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Beneficial Effects of Practical Life Activities and Normalization

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Abstract

This action research project investigated the effects on involving children in the practical life curriculum on normalization in the Montessori toddler and primary classrooms. 30 students, their parents and 7 teachers were participants. 12 students and their parents were from a toddler classroom and 18 from two separate primary classrooms. Data was collected pre and post study via questionnaires on the parents' goals for their children. Many of the goals listed such as socialization skills, independence and emotional stability can be met through engaging the child in practical life activities and as the child meets these goals should normalize. A behavior log, daily plan sheet log and journaling tracked what materials children used or were offered for the purpose of tracking components of normalization such as self-regulation, confidence, independence and socialization. Analysis of the data showed that when a child was directed to a practical life activity he was more likely to choose a second activity on his own and continue to move through cycles of work independently. When a child could not be directed to an activity, practical life or otherwise, observing the environment with an adult was beneficial in assisting the child in the process of normalization.

Key Words: practical life curriculum, Montessori, normalization, self-regulation, deviation

The purpose of this research was to determine what material and activities most effectively assisted the child in the process of normalization in the Montessori toddler and primary classrooms. The toddler classroom is made up of children ages 18 months to 3 years and the primary classroom ages 3-6 years. Normalization is a term used in Montessori with a key component being the ability to self-regulate and calm oneself. Maria Montessori described four major parts of normalization as: love of work, concentration, self discipline, and sociability according to a co-teacher Alba (2016) and the term "normalization" is borrowed from the science of anthropology and refers to becoming a "contributing member of society" (Zener, 2006). For students in toddler and primary Montessori classroom, this means the time after which they become able to focus and concentrate for longer periods of time, and are also able to derive self satisfaction from daily work. While every child develops and learns at her own pace, there is a six week milestone of the school year when teachers typically start looking for these behaviors to start occurring, and start seeing progress in the classrooms as the children are learning to complete work cycles, care for their environment, and help their friends when needed (Alba, 2016).

A child not actively involved in the process of normalization may be considered to be in deviation. Montessori explained deviations as obstacles to optimal development and are times when the child's energy is focused on defending himself and not consciously defiant choices a child makes. Behaviors considered deviations by Dore (2014), Howe (2010) and Schmidt (2011) include, wandering the classroom, overactive imaginative play, running away from teachers or other adults, inability to separate confidently from a parent, inflicting harm physically on self or another living being. Behaviors which characteristic of the child not actively involved in working toward independence and self-reliance are deviations according to Epstein (2010).

The first six weeks of the school year was an optimal time to do this research because it is the ideal time to observe the phenomena of normalization. Children new to the environment are learning rules and expectations and may even be learning to separate from the parent for the first time. These are times when the child's energy may be focused on self defense and she may be more reliant on the adults in the environment to assist in the process of normalization. While maintaining consistency in schedules and routines is typical in Montessori classrooms, extra attention is paid during this time. Materials on the shelves remain unchanged and disruptions such as assemblies and observations by those not part of the class are kept to a minimal.

The objective is to first ensure the child feels safe and one way to facilitate this is to provide as much predictability in the environment as possible. This includes the children as well as the adults in the environment. All students in the class attend either four or five days, Monday thru Thursday or thru Friday and the same adults remain with the children throughout their days.

Prior to this research study fellow teacher participants and I spent time discussing how to respond to a child exhibiting a deviation in behavior, in order to assure consistency in what behaviors we considered deviations, and how best to address them with practical life activities. We concluded that while every situation is unique and different materials or activities may better suit a child's needs, it is helpful to the child to learn that he will be redirected in a similar manner and that the expectations remain a priority. While the expectation is for all children to achieve normalization it was noted at a workshop I attended by Montessori leader P. Donahue Shortridge (2011) that the characteristics of normalization may look different for each child.

