental activity and because of their functional character also give direction and purposeful handling. Besides they lend a personal and original feature to the material.
5. **Local character** (adaptation). Locally used tools should be used. The outer appearance of the material, therefore, will vary and has to vary from place to place and time

to time. The children should be able to recognize the material and its purpose because of its affinity with that used in their own home-environments and they should be able to use what their elders use at home in acceptable manner.

6. **Perfectionment.** Adopting for the purpose of the exercises of practical life tools in their local form does not exclude that they be perfected where necessary. In view of their both outer and inner purpose, whatever needs or is capable of perfectionment should be thus developed. Where efficient tools are *missing* or not in common use, these should be added either by invention or by borrowing whilst at the same time considering local forms and needs. Thirdly, the number of activities and consequently tools should be constantly increased and developed on the basis of (a) observation of those in use in the environment of the children, (b) the changes that constantly take place in our environment, and (c) increased sensitivity towards the needs of the environment, ourselves, and those around us.
7. **Differentiation.** Particularly where basically identical materials are used for different activities (dusters, brushes, towels, etc.) an effort should be made to render these materials different in appearance so that the child can easily distinguish what is to be used for which purpose. This can easily be done by means of differentiation in size, in colour, in the fabric or material and where this should be “artificial” (all artificiality must be scrupulously avoided) by means of functional decorations (embroidered or “applique” indication).
8. **Independent sets of material.** Each exercise of practical life should have its own independent set of material. The child’s will would, at this stage, meet with excessive obstruction if it should have to borrow from other sets of material in order to carry out a chosen activity.

9. **Multiple sets.** It is characteristic of the material to be provided for the exercises of practical life that (in contrast to that used for later activities) for each—or at least many—of these activities more than one set of material is available. This makes possible for the child to carry out the activity chosen without having to suspend his choice and decision and either wait for another child to have finished or seek and alternative. This, at the stage of development concerned, would be too great a challenge to his will. It is also to be considered that at an initial stage of the child's life in a House of Children there are very few alternatives to the exercises of practical life.
10. **Display the material in the environment.** The material for these (and all other activities) has to be displayed in scrupulous and fixed order, according to the rule: "*everything in its proper place and a proper place for everything.*"

This orderly display has to consider:

- (a) That everything be well within reach of the child's eye and hands.
  - (b) Developmental succession: materials should be grouped and kept together according to the developmental level to which they correspond.
  - (c) It should be kept in accordance to the *nature* of the material and activity, and to its proper function. It should be kept at different levels according to the *place* where it is used (floor-level, table-level, higher-level).
11. **Separation** between means (tools) with which the exercises of practical life are carried out and the objects on which they are performed. The latter must be part of the environment and should be looked for at the different places where they belong in view of their natural function (furniture, decorative objects, shoes

in cloak-room, brass on window and door-handles etc.). The former have their fixed place as material displayed on shelves etc., (as mentioned under 10). It is only when this distinction is properly made that these exercises can play their full role and help the child extend and deepen his active contact with his environment, and assume responsibility in its regard. This is an important contribution to development as such and utterly obviated when together with the material some sample-objects, on which the activity can be carried out, are kept.

### **Presentation**

A still more important responsibility of the adult and a true privilege is to establish contact between the child and means of development. On the timeliness, repetition and perfection with which this is done there depends the extent to which the child can use these exercises for his development. The adult will have to re-learn and practice the manner in which these activities have to be carried out so that they may help development. He has to absorb this manner in his own life and be fully aware of the fact that the most effective presentation is not that which is given intentionally as such, but the much more frequent, almost constant "presentation" given unintentionally when he himself carries out these activities in the child's presence. Intentional presentations (those we commonly call so and consider) are by their nature only *sporadic*, given in answer to an acute need. The unintentional presentation repeated whenever we, adults, carry out these activities in the child's presence and environment are a constant example and inspiration. The formal presentation arouses conscious attention and throws light on the technical details of each of these activities and should enable the child to carry them out with full clarity as to all they require from him so that perfect mastery may be gained. Their constant performance by the adult and other children serves both as an inspiration arousing interest and as a check-up for one's own performance.

