



Module 2

Exercises of Practical Life

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Exercises of Practical Life (EPL)

If education is always to be conceived along the same antiquated lines of a mere transmission of knowledge, there is little to be hoped from it in the bettering of man's future. For what is the use of transmitting knowledge if the individual's total development lags behind?

Dr. Maria Montessori



1.1 What is EPL?

Exercises of practical life (EPL) are those simple daily actions which are normally performed by adults in the environment. These actions are real and are done in real situations. The adults perform these activities for maintaining and restoring proper living conditions.

There is no limit to the execution of practical life exercises in a Montessori house of children. We may practically include anything that we do in our day to day life. By doing EPL children can perform complicated everyday tasks.



We follow a systematic approach in which each child is provided with opportunities to go through a series of simpler to complex activities. This way the child gradually steps up the complexity level of exercises, and becomes able to perform complicated tasks.

Religious teachings and practices can also be incorporated into EPL like how to pray, greet others, drink water, start a task, knock at the door, etc.

1.2 Why should Children do EPL?

Children should be exposed to a variety of EPL during early years in the prepared and home environments. We will discuss why children should do EPL under the following ten headings.

1. For Independence:

By far it is established that between birth and six the child is developing. His mental patterns are getting fixed, and the personality is developing which is almost determined by the age of

six to seven years. To be dependent or independent in everyday life is also a personality trait which gets determined during early childhood only. Most parents, adults in the family and teachers are unaware of this fact, so they love to do things for the children. For instance, in our society the root cause of male dependence is the superfluous help offered to them in early childhood. When the right time is there... mothers and other adults in the family do almost everything for the children. **Things are done for them rather than helping them to do things themselves.** We fail to understand that all efforts to grow are actually efforts to be independent. During the course of time dependence on others, for everyday tasks, becomes a personality trait of the child. Later on, it becomes almost impossible to undo this. In almost every family we have males ordering mothers, sisters, wives and daughters to do things for them.

- “bring me food”
- “bring me water”
- “take the dishes away”
- “where are my shoes?”
- “polish them”
- “iron my clothes”, etc.

A wife expressed her fear saying, *“He calls me for water even when I am upstairs... I wonder if he would die of thirst if I am not there.”* The normal male

reactions can be harsh, if their wishes are not fulfilled. Thus, by doing things for children in their childhood we create not just one problem but problems over problems for not just them but for many forthcoming relationships in their lives.

Let's discuss females in this perspective. When the right time is there, the mothers and other members of the family keep on doing things for them. However, as they grow older and the right time to internalize practical life activities is gone, the pressure from the family to do house hold things begins to mount up. The pressure is much more than that when they get married. The ultimate result is that they have to do all this unwillingly and unhappily due to pressure and not because of their will. “Pressure Creates Resistance” is a law of physics and is applicable to human situations as well. One cannot do a thing happily unless the desire to do it springs from within. The ultimate causes can be frustration, unhappiness, tension among the family members and the blame game... “I have to do more and she has to do less”. The list can be stretched; however, we stop here and get back to the topic.

The point is that if practical life activities are started at the right time and we help children do things themselves rather than doing things for them, independence becomes a lifelong



personality trait. They don't just continue doing everyday things for themselves and others but also do it happily.

2. For Developing Love for Work:

EPL are also meant to give the children an understanding of the environment around them and how it works. Through EPL the love of work also develops in the child, and he enjoys the activities involved in keeping himself and the environment worthwhile for living. All this work, actually, gives the child high self esteem and feeling of being important.

3. For Happiness, Self Satisfaction & Self Respect:

When work habits are formed it must be shown to the child that he has to be helpful for all... not just for himself. The adult, who has to choose a profession, chooses the kind of work he enjoys doing. This work helps him earn self esteem, and he enjoys contributing to the betterment of the society as a good citizen. Happiness and self satisfaction can be acquired only if all kinds of work are done in the proper way. Similarly, young children should also be allowed to choose work that they will enjoy doing.