Literature Review

Montessori (1983) observed children went through a transformation process as they recovered psychologically from conditions and obstacles imposed on them unknowingly by the

adults in their environment. This transformation is noted by a change in behavior according to Epstein (2010), and characterized by four distinct stages. There is “infinity of variations in child behavior (Epstein, 2010)” and in each stage the child is working toward independence and self-reliance. The first stage, disorder, the child is initially reliant on the adult to provide. The second stage is the onset of concentration and has two observably different sub stages separated by a false fatigue. A false fatigue occurs before the onset of the second sub stage and is a time when the child appears to be tired of working and restless. In contrary he is preparing for the second sub stage in which more challenging materials and activities are chosen and at the culmination of this activity he appears to be lively yet calm. In the first half the child is observed choosing materials or activities that are more familiar and can be completed with relative ease. In the third stage, onset of contemplation, more concentration and less false fatigue is observed. The fourth is the phenomenon of obedience and characterized by self-control. This process is known as “normalization” and Lloyd (2008) outlines Montessori’s phenomena of “normalization” and aligns it with self-regulation.

Even though Lloyd referred to “normalization” as a theory of Maria Montessori in the title of her work, she goes on to discuss why Montessori would not call it a theory. A theory is based on what we think the child should do and can be contradictory to “following the child” and allowing him to unfold naturally, not normally. Many behavior traits that are considered normal for children to exhibit are actually deviations. Deviations are explained as obstacles to optimal development and are times when the child’s energy is focused on defending himself and not on the consciously defiant choices a child makes. Montessori observed children normalize through work. It is not toiling labor as the term has come to be understood, but interacting purposefully with materials and environment. It is not a contradiction to play but a compliment (Lloyd,

2008). Recognizing the needs and assisting the child in this natural process of normalization follow in accordance to each stage.

In stage 1, Disorder, while young children want to do real and meaningful activities, they are also tending to an inner need for order. Wiping a table in itself can be presented as a complete “cycle of activity” (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). Montessori saw this as preparation for other activities to come. Practical life activities are offered at every level of the Montessori curriculum. Lillard and Jessen (2003) encouraged implementing practical life activities for children as soon as they begin to walk. Young children want to exert maximum effort in their tasks and work collaboratively with adults to complete the activities of daily life. Practical life activities should be presented orderly and consistently, having materials readily available for younger children and having older children participate in deciding what to use and then finding (Lillard & Jessen, 2003).

Dore, 2014; Howe, 2014 and Sherill, 2014 address meeting the needs of the youngest students in Montessori. Sherill (2014) provided a reminder of the importance of meeting the needs of children in infant and toddler Montessori programs according to Maria Montessori’s planes of development. She addressed what those needs are based on Montessori's first half of her first plane of development, what the role of the adult is and the beneficial effects of honoring the process of development. Dore (2014) answered questioning by a prospective parent at her school, what is taught in the Montessori toddler classroom, by responding that the role of the adults isn’t in the imparting of knowledge, but in preparing the environment to be conducive to the independence needed for the child to teach himself. Dore (2014) pointed out for many toddlers the classroom can be the first group setting where they are introduced to and given opportunities to develop social skills and emphasized the work the child is doing to learn to

separate confidently from the parent and build the social skills needed to integrate effectively into the group. Howe (2010) also highlighted the important work the child is learning to do in separating confidently from the parent. Howe noted change can be stressful, good or bad, and children respond better when they are prepared and are given cues as to what is coming next. Keeping routines such as making breakfast together and talking about what you will make together for dinner when returning home can be helpful. Confidence in the child is also communicated through body language, and the child needs to see this as well.