1. Presentations are of three types: collective presentations, group presentations, and individual presentations.



2. Which form of presentation is to be adopted depends on:
  - (a) The child(ren)'s needs to which have to be observed and responded to. These may be common to all those who form a community (or a community within a community as those newly admitted), common to some children only, and may be individual needs. Accordingly collective, group or individual presentations have to be given.

In the beginning collective presentations will naturally prevail as all newly admitted children experience common needs and these are not even so much of individual activities as those which help them settle down in the environment, acquire confidence in the adult and with the other children and become independent with regard particularly to elementary and basic movements and equally basic social relations. Neither are they at the beginning ready to receive individual presentations. The individual child likes to "keep distance," and the other children not yet capable for lack of contact to make an individual choice have to be engaged also. Later on the need for group presentations arises and ultimately individual presentations will become prevalent.

- (a) The *nature* of the *presentation* and the nature of the *activity*. Some presentations cannot be followed adequately from the distance unavoidable when they are to be given to some or all children. These, therefore, require an individual presentation. There also are exercises of practical life which by their nature require the participation of some or all children. These therefore have to be presented respectively to a group or collectively.<sup>1</sup>

As a general rule it can be stated that activities which lend themselves to a collective presentation (and do *not* concern a collective activity) can also be given to a group and to an individual child. Activities which can be given to a group (and do *not* concern

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1. cf. "Helping one, helping all" I (leaflet published by the Indian Montessori Training Course, Re. 1:50).

a group activity) can be given to an individual child, but **not** collectively. Activities which require an individual presentation can, naturally, not be given in any other way.

### Analysis of Movements

The most important and prominent characteristic of the presentation of exercises of practical life and its outstanding and essential technical feature is “analysis of movements,” i.e., the presentation of each and every movement needed to perform a given activity in a manner that enables the child to see it distinctly. Each activity consists of a series of logically subsequent actions, each of which have their own distinctive technique, place and succession in time. Analysis of movements, without breaking up the unity of the activity itself, is effected by separating every individual action from that which follows by a few seconds of inaction. In doing so the child is helped to realize:

The exercises of practical life then are **means** for an all-around **human development**. [They go] far beyond any merely utilitarian function and leave no room for social distinctions and those between boys and girls, they ... help the children lay a foundation for an ever wider and deeper development and the activities required for its realization.

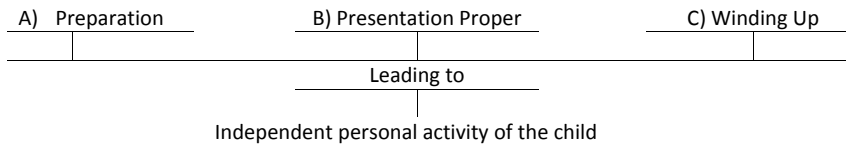
- (a) That *each activity consists of a series* (sometimes a surprisingly numerous series) of individual actions;
- (b) *Which* these actions are;
- (c) The *succession* of these actions;
- (d) *How* each individual action is to be performed in relation to the whole activity and its purpose.

It is the analysis of movements performed by the adult who presents these activities which “unlocks” their developmental potential. The exercise presented with analysis of movements becomes “transparent” to the child who is helped to “understand” it both as a whole and in its parts, therefore to “will” and carry it out himself in a conscious effort to master it fully and with full perfection, and

under the guidance of his intelligence and spurred on by his will to train his movements and to fulfill their executive function. Thus these activities become truly human activities in which intelligence, will and movements work in unity, fully engaged in harmonious cooperation. Thus the child himself grows in integration and lays a solid and vital foundation for his integrated personality. Thus the child builds up what is called “coordination of movements,” the orderly (and that also means hierarchically ordered) cooperation of intelligence, will and movements, their orderly working together in the service of the single and unique human being to whom they belong.