All the activities which are taught must be taken very seriously. During 0-3 years the child loves to do work at home and learn. Since this age proceeds quickly, if this time is used properly and all the activities are taught seriously, the child in his later life would be well equipped to maintain the house, which in the modern age requires a lot of dexterity. All this work requires high intelligence and skills. When we teach these activities to a child we should be generous in our support and praise to the child, because at this stage he works hard, ardently and passionately. We should show our interest and delight to make him feel important. Such things like "It is so nice that you are helping me today" or "Oh! Look at that neat and tidy bed... well done!"

The children who come to a Montessori school are those who are actually being prepared



for maturity. It is very essential to provide opportunities for learning which aim on acquiring the basic skills to prepare each child for future responsibilities. The child naturally has an urge to acquire these skills. A young child who has had the opportunity to help his mother in the house gets to learn all these skills from her. He develops in intelligence and has a fulfilled feeling of satisfaction because he can see that he is involved in an important work which is done by adults and is of value. The child gets the contentment and knowledge of the fact that he is doing something worthwhile which is leading him to independence. If we stop the child from working it is stopping him from developing. Words like **“Go away and play”** means *“You are worthless and not suitable for anything. Take a toy and play with it because no real and purposeful things can be given to you, the real things are only for me!”*

4. For Making World a Better Organized and Tidier Place:

Many of us are far from practicing putting things back at their proper places. One essential element of EPL is winding up. In Montessori schools we follow the principle... **“There is a place for everything, and everything has a place.”** A particular material will always be found at its right place in a Montessori classroom.

By ignoring the practice of this important principle in the right age, we complicate the environment and our lives. For example;

- We leave used utensils on the table for someone else to pick.
- Instead of spreading the towel on the towel rod we throw it on the back of a chair.
- We bring in our laundry, and throw the pile on the bed or on the sofa and leave it there.
- When we need a tool it just disappears because we did not place it back at its place last time we used it.

Internalization of this rule is possible if we practice putting things away at the right places at home or at school at the right age, and clean up any kind of mess that we have made while working. Shelves and cupboards that are child sized must be made available to the child at school as well as home so that the child becomes independent. If, however, the child does not feel like putting his things away or does not understand how it is to be done, the adults should help him do so by saying “I can help you today to put away the things” or “Who would help Noor put away these things”, etc. In this manner the

children also learn to help each other and the child who first receives the help would later be the first one to help others.

While giving an occupation to a child, only those which are designed well, made well and worthwhile should be given. A clutter of things should not be kept in the house because there are a very few people who can keep a large number of possessions in an organized way. Neither should there be too many things from which the child is to choose. It is also unwise to give a child huge quantities of cheap trashy toys, which hinder his intellectual development and do not support learning.

5. For Learning to Give and Take Help Gracefully:

Many of us do not know how to ask for or offer help gracefully. EPL are extremely helpful to learn to receive and give help from younger and older children willingly and with pleasure at school or at home. The basic trend of “Go and clean up your room” should be replaced with “Let us all clean the guest room today.



The kitchen tomorrow and your room the next day,” This way the child learns to do all kinds of work properly. This practice also helps to form good work habits among children, help each other delightfully and later on when they grow up they offer help in household jobs *“knowing that all have to participate to run the home which belongs to the whole family.”*

6. For Passing on Good Work Habits to the Next Generations:

When the child is young he learns enormously by imitating adults. If at this stage the adults complain about their work, the child will also avoid all kinds of work when he grows up. This transmission of bad attitudes can only be stopped if our kids today grow up into excellent models with excellent work habits for the next generations to imitate.

7. For Perfection of Movements:

Nature wants the child to be constantly on the move. This need for movement, which is irresistible in childhood, apparently diminishes as we grow older. Movement helps to create the means for subjecting motor impulses to the will. Thus, more developed a child is, the more obedient are his instruments of motion to his will.