Maria Montessori saw an importance in encouraging and supporting children in the development of practical life skills based on observations made of the various Children's Houses she saw emerging at the beginning of the 20th Century. Children's Houses were the newly emerging Montessori classrooms. What Montessori (1964) found was that while the length of time in a day the children spent at school varied as well as how activities throughout the day were incorporated, addressing practical life skills remained consistent and were always the priority of the day. Every morning started with cleanliness, the preparation of the self, followed by order, inspection and preparation of the environment, movement with poise and grace followed by conversations with the guide. The conversations were spurred by inquiries from the guide to find out about activities outside the classroom and provided children with a model to converse pleasantly about appropriate topics. From then on everything else in the day could vary. She believed this set them up for the rest of the learning that would take place. Was the importance she saw in keeping practical life skills a priority, in the simplicity of creating and providing order, and what are other beneficial effects of the practical life activities in the Montessori curriculum? The work being done was to progress to stage two, this being where the

onset of concentration is observed. Providing order for the child externally should support his development of internal order.

In stages two and three, the onset of concentration and the onset of contemplation, one of the key components Montessorians considered when providing practical life activities for younger children in the classroom was the emphasis on the process (Garfield-Anderson, 2010; Lillard & Jessen, 2003 and Sherill, 2014. According to Lillard and Jessen (2003), “It is important to remember that your child is interested in the process you are both engaged in, not the product. He enjoys wiping the table but his goal is not a dry table (p.99)”. This is called a direct aim and has benefits to the child that may not be immediately apparent.

Another direct aim addressed is grace and courtesy lessons and includes a development of the impulse control as well as delayed gratification and establishing healthy and appropriate food habits (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). If children are asked to wait until the food preparation is complete to eat and others are served, they are learning grace and courtesy in the context of a community. Garfield-Anderson (2010) saw grace and courtesy lessons as unique to Montessori curriculum and when learned early become spontaneous and a way of life. Children learn important grace and courtesy lessons through community meal time. These lessons teach to the whole child and help him realize his part in society as well as contribute to developing "global citizens."

Direct aims also include developing the concentration and coordination necessary for hand-writing and reading. Practical life activities offer children the opportunity to use tools that strengthen hand muscle and strengthened intellect due to the feedback loop from the hand to the brain (Lillard & Jessen, 2003). Tasks children are reliant on adults for involved interacting and modeling. Sherill (2014) suggests using narrative speech to let children know what is happening

and what might happen next to assist the development of inner speech. This is another important indirect aim. The development of inner speech is also tied to the impulse control and the ability to self-regulate as well as the concentration necessary to facilitate not just the ability to read but read silently.

Stage four is highlighted by the phenomenon of obedience. Children exhibit a variety of behaviors referred to as "normalized" when considered developmentally on track (Epstien, 2010; Futrell 1998 Schmidt, 2016). Guidelines for what to look for when determining if a child's development is on track and are signs of "normalized" children are that they have a love of silence, order, repetition, attachment to reality and can learn by making connections to the environment around them. Adults lacking critical thinking skills can't classify objects effectively. Starke-Schmidt (2011) gives information on what is needed for optimal development as well as suggestions for what to do when a child shows developmental deviations. Children spending too much time in fantasy play can be unpredictable and sometimes dangerous. For these children it becomes necessary to make the real more exciting than the imaginary. "From experience comes knowledge, then love and respect, and at last a desire to be of service (Stark-Schmidt, 2011, p. 13)."

When deviations in behavior are apparent and the child is in the stage of disorder to what extent are practical life materials and activities able to facilitate the child in moving to the next stages of normalization and be observed as normalized? In addition to this research providing information on beneficial ways to facilitate the child in the process of normalization, other benefits are anticipated as well. Anticipated benefits to the classroom include less interruptions and a calm environment conducive to the promotion of concentration. Anticipated benefit to the fields of early childhood development and education include working toward establishing and

validating ways to assist young children in the process of “normalization” including self-regulation through encouraging practical life activities. These essential benefits are what prompted me to ask “What is the effect of practical life activities on the child’s ability to normalize in the Montessori toddler and primary classrooms?”

Methodology

Data was collected in the following ways for the purpose of providing the child with materials and activities to assist in the process of “normalization” to reconcile deviations in behavior. As stated in the introduction, Montessori explained deviations as obstacles to optimal development and are times when the child’s energy is focused on defending himself and not consciously defiant choices a child makes.