### Basic Parts of the Presentation

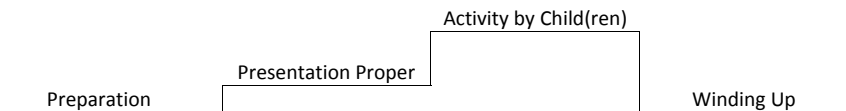
Generally each presentation consists of three distinct parts:



In the case of *collective* presentations the winding up is an integral part of the presentation as then only all the children who have observed the presentation find themselves on a basis of equality and free choice. The same is the case for a group-presentation. In the case of *individual* presentations, and where the activity presented collectively or to a group, is itself a collective of group-activity, the winding up becomes part of the activity carried out by the child(ren) and is deferred until the child(ren) decide(s) to finish his (their) activity. The moment when the presentation by the adult has fulfilled its function is in those cases indicated by the child(ren) who show(s) his (their) desire to take it over. The adult therefore has to be very observant to “catch” these indications which may be implicit rather than explicit. This can be shown with the help of two diagrams:



or (second case)



The following chart gives a detailed survey of the various steps in which each of these three parts of a presentation consists and that in three columns to facilitate comparison between the three types of presentation.

Collective Presentation	Group Presentation	Individual Presentation
<b>A. Preparation</b>		
1. In the absence of children: Remote preparation		
a) Continuous practice of both activities and their presentation		
b) Continuous practice of both activities and their presentation		
<b>Immediate preparation</b>		
a) Observation which presentations are needed by the collectivity, by groups and individuals.		
b) Practice of those presentations in preparation to offering them as soon as a suitable occasion occurs.		
c) Detailed check-up on the material required.		
2. <b>In the presence of children</b> (preparation as part of the Presentation itself):		
<b>I. Invitation:</b>		
a) Signal modest, melodious (small bell, triangle cymbal) and attuned (diminished) to the children's increasing sensitivity: to draw attention to the invitation to be given.	None	None
b) Collective invitation brief, precise (mention what will be presented), stimulating, but leaving the child(ren) free to accept or refuse	Individual invitations	Individual invitation
II. Request those who decide to take part to seat themselves in a semi-circle at a suitable place indicated by the adult.	Idem, choosing the place so that none is disturbed	The presentation will be given at the child's own (chosen) place.
b) While the children arrange themselves, the adult brings what is needed for the presentation, but not by the children who will later on carry out the activity presented on their own, f.i. a dusty table for dusting, some confetti spread on the floor for sweeping etc.	Idem	Not needed
III. When the children are ready, repeat the subject of the presentation	Idem	Not needed

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<p>IV. Fetch the material needed by both the adult who presents and the children who will do the activity presented on their own. Bring the needful one by one and show:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) What is needed</li> <li>b) Where it is kept</li> <li>c) How each item is to be carried</li> <li>d) In which succession</li> <li>e) How to place each item at the place where it is used and</li> <li>f) At which place</li> </ol>	<p>Idem.</p>	<p>Do so with the child accompanying the adult and, if ready, helping.</p>
<p><b>B. Presentation Proper</b></p>		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. a) Presented with scrupulous <i>analysis of movements</i>.</li> <li>b) Weigh and count your words, using as few as possible and those well-chosen. Words serve to underline, stimulate interest, but the presentation is given by means of actions.</li> <li>c) Focus the child's attention on <i>the point of interest</i>.</li> <li>d) Direct the child's attention to the <i>criterion of perfection</i> (or control of error) which enables the child to judge and correct his own performance independently and stimulates repetition, leading to perfection.</li> <li>e) Repeat the presentation once or twice according to need and interest.</li> </ol>		
		<p>In an individual presentation the adult continues performing the activity until the child shows its desire to take over, by gesture, word or facial expression. The child can be stimulated to take over by slightly slowing down one's actions and their succession. This "indirect" stimulus is better than a direct one in the form of a verbal invitation.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. <b>Invite</b> an individual child, mentioning its name, to repeat the activity presented (do not ask, "Who would like to repeat it?") Choose the child to be invited in answer to its eagerness to do so and consider its probable ability. The child invited should be free to decline the invitation. Two or even three children can thus be invited, according to interest and duration of the activity.</li> </ol>		<p>No invitation needed, see above</p>