Rolling up a carpet, polishing up the shoes, washing the basin or the floor, setting the table, opening and closing boxes, doors and windows, arranging a room, putting chairs in order, drawing curtains, carrying furniture, etc. are the exercises that engage the whole body, work out muscles and perfect movement. Through good work habits the child learns how to move his hands and arms, and to strengthen his muscles more than he does through ordinary gymnastic exercises. Nevertheless, the exercises of practical life cannot be regarded as a simple kind of gymnastic; they are “work”. The work is refreshing and not tiring because of the interest which the child takes in all his movements. It is a natural exercise, since man ought to have some object in view when he moves. The muscles should always serve the intellect and thus preserve their functional unity with the human personality.

The child also learns to move with grace and avoids superfluous movements. The more control a child develops over his movements, the more freedom he can enjoy, as the adults would not be hindering his movement because of the fear of damage to the environment or himself.

8. For Normalization of the Child:

As described in the Module 1 (*Chapter- Sensitive*

Periods), every child undergoes sensitive periods during 0 – 7 years of age during which he goes through certain strong urges to have experiences appropriate for development. If, however, these urges are suppressed by the environment or the adults, which means the child does not get opportunities to have appropriate experiences, he tends to get deviated. Sensitive periods for EPL also starts and ends during this age only, and require the child to do necessary activities. We all have seen the amount of joy children take by engaging themselves in everyday activities, like washing, cleaning, cooking, cutting etc. Fulfillment of inner urges leads the child to **normality** which is the spiritual goal of EPL.

9. For Developing Love of the Universe:

By doing exercises of personal care, care of the environment, care of living things and exercises of grace and courtesy the child develops love for the entire universe and all forms of life. He tends to be a peaceful and responsible individual who cares about almost everything, as “**CARE**” becomes an integral part of his personality.



10. For Avoiding Personality Disorders:

Children who are introvert and lack confidence actually are rejected and turned down by adults during their learning phase. These children later on do learn how to do cooking and use other kinds of machinery but neither achieve the level of perfection, nor feel the natural urge to happily carry on EPL, as they have not gotten opportunities to practice them at the right age.

As Dr. Montessori stated “Sensitive Periods” are those peak times when nature allows a person to learn something the best way. This time is temporary and once it is lost it does not come back again. Therefore, we must be aware of the child's natural urges by observing what type of activities interest him the most. If he is repeatedly seen doing a particular activity... the sensitive period for learning in that area is on. Maximum opportunities should be made available to the child during this phase for development and maximizing learning.



1.3 Groups of EPL

In this section we will briefly look at the groups of EPL. For convenience they are broadly categorized into the following four groups;

1. **Elementary Exercises**
2. **Exercises of Personal Care**
3. **Grace and Courtesy Exercises**
4. **Care of Environment Exercises**

1. Elementary Exercise

Elementary exercises are further sub-divided into three groups.

i. Basic Elementary Exercises

These activities involve very basic movements, mostly involving how to hold and place objects. These activities are completed within a very short time. For example, how to hold, carry and place a jug, glass, tray, spoon, etc.

ii. Elementary Exercises

The movements involved in this category are a bit more complex and advanced than basic elementary exercises, but altogether they are also done within a short period of time.

Examples: rolling and unrolling of mats, folding and unfolding mats opening and closing bottle tops, pouring rice from one jug to another jug, etc.

iii. Higher elementary Exercise

Same sort of work is involved in these exercises but they are more logical and slightly more complex than the previous group of exercises.

Examples: cutting along a line, spooning beans into a number of containers, use of dropper, etc.

2. Personal Care

These exercises help the child to take care of himself, gain confidence and groom himself.

Examples: combing hair, brushing teeth, dressing frames, etc.

3. Grace and Courtesy

Through these activities the child learns to be polite, use basic manners and how to go around the society.

Examples: table manners, how to carry a chair, how to be silent, use of thank you, sorry, please, etc.

4. Care of Environment

Exercises of care of both outdoor and indoor environments are components of this category. The child learns to take care of the environment, how to keep it clean and how to restore and maintain proper living conditions.

Indoor Examples: polishing brass, washing dishes, dusting, flower arrangement, etc.