Prior to the collection of data parents were emailed an assent form (Appendix A) by the director of the school to establish participation for their children. The assent form informed parents of the research being done and provided them with the opportunity to opt-out and not have their child’s data included in the write up of the research. No one chose to opt-out.

Existing data included a statement from student enrollment forms about goals for the child. It is data that was initially analyzed to create a baseline for parent expectations for the child. The baseline data established that certain goals for the child such as socialization, independence and emotional well being could be met through the child’s engagement with practical life activities and were also goals characteristic of normalization. The statements were analyzed in order to compare how the goal(s) aligned with what work was being done in the classroom, particularly goals that were coded as practical life activities and goals coded as characteristic of normalization.

Baseline data was also collected from teachers in the form of pre-study conferencing to establish participation as well as to collect data from pre-study discussion and questionnaire (Appendix D) on current practices of methods in use to reconcile deviations in behavior and established an understanding of “normalization” as an observable phenomenon and post-study to discuss results and share professional feedback. Teachers were given an active consent form (Appendix E) which outlined the research being done and methods for collecting data, Daily Record Keeping (Appendix F) and Behavioral Log (Appendix G).

The Daily Record Keeping (Appendix F) is an established tool which was already being used daily in the classroom by all teacher participants and non-participants. However, specific to this study, notes from the Daily Record Keeping Log were looked at to track patterns and frequency in practical life work choices and behaviors exhibited as well as skills introduced, emerging and mastered skills. Over the first six weeks of school focus was on offering activities from the practical life area of the classroom. Children were encouraged to use this area and directed there when they appeared upset or unfocused. These activities were a regular part of instruction and used to assist in normalization of all students in the class.

Behavior Log (Appendix G), is a supplement to Daily Record Keeping Log (Appendix F). The Behavior Log was used to collect data that was analyzed in order to recognize specific behaviors seen as deviations and ways the child reconciled, normalized, with or without the guide. When a child was receiving assistance for a behavior deviation from a teacher, the teacher was asked to note how long the deviation occurred and determine when best to introduce the child to another activity. It was noted what activity the child moved to and how long it took him/her to normalize. Measurements were compared as to whether the initial activity was practical life or other activity, and what type of activity the second was and the time it took for

behavior to normalize. It measured lengths of time a spent with materials or in an activity, repetition with activity, as well as demeanor while in the activity or working with the materials. It was developed to look at ways to support and supplement best practices for assisting the child in the process of normalization.

Analysis of Data

Parent Results

The first data analyzed was a statement from the toddler students’ enrollment form in response to an inquiry about the goals for the child. Information from eleven enrollment forms was collected to establish a baseline for activities that correlate with The Montessori Practical Life Curriculum. Only one of the forms did not list goals and most listed multiple goals. Total number of goals listed was 19.