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3. <b>Short verbal summary</b> of outstanding points: stress control of error and point of interest.	None	
		After the child to whom the individual presentation has been given starts to carry out the activity itself and we have observed that is does so “in the right direction,” though not perfectly of course, the adult leaves the child discreetly and continues observing from a distance (the adult’s own place). The presentation is over.
<b>C. Winding Up</b>		
1. <b>Put back</b> the material which will be used also by the child who carries out the activity, to its proper place, in proper manner and succession. This can be done with the help of one or two children, the others watch how it is done.	Idem.	Done by the child himself when it decides to discontinue the activity, which however must be completed.
a) The children are invited to disperse and resume their own activities at their own, chosen, places.	Idem.	
b) Meanwhile the adult puts back the things used for the presentation only by him (the table dusted, chair lifted etc.) Children who wish to help, can do so of course.	Idem.	
<b>VI. Freedom</b>		
The child’s inner potentialities and his developmental urge, which make him look for these exercises of practical life as they answer his needs, are given the scope and opportunities required by: The preparation of the environment and the materials	And  Which then offer and make possible, but also require freedom to conquer independence.	The presentation which established developmental contact and “opens up”

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<p>In carrying out these developmental activities in the four fields covered by them. The child should, therefore, enjoy full freedom within the limits of correct endeavor and regard for others and for the community as a whole, in using these means for his unique and supreme mission: his own development. He should be free to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Choose</b> any of the activities presented,</li> <li>2. <b>Decide</b> when to do a particular activity,</li> <li>3. <b>Repeat</b> any activity as many times and as often as needed by him,</li> <li>4. <b>Ask</b> for a repetition of any presentation already given or for new presentations</li> </ol>
<p><b>VII. The Adult's Task in Favour of Freedom</b></p> <p>The adult's activity which is an "outer" one while preparing the environment and material, while giving presentations and in providing for and protecting freedom of action, changes into an <i>inner participation</i> in the child's self-constructive work when the children assume freedom and personal responsibility with regard to these activities. The adult then follows the children in their work, within his own mind. He will <i>observe</i> respectfully, i.e.: also inobtrusively, the children's independent activity, note <i>preference</i> for one or the other form of activity, the <i>manner</i> in which they are done, the <i>difficulties</i> met with and whether they require direct assistance or will be overcome by repeated performance. He will also note whether certain activities remain outside the child's horizon and range of choice and whether they have to be brought within this range directly by repeated presentation or first presentations or whether the stimulus given by other children carrying them out suffices. He will, furthermore, try and interpret on which basis the child chooses his activities: a) urged from within our of interest in the activity itself (in which case we often find the child first fetching the material needed and only thereafter looking for an object on which it can be used) or b) in response to a need of the animate or inanimate environment or the attraction of some object in the environment on which the activity can, or needs, to be carried out (in which case we often see the child first taking such an object and only then fetch the material required). He will also observe the transition from the former motive to the latter both with regard to individual activities and to the whole range of exercises of practical life. Careful and objective records have to be kept of these observations, both with regard to individual children (at least once a week) and with regard to the community as a whole (daily): cf. "observation," leaflet published by the Director, Indian Montessori Training Courses.</p> <p>The adult's inner activity of observation is based on loving readiness to render assistance when help is needed, but still more on ready humility in letting the child work at his own development through effort, struggle and imperfection overcome by personal and fully engaged repeated activity. The adult will scrupulously avoid interfering and limit himself to the rendering of truly needed help, always remembering that "all forms of unnecessary help are a hindrance to development." Prompt interference, firmly expressed but always positive in nature and without "anger" is required if the child(ren) <i>misuse(s)</i> the material, lack(s) in respect towards the other members of the community and towards the environment and thereby waste(s) his (their) own energy and time or cause(s) others to do so. This interference must aim at reorienting the child's choice, redirecting his actions and leave to the child the alternative of either doing so or leaving the activity and choosing something he can do constructively and wills to do so. The positive purpose of such intervention should be expressed by an equally positive and helpful manner (and even tone).</p>
<p><b>VIII. The direct aim of the exercises of practical life:</b></p> <p><b>To help the child grow in independence</b> with regard to</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The performance of elementary movements,</li> <li>2. Looking after himself,</li> <li>3. Looking after his environment</li> <li>4. Social relations.</li> </ol>

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**IX. The indirect aim of the exercises of practical life**

**To help the child consolidate and develop coordination of movements and the integration of his personality.**

Coordination of movements (as specified above) reveals itself through movements performed in an orderly, graceful and purposeful manner. It becomes an indication of the growing integration of the personality, the union and harmony of the inner powers of intelligence and will with their executor organs, the movements. While carrying out these exercises of practical life for his own inner and developmental purpose, these three basic powers come ever closer together, integrate and build up a firm and lasting foundation for further development.