Outdoor Examples: picking up dried leaves, watering plants, etc.

Checkpoint No. 1

check your progress

1) EPL stands for _____.

- a) exercises of personal life
- b) exercises of practical life
- c) exercises of private life

2) EPL can be performed in a Montessori school only and not at home.

- a) true
- b) false

3) Children become dependent because

- a) adults do things for them and do not let them perform themselves.
- b) they have a natural tendency to be dependent.
- c) they are too young to be independent.

4) Pressure creates _____.

- a) burden
- b) resistance
- c) discipline

5) If EPL are introduced at the right age, then carrying them out happily for the rest of his life becomes of a part of his personality.

- a) true
- b) false

6) EPL are important because they

- a) make the child independent for his entire life.

b) develop love for work.

c) help the child reach normalization.

d) add into the self esteem and joy level of the child.

e) all of the above.

7) Name the groups of EPL.

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

8) Holding a jug, pouring water from a jug and peeling carrots are examples of

- a) elementary exercises
- b) care of environment
- c) personal care

9) Religious teachings can be easily incorporated in EPL.

- a) true
- b) false

10) The child does not naturally undergo sensitive periods for EPL.

- a) true
- b) false



Call your tutor now and discuss your progress.

4.3 Higher Elementary Exercises

Similar sort of work is involved in these exercises, as in Elementary Exercises, but they are more logical and slightly more complex than them.

Exercise 1

Sponging Water (One Container to Another)

Material

One tray, one bowl (75% filled with water), one empty bowl, one sponge, aprons for the directress and the child, water proof/plastic cloth and one duster.

Presentation

1. The directress and the child will put on the aprons.
2. Bring the material to the work place in a tray with the help of the child.
3. Arrange the material in order to use. Spread the sheet on the table. **The duster should be kept on the right hand top corner.**
4. Keep the sponge on the right side of the tray.
5. Keep the basin (filled with water) on the right hand side and the empty basin on the left hand side.
6. Take the sponge in your right hand, and squeeze it completely in your fist before dipping it into water.



8. Wait for the sponge to absorb maximum amount of water.
9. Take out the sponge gently, and keep it over the bowl to let the extra water drip out.



7. Now, put your fist in water, and release the sponge slowly. You will see that the sponge will begin to absorb water and also changes colour.

10. Then, take the sponge over the empty bowl, and squeeze the sponge carefully, so that all the water falls into the bowl. (The child can do it with one or both hands depending upon the size of the sponge.)



11. Let the sponge resume its original shape. Repeat the action until all the water from one basin is transferred to the other.
12. Ask the child if he wants to do it himself, and allow him to do it, if he so desires.
13. After the exercise put the sponge in the empty bowl and wipe off the spills with the duster.

Extension

Repeat with left hand at a later stage, if the child is willing.

Control of Error

Dropping the drops outside the bowls.

Point of Interest

- Sponging and waiting for the last drop.
- Pressing the sponge, learning another way of transporting liquids, exercise for hands.

Direct Aim

- Concentration and coordination of movement.
- Preparation for wiping up spills.

Age Group

3 years and onwards

Exercise 2

Pouring Rice (A Jug to 3 Cups)

Material

1 tray, 3 cups, 1 jug full of rice and one spoon

Presentation

1. Bring the material to a table (or a mat).
2. In the tray put the jug on right hand and cups to the left.
3. Hold the jug with right hand while supporting with left hand.
4. Pour rice into the cups one by one.
5. Then, take the spoon and put the rice back into the jug from all the three cups.
6. When a small quantity of rice is left in the cups, hold the cups in the right hand, bring up over the jug and pour into the jug (one by one).
7. After the exercise, ask the child if he likes to do it. Allow him to do it for as long as he likes.