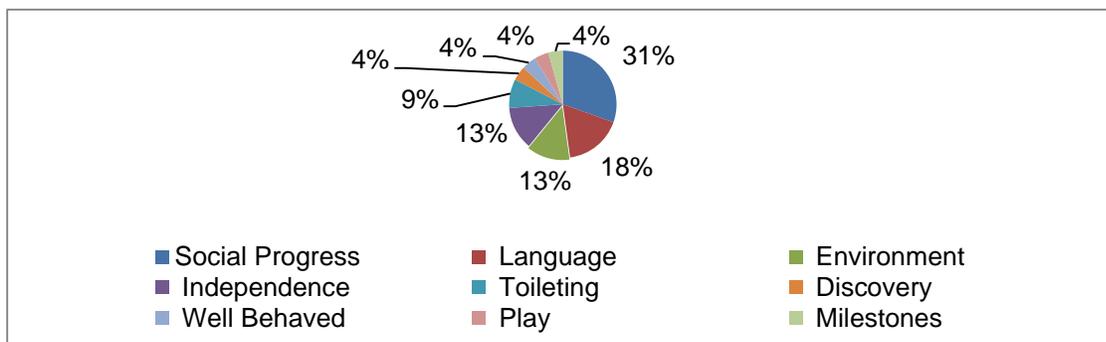


Figure 1. Toddler Goals

Data was also collected and analyzed from the enrollment forms of primary students in response to an inquiry about the goals for the child. Information on 22 goals for students was collected however because the form was filled out when the child initially enrolled in the school, goals may not reflect the parent’s current views. Goals were addressed again at parent/teacher conferences. Only one specific goal of “activities of daily life” however many listed could fall into that category.

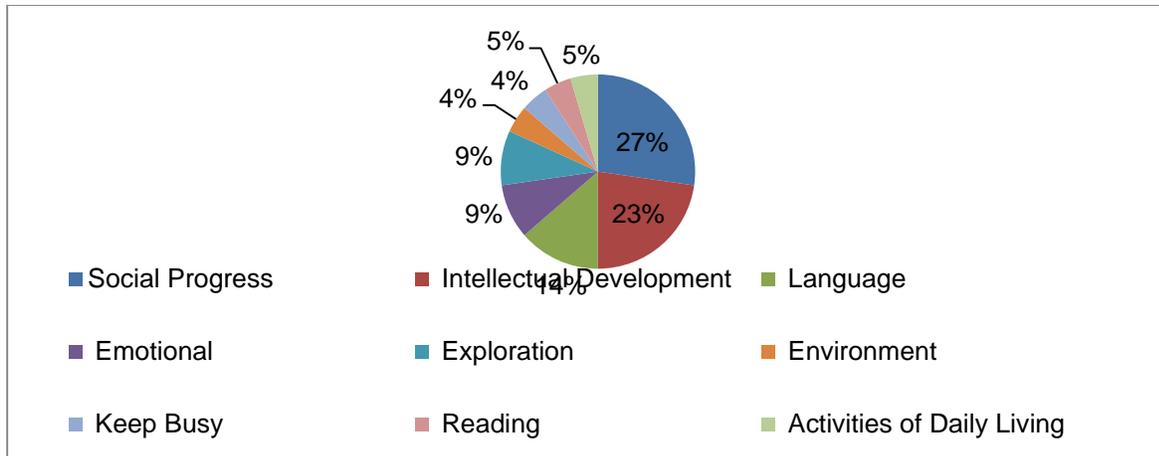


Figure 2. Primary Goals

Additional data was collected from a short questionnaire given to parents at Parent/Teacher conferences. Of 26 questionnaires distributed, seven were returned completed. The parents were asked to identify goals for their child. Five parents conveyed the importance of developing social skills. Independence, effective communication and happiness were the following three goals each listed three times. These four goals for the child align with developmental aims the child meets through engagement in the practical life curriculum. Areas of the classroom parents felt supported goals for their child was most frequently listed as “all”. Language was the most frequently listed specific goal. It was listed on more than half the forms. Parents were asked a question regarding feelings on the importance of the practical life curriculum in comparison to other areas of the classroom. Four feel it is more important, two feel it is as important and one feels it is less important.

Teacher Results

Seven American Montessori Society credentialed teachers from toddler, primary, lower and upper elementary classrooms, with experience ranging from two to fifteen years, filled out a questionnaire. The questionnaire asked teachers to give a sentence describing components of normalization, a sentence describing behavior deviation and what current practices are being used to assist a child with a behavior deviation, what practical life activities are most calming

personally and for students, and student make-up of the class in regards to total, returning and sibling status of students. The information provided by the teachers was used to establish a unified understanding of key terms used in the study and establish previous exposure to Montessori practices in the classroom and home which might affect the participants in the study.