X. Other positive “consequences” follow along with the direct and indirect aims of the exercises of practical life and are embedded in the soil of development:

1. An *emotional* enrichment: intelligent, willed—that is freely chosen and perseverantly performed—activity which answers a developmental need is necessarily also loved. The love felt for these activities by the child ensure for them a place in his whole life and helps them play the role they are meant to occupy both in view of their utility as well as a form of relaxation.
2. A *social* “revolution:” the place these activities occupy in the child’s first (and fundamental) years of life, the love felt for them and the “inspiration” given to him by those who perform them in his daily environment, leaves no room for a looking-down upon these activities and those who perform them professionally (menial labour, menials), but help the child develop true and just appreciation. This positive attitude on the part of the child brings about a “natural” an peaceful “social reorientation” which through the child permeates more effectively than any direct action on the part of adults can every achieve.
3. *Practical consequences:* the child who carries out these activities for his own purpose and in this own prepared environment, develops a habit of taking care of everything in and around himself.
4. The exercises of practical life spontaneously performed and repeated also make a substantial and “natural” contribution to physical development. The muscles of the whole body are exercises not mechanically and under outer compulsion as often in physical training, nor either as a function of the body only, but by a human being as an expression of his human life and for a truly human, understood and willed purpose. For that reason also they are repeated more often than any merely physical activity would be done and that without fatigue and strain.
5. They help the child develop *intelligent and responsible contact* with his environment which lays the basis for later more penetrating and abstract exploration.
6. There is formed a *habit of conscious constructive activity*, a “taste” which makes all other forms of activity “insipid.”
7. They also help the child form a habit of *judging his activity objectively and independently*, not in view of praise or blame from without, but out of interest in and attachment to perfection.
8. They nourish the *development of the will* in providing a vast opportunity for its constructive and intelligent use in choosing, deciding, persevering.

The exercises of practical life then are *means* for an all-around *human development*. Looked upon, assisted and performed in this function which goes far beyond any merely utilitarian function and leaves no room for social distinctions and those between boys and



girls, they lay a foundation, or more correctly, help the children lay a foundation for an ever wider and deeper development and the activities required for its realization.

Cf. Maria Montessori: *The Discovery of the Child*, Chapter VI

A.M. Joosten: "The Hand in Education" (*Around the Child* Vol. II)

### LIST OF EXERCISES OF PRACTICAL LIFE

The following list of activities cannot, of course, be complete nor is it meant to be complete. The activities to be presented to the children should be multiplied according to local conditions, customs and possibilities and to the development that takes place in the environment. The classification of this or that activity under the one or the other heading is also "orientative" rather than final and several activities can be considered as related to more than one group.

#### Elementary Movements and Activities

1. Rolling and unrolling of sitting and working mats, carpets, oil-cloths, etc. (Each activity has its own distinctive features and will be presented separately. Not more than **one** activity to be presented in the course of a single demonstration. It also is to be considered which should be presented first and that from the point of view of the child's independence, f.i. rolling precedes unrolling as even before demonstration the child will be able to unroll somehow. The same will apply later on to opening and closing where some activities (buttoning, lacing, etc.) closing is to be given priority, whilst for others (doors, windows, etc.) the opening will prove more difficult and should be shown first.
2. Sitting down on and getting up from: mats, chairs, chairs standing front of chowkies or tables.
3. How to walk quietly.