Point of Interest

Equal division of rice into 3 cups

Control of Error

Rice not equally divided

Dropping out rice from jug into tray

Direct Aim

Pouring beans or cereals from one container to a number of containers



Indirect Aim

- Coordination of movement
- Concentration and perfection of movement
- Indirect preparation for division
- Indirect preparation for pouring liquids in a number of containers

Age Group

2 ½ to 3 ½ years

Exercise 3

Pouring Water (A Jug to 3 Cups)

Material

One jug with water in a tray, 2 to 3 small cups/glasses, 1 duster and 1 plastic sheet.

Presentation

Follow the same method as exercise 2 replacing rice with water and wiping off any spills with the duster.

Point of Interest

Equal division of the water into 3 cups/glasses.

Point of Error

- Un-equal division.
- Dropping out water from the jug into tray.

Direct Aim

Pouring water from a jug into a number of containers

Indirect Aim

- Coordination of movement
- Concentration
- Indirect preparation for division

Age Group

2 ½ to 3 ½ years



Exercise 4

Using a Dropper

Material

A dropper, 2 small containers, a little water, a duster, plastic sheet and a tray.

Presentation

1. Bring the material to a table, or to the place of presentation.
2. Spread out the plastic sheet.
3. Place the tray on the table.
4. Place the small container filled with a little amount of water on the right hand side, and the empty small container on the left hand



side.

5. Now pick up the dropper with the right hand.
6. With thumb and index finger pinch dropper and immerse it into the water container.
7. Release the pressure so that water is drawn into it.
8. Bring the dropper to the empty container and pinch the top again so that water is expelled into the container.
9. Repeat this process until water is transferred from one container into the other.
10. Transfer water back and forth between containers in this manner.
11. With the help of the duster wipe off any spills.

Note: Take very small containers or transparent bottles, which can hold only a little amount of water. Otherwise, it may take you a very long time transferring all the water from one container to the other.

Point of Interest

The child may count the drops.

Control of Error

Dropping the drops outside the container.

Direct

Learning the use of dropper

Indirect Aim

Coordination and concentration of movement

Age Group

2½ to 5 years

Exercise 5

Use of Funnel

Material

A small funnel, a jug with water, a duster, plastic cloth; keep all this in a tray.

Presentation

1. Like all activities dealing with water, spread the plastic cloth and place the duster on the top right hand corner of the tale.
2. Arrange the material in order.
3. Pick up the funnel, and fix it up in the mouth of the bottle.
4. Start pouring water from the jug into funnel.
5. Watch the water level in bottle simultaneously.
6. When the bottle is full, show it to the child.
7. Tap the funnel a little in order to drop even the last drops of water in the bottle.
8. Remove funnel from the bottle and clear the





spills with the duster.

9. Pour back the water into the jug from the bottle.
10. Invite the child to do the same.

Point of Interest

The exercise can be done with small colorful beads also.

Control of Error

- Dropping water outside of the container.
- Filling up the bottle so much that it overflows.

Exercise 6

Wringing a Wet Cloth

Material

A large plastic/glass bowl with water, a tray, a clean cotton cloth, a dry duster.

Presentation

1. Take the consent of the child.
2. Bring the material to the workplace with the help of the child.
3. The bowl is filled to its half with water and placed on the tray.
4. The teacher unfolds the cloth and places it in the water, pressing it gently into water so that the cloth absorbs some water.
5. She takes the cloth out of the water. Holding it over the bowl, grasping it with two hands together, she closes both hands tightly over the cloth.
6. Grasping the cloth tightly, she rotates her hands in the opposite direction to each other, keeping the sides of the hands touching each other.

7. Most of the water is wrung out of the cloth during this action.
8. Keep applying pressure until the last drops of water fall into the bowl.
9. Unwind the cloth and dip it into water again and repeat the procedure.
10. When the child understands the exercise, he can practice on his/her own.
11. Use the dry duster to wipe off any spills.

Variation

When the child has fairly mastered the technique of wringing the teacher can place two bowls instead of one and the child can practice wringing water from one bowl into another. The exercise continues until all the content of one bowl is transferred into the other.

Direct Aim

- To learn how to wring a wet cloth
- To learn the vocabulary “wring”

Indirect Aim

Hand and eye coordination