Teacher views on normalization supported what Maria Montessori wrote and taught about it. Components were listed by one teacher, love of order, love of working alone and with others, love of silence, obedience (self-discipline), independence, and initiative (intrinsic motivation). Normalization is reached when the child knows focus and concentration at length, progresses through own work with minimal guidance, has an emotional state that appears calm, comfortable and independent, self regulates and remains calm through transitions, and is in a state of natural “flow” and balance. Normalization requires engagement with materials or activity in the environment.

Responses on deviations in behavior reflected a general consensus among teachers that they are caused by having unmet needs or when the child is not getting what he needs from the environment. Manifestations may appear in the form of frustration, aggression, misuse of materials or body, possessiveness, inferiority complex, fears and lies. Deviations in behavior create disruptions in work “flow”, interfere with the child’s ability to complete work cycles, follow a routine of the classroom and hinder the child’s ability to derive self satisfaction from her own work. One teacher noted a deviation is when a child is not falling within the realm of what is typical of peers in the classroom.

The ways in which teachers addressed deviations in the classroom varied by the age grouping taught, however the need for observation remained consistent. Older students were asked by the teacher “how can I help?” and younger students had their emotional needs attended

to first by comforting and assuring the child felt safe and cared for and confidence was regained. Observation was noted as a tool used to assess behavior patterns, antecedents (triggers), what consequences resulted, and did the consequences affect frequency and duration of the behavior. Observation allows the teacher to go through a process of assessing the environment and the self for needed change before looking to make changes with the child. Working one-on-one with the child, creating a work to help meet the child's need, discovering what brings joy to the child, and redirecting to assure safety were techniques reported as being used.

Practical life activities teachers felt were calming personally and for students addressed the needs to feel like they are being helpful, are contributing to the group, required using fine motor skills, involved using tools and incorporated many steps. Specific activities listed were dishwashing, cleaning a science beaker, organizing one's personal space (a cubby or locker), making designs with pieces of wood, transferring materials with the hand, pitchers or tongs and preparing food.

Collecting numbers on the make-up of the classes this year provided supporting evidence that the majority of students have had some exposure to Montessori practices. The exposure to Montessori practices, which include those of practical life activities and other activities beneficial to the process of normalization, have either been directly through a Montessori classroom and those in it and/or through a sibling and parents in the home. The majority of students in each class were returning students and three of eight classes began the year with no new students. The total percentage of new students in the school was 19% with nine of the 13 new students having entered the school at the toddler level.

Toddler Results

Data provided from the Behavior Log was most often collected within the first thirty minutes of the mornings and had to do with separation from parents at drop off. Some behaviors

were noted later in the morning when a child was redirected because of emotional distress, misuse of materials or inappropriate physical contact with others. Specific behaviors were recorded on seven of eleven students in the class and three of the seven had two or less entries. The main focus became on four students, three new and one returning.

Of the 47 entries on the Behavior Log, 34 entries correlated with separation from the parents at drop off. The child was noted either being directed to or choosing a second activity 40% of the time. The second half of the study showed a 26% increase in the child choosing the activity vs. being directed. Three of the four children directed to practical life during the second half of the study were not recorded as needing a second activity.

Primary activity the child engaged in 45% of the time was a practical life activity. Of the times the child was directed to practical life, 71% of the time was by either an adult or a parent bringing the child in to class at drop off. A second activity following the practical life activity was observed at the rate of 90% with the child choosing an activity on his own at a rate of 80% for the second activity.

Observational notes provided information that supported ways in which practical life activities were being used to assist with the normalization process. It was observed that when one child was directed to work with practical life activities other students would follow. Children roaming around the room took notice and joyfully opted to engage in the activities. There were six occasions documented when more than half of the class chose a practical life activity to begin the day. For a period of 15 minutes this majority of the class was either working with the same practical life activity in repetition the entire time or working through the sequence of materials as they were displayed on the shelves. Signs of normalization noted of children while children engaged in practical life activities were making choices, using yes and no

appropriately when offered an activity, smiling, laughing and engaging with others as well as attempting to get other to laugh, mimicking behavior of peers, and a move from working parallel with a peer to interactively working together.