4. How to talk softly, but audibly.
5. To go near a person before addressing him (not to call from a distance).
6. How to hold: rolled mats and carpets, folded mats and carpets, rolled oil-cloths, jugs (or various sizes and weight, with and without ears or handles), glasses, cups, saucers, plates, thali's, Iota's, katori's, boxes, chairs, chowkies, tables, tiffin-carriers, lunch boxes, bags, parcels and generally all objects that form part of the environment. Also specially the different items of the apparatus. Separate presentations to be given when the object requires to be held by more than one person.
7. How to carry all of the above.
8. How to put down all of the above.
9. How to pick up all of the above.
10. How to carry objects in each of the two hands (keeping distance between the hands to avoid knocking, yet keeping an eye on both).
11. How to carry a tray with both hands.
12. How to carry a tray on which something is kept: a) one object only which does not move, b) an object which can move, c) with more immobile objects, d) with several mobile objects.
13. How to hold and carry books, photographs, pictures, etc.
14. How to carry objects on the head: flat ones, curved ones (with support), heavy ones (with protecting pad on the head).
15. How to hold and carry pointed objects (with the point downwards) and cutting objects (with the

sharp edge turned leftwards): pencils, pens, cutlery, scissors, etc.

16. How to hold and carry gardening tools (watering-can, rake, spade, etc.)
17. How to put down all objects mentioned under 10-16.
18. How to hold and carry lit and unlit candles, diya's, oil-lamps.
19. How to put down the above (18).
20. Pouring, first of dry materials (small seeds that flow easily), from Iota into katori's and vice versa, oil with special ladle from container into diya or oil-lamp.
21. Pouring into a bottle: through a funnel, into small glasses with an eye-dropper, with the help of a pump (kerosene-pump), with the help of a rubber-hose into a vessel held at a lower level.
22. Folding: of napkins (according to different patterns), of handkerchiefs, of dusters (for putting away and, separately, for dusting) table-cloths (requires more than one child if large), of different shapes of paper (for making mats), etc.
23. Unfolding the above.
24. Opening and closing (see note ad. 1) of: doors, boxes, bowls, drawers, shutters, windows, cupboards, cases, chests.
25. Opening and closing with the help of keys, latches, padlocks, bolts, chains, snap-locks, secret springs etc.
26. How to hang up: towels, dusters (wet and dry), brooms, dustpan and brush, pictures, buttoning frames, etc.

27. How to turn the pages of a book, photo-album etc.
28. How to light and extinguish: candles (also with taper), matches, diya's, oil-lamps.
29. How to clean and card raw cotton.
30. How to prepare cotton-wicks.
31. Use of "takali."
32. Cutting with scissors, (with round points), paper-knife, ordinary knife: of various things (string, ribbon, flower stalks, dry twigs and faded leaves, paper-mats, cloths); according to various patterns: first along straight lines, later (also with special scissors) along curved lines, of simple geometric designs, etc.
33. Cutting and slicing of bread, of different vegetables, of fruits.
34. Peeling of different fruits and vegetables.
35. Scraping of different vegetables, coconut, etc.
36. Breaking of coconut, pouring its milk, scraping out its flesh, etc.
37. Washing different vegetables and fruit.
38. Cleaning rice, wheat, dal, etc.
39. Winnowing rice, wheat, etc.
40. Grinding nuts, wheat, rice, etc.
41. Crushing with pestle and mortar.
42. Beating and whisking of eggs.
43. Stirring and mixing ingredients

44. Crushing with special tools for the preparation of massala's, chutneys, etc.
45. Shelling of peas, beans, etc., also peanuts, cashew nuts, almonds, cardamom.
46. Seasoning salads.
47. Making mashes (potatoes, etc.)
48. Sifting flour, etc.
49. Churning butter-milk.
50. Kneading of dough (for chapatti, puri, etc.).
51. Rolling of kneaded dough.
52. Cutting of different shapes and for different purposes of rolled dough.
53. Simple cooking (syrups, jams, and other easy preparations).
54. Pasting and glueing (edges, full surfaces, envelopes, stamps, etc.)

Special (collective) activities are the silence-activity and walking on the line (see also "Around the Child, Vol. X")

### **Looking After the Environment: Indoors**

1. Arranging sitting and working mats, tables, chowkies, chairs, etc. for different purposes (individual, group and collective activities, functions, etc.)
2. Putting away what has been used (furniture, apparatus, etc.).
3. Dusting (of various objects) a) with duster, b) with feather duster, c) with soft brush.