Primary Results

The behavior log was used by one of the primary classes, Class C, to collect data. The class consisted of nine students with only one student new to the school. However he has an older sibling who attended the school for four years. The teacher documented 34 entries of children engaged in a practical life activity. All 34 entries noted the child appeared calm while working. There were only two occurrences of the child getting directed to practical life and both times were during the first two weeks of the study. 32 times the child chose the materials or activity. A second activity was recorded 26% of the time.

Observational notes from class C support the data collected on the Behavior Log. The teacher commented on the time varying due to when she started her group circle time. Behaviors were recorded both before and after the first circle time and she preferred to wait until everyone was in attendance to begin. It was noted that food consumption had a high rate of occurrence with the three year olds with a possible tie to the need to fulfill a physiological need. The three year olds most often chose to work in practical life first thing upon arriving and did not come back to the practical life area after working initially working there. The five year olds she noticed would choose practical life or art directly after completing language activities therefore the recording on five year olds happened later in the morning.

Observational notes were compiled from a second primary class, class P. Class P consisted of ten students, eight second year students and two that moved up from the toddler program. The teacher initially commented on a lack of interest in the practical life activities and materials with

the exceptions of food preparation and bead stringing. Upon reviewing notes and recognizing the regular interest in working with the land forms she concluded there may still be more of an interest than previously recognized. This was noted because working with landforms is a step-up from practical life combining skill of practical life with culture and geography.

She observed children calmed from engaging in practical life activities such as animal care, water transfers with syringes and pitchers, and hand washing. A newly three year old girl was noted as the only child spending a consistent amount of time with practical life. When she wasn't choosing it on her own the teacher would direct her there, as she seemed lost when not there. Her daily activities included washing the baby doll, bubble beating and pouring. All activities that required focus and concentration and strengthened her fine motor skills and sense of order as there are many steps to the activities she would choose. A four year old boy was directed to water pouring when he was "goofing off" and a four year old girl was directed to spoon transferring when she was upset because her friends were doing work she wasn't yet ready for. Both children were observed settling down and working with focus. The teacher also noted that taking care of the class pets brought joy to the children and was empowering.

Action Plan

Findings confirmed that the process of normalization was facilitated in a beneficial way for the child when directed to a practical life activity. The child became engaged with the materials and was more likely to choose a second activity on his own and continue to move through cycles of work independently. Because observing the environment to become familiar with it in order to understand its predictability and feel safe is also a beneficial practical life skill, student observation was also considered a beneficial practical life activity which assisted the child in the process of normalization.

The results of the research have already begun to change my practice. As I noticed certain activities and materials were helpful to the child's process of normalization I was able to use them again and track efficacy. For example, I eased my stance regarding what personal items are allowed into the classroom. Through my study I tracked how best to use personal items as transitional objects until the child could enter the room confidently and independently without them. Another change I made was in the amount of preparations of the environment I do with the students. I now do less preparing before their arrival and more with them. Instead of having paint at the art easel and water in the wash bins I wait until the students are arriving as there is often one eased into the classroom by participating in these communal practical life activities. They pick out the paint colors and sometimes take a walk to the kitchen to pick out snack items or additional utensils we may need.

Possible impacts this research will have on student learning begin with a deeper relationship with the student. This relationship allows me to continue developing materials and activities customized to each child's individual needs. What calls to the child in the environment will be what entices him to want to be in class and allows a love for learning to develop. For many children this begins in the practical life area of the classroom.