4. Use of dustpan and brush.
5. Sweeping (a limited space should be demarcated).
6. Polishing of brass, bronze, silver, wood, etc. with appropriate material (brasso, silver-polish, ash and tamarind, lime, salt, chunam, etc.). Help should be given so that the child does not take more than needed (marks on "spatula," using only the brasso, silver-polish, etc., remaining in the lid after shaking).
7. Cleaning of windows, mirrors, etc. (with water, old newspapers, methylated spirit).
8. Cleaning of framed pictures and photographs.
9. Washing of towels, handkerchiefs, dusters, easily washed clothes, crockery, cutlery, etc. (using soap, soap scrapings, soap-powder, etc.).
10. Drying of the above.
11. Ironing (the handle should be well protected by a holder).
12. Cleaning and scrubbing of pots and pans.
13. Washing the floor.
14. Mopping spilled liquids, from chowkies, tables, floor (small drops and larger quantities).
15. Polishing an earthen floor (with a mixture of earth and cow-dung) and rubbing with polishing-stone.
16. Washing of slates, black-boards, etc.
17. Dusting of black-boards.
18. Brushing mats and carpets.
19. Beating mats and carpets.

20. Laying and clearing a table and preparing the needful for a meal, a snack, tea, etc. according to the customs and styles used in the child's environment.
21. Decorating the floor, entrance, special places with white and coloured powders and different designs.
22. Preparing leaf-garlands for door-posts, hanging them.
23. Preparing the environment for religious functions (prayers, puja's, etc.).
24. Watering plants in pots. Sprinkling, washing, and dusting of leaves.
25. Arranging flowers in vase, refreshing water in flower-vases, removing and cutting off withered flowers and leaves.
26. Maintenance of aquarium, terrarium, aqua-terrarium, insectarium, etc.
27. Maintenance of bird cages.
28. Feeding of animals kept indoors (mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish).

### **Looking After the Environment: Outdoors**

1. Sweeping compound.
2. Sweeping lawns.
3. Washing and scrubbing of concrete and stone pavements (flag-stones, tiles).
4. Raking.
5. Digging.
6. Hoeing.

7. Watering plants, flower-beds, lawns (watering-can, water-pots, hose).
8. Weeding (give samples of weeds to be removed, basket to collect them in).
9. Protecting delicate plants, fruits, etc. (covering with protective branches or leaves, tying muslin bags, spraying).
10. Gathering fruit in baskets, drying fruit in the sun, maturing fruit in straw or saw-dust.
11. Laying out fruit on shelves, arranging it in baskets.
12. Gathering twigs and fire-wood, bundling it, carrying it, stacking it.
13. Collecting vegetables.
14. Gathering eggs.
15. Looking after (cleaning, feeding, etc.) poultry, pigeons, rabbits and other conveniently kept animals.
16. Preparing nesting-houses (pots) for wild birds.
17. Feeding and watering wild birds in times of food-scarcity or drought.
18. Looking after shallow ponds (with or without fish, etc.)

### **Looking After Oneself: Hygiene**

1. Washing hands, face, feet, taking bath (under shower and with Iota) using soap, soap-nut powder and other commonly used preparations.
2. Drying oneself and the different washed parts.
3. Cleaning the teeth (with toothbrush and toothpaste, stick and other commonly used things). Gargling, rinsing of the mouth.



4. Bathing of the eyes. Applying eye-black, (Kajal).
5. Care of the hair: combing, brushing, oiling, washing.
6. Care of nails: cleaning, brushing, cutting, filing, painting, polishing.
7. Painting of the foot-soles (for dancing, ceremonial occasions, etc.)
8. Cleaning of ears (with cotton-wool).
9. Blowing one's nose.

#### **Looking After Oneself: Clothes**

1. Folding of clothes (unfolding). How to keep shoes, chappels when not in use.
2. Brushing of clothes.
3. Removing spots from clothes.
4. Removing mud from shoes, scrubbing of rubber chappels.
5. Polishing shoes, whitening of white shoes (with powder, paste).
6. Use of doormat, shoe-scraper.
7. Washing, drying and ironing of clothes.
8. Use of pyjama or skirt-string (insertion in an open and a closed piece of cloth with proper inserter).

#### **Looking After Oneself: Dressing and Undressing**

1. Closing frames, (large and small buttons, press buttons, hooks, hoops, ribbons, laces, buckles).
2. How to put on and take off different garments, shoes, chappels, etc.

3. How to pleat (sari, dhoti)
4. How to plait (first with 3 differently coloured cords, then with 3 cords of one colour, then with strains of wool in 3 colours, lastly with strains of wool in one colour.
5. How to put kumkum, sandalwood-paste, on the forehead.
6. How to make flower garlands.
7. How to weave them in a plait.
8. How to put flower in the hair.
9. How to decorate the face on special occasions.
10. How to use shoe-horn.
11. How to hang clothes on clothes-hangers.
12. How to wind plaits around the head.
13. How to put on, take off, fold and clean spectacles and goggles.
14. How to pull up and fold sleeves, trouser-legs.
15. How to tuck in and hitch up clothes.
16. The use of the four mirrors (for head and neck, body from neck to knees, feet, and the full-length mirror).

### **Social Relations**

1. How to greet (special greetings for different times of the day).
2. How to say Namaste.
3. How to bow.

4. How to touch the feet.
5. How to perform religious gestures (in temples, churches, mosques).
6. How to greet elders on ceremonial occasions.
7. How to ask for something (waiting quietly until attention can be given).
8. How to thank.
9. How to wish (different occasions, persons).
10. How to ask permission to pass in front of somebody (if it cannot be avoided).
11. How to apologize, excuse oneself.
12. How to knock at doors and wait for permission to enter.
13. How to take leave.
14. How to borrow (what can and what cannot be borrowed).
15. How to cough, sneeze, yawn in company, blow one's nose.
16. How to pick up things for others.
17. How to receive visitors, offer a seat.
18. How to accompany people (showing the way, adjusting to pace of those escorted).
19. How to remedy mistakes (at table, elsewhere).
20. How to watch others working (without speaking, moving, touching anything). The same when watching presentations given to others.

21. Courtesy while ascending and descending steps or stair-cases.
22. How to introduce persons to each other, oneself to others.
23. How to give way to others.
24. How to prepare oneself before entering anywhere.
25. How to prepare oneself before meals (washing hands, etc.).
26. How to leave after a meal (washing hands).
27. How to use and leave a bathroom (W.C.)
28. Table-manners: how to handle cutlery, how to use one's right hand while eating, how to mix food with the fingers, avoiding noise while eating, how to pass things, serve others, how to express refusal of further helpings, how to ask for further helpings, how to apologize when something would disagree with oneself.
29. How to offer and accept things (different ways according to different things).
30. Order of offering things (according to sex, age, rank, guests and family members, etc.)
31. How to offer help.
32. How to help others dress themselves.
33. How to help others in washing hands (after and before meals), offering and pouring the water, soap, towel.
34. How to avoid stepping on others' working and sitting mats.

35. To avoid touching others without real necessity.
36. How to caress, embrace, when, whom and only when implicitly or explicitly invited.

Social manners should be presented so that the children may become acquainted with them. These presentations should be repeated frequently as opportunities to practice them are naturally limited. The most important thing is to observe them oneself always and under all circumstances and particularly towards the children themselves.

The children on the other hand should be left free to practice and observe them and *not* be commanded to do so, nor corrected then and there when they fail to do so. Never tell the child: "Say thank you, say namaste, beg pardon, etc." Observe carefully which manners and formalities require repeated presentation.

### **Outdoors and in Public Places**

1. Demonstrate basic traffic-rules.
2. How to cross a road.
3. Where and when to wait.
4. How to overtake.
5. How to walk in procession or files.
6. How to talk on the road and in public places.
7. How to use and leave public conveniences.
8. How to remedy: Picking up things thrown on the street, setting up things (bicycles, etc.) fallen down, returning objects lost or dropped, etc.
9. How to show the way, how to ask for the way.
10. How to help people in need.
11. How to offer alms.

12. How to avoid waste of public utilities (close taps left open, etc.)
13. To use public services (waste-paper baskets etc.).
14. How to hail rickshaws, taxis.
15. How to halt trams and buses, how to wait in queue, how to get in, get out, indicate than one wants to get out, take and accept tickets.
16. How to behave in stations and trains with due regard for fellow-passengers. Also in waiting-rooms.
17. How to behave in restaurants, cinema's, theatres, etc.