Several ideas came up for further research investigation. I found when the data wasn't answering the research question I composed a new question in which to investigate later. While analyzing answers from teachers on a questionnaire about normalization, behavior deviations and calming strategies I came across a comment about a deviation in behavior being "when a child does not fall within the realm of what is typical of his peers." This prompted me to ask what normalization for a child with atypical behaviors looks like. Being in the classroom for many years and reading and participating in discussions at workshops on this question, I know

normalization can happen and it can look very different while still containing the essential elements, love of work, silence, order, concentration, etc. I feel there is a need for more research on the normalization process specific to children with atypical behaviors so that teachers see normalization can happen for these children too. A second question I formulate, based on the number of student participant with siblings I had, was how birth order affect the child's independence and normalization process. A third question, in which I am still formulating, is based on creating a mentoring program for new students. An older child assisting a younger one throughout the environment observing together, with the older student narrating what is happening in the environment and staying with the child until she feels comfortable enough to make an independent choice of materials or activity. I shared this type of experience with a new child several times because my class was small enough and "normalized" enough that I didn't have to leave the new child to assist others. He got a one on one experience that helped him transition smoothly into the classroom. I wonder what normalization would look like for a toddler with an elementary student coming in to help out with this.

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Appendix A
Beneficial Effects of Practical Life Activities
Assent Form

August 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

In addition to being your child's teachers, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education. As a capstone to my program, I need to complete an Action Research project. I am going to study how using practical life activities and materials assist the child in the process of "normalization" in the Montessori classroom because of important components these activities promote such as independence, concentration and development of social skills based on literature I have read and experiences in my own classroom. "Normalization" is a term used in Montessori with a key component being the ability to self-regulate, calm oneself.

In the coming weeks, I will focus on offering activities from the practical life area of the classroom. I will also direct children to that area when they appear upset or unfocused. These activities will be regular parts of my instruction to assist in normalization and all students will participate as members of the class. However, specific to my study, I will keep track of data through daily record keeping and behavior logs that will be used to track specific behaviors seen as deviations and ways the child might reconcile, normalize, with or without the guide and the logs will be used to analyze patterns in the child's ability to normalize and to support and supplement best practices for assisting the child in the process of normalization.

The purpose of this letter is to notify you of this research and to allow you the opportunity to exclude your child's data (collected from behavior log and daily records) from my study.

If you decide you want your child's data to be in my study, you don't need to do anything at this point.

If you decide you do NOT want your child's data included in my study, please respond "opt-out" to this email by 8/28/2016. Note that your child will still participate in the lessons and activities but his/her data will not be included in my analysis.

In order to help you make an informed decision, please note the following:

- I am working with a faculty member at St. Kate’s and an advisor to complete this particular project
- The anticipated benefits to this research include accelerated process of “normalization” for the child and establishing best practices in the fields of teaching and child development with no foreseeable risks.
- I will be writing about the results that I get from this research. However, none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Other people will not know if your child is in my study.
- The final report of my study will be electronically available online at the St. Catherine University library. The goal of sharing my research study is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve their teaching.
- There is no penalty for not having your child’s data involved in the study, I will simply delete his or her responses from my data set.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, 435-200-8248. You may ask questions now, or if you have any questions later, you can ask me, or my advisor, Nicole Wilcox, ndwilcox@stkate.edu, who will be happy to answer them. If you have questions or concerns regarding the study, and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at [\(651\) 690-7739](tel:6516907739).

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

[Leah Linebarger]

Date

OPT OUT: Parents, in order to exclude your child’s data from the study, please sign and return by [8/28/2016]

I do NOT want my child’s data to be included in this study.

Signature of Parent

Date

Appendix B
Beneficial Effects of Practical Life Activities
Active Consent Form

Dear Parents,

As you may know, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education degree. An important part of my program is the Action Research project.

As a toddler teacher of students at Soaring Wings International Montessori School, I have chosen to learn what effect practical life activities have on the child's ability to "normalize" in the Montessori toddler and primary classrooms because of important components these activities promote such as independence, concentration and development of social skills. "Normalization" is a term used in Montessori with a key component being the ability to self-regulate, calm oneself. I am working with a faculty member at St. Catherine University and an advisor to complete this particular project.

I will be writing about the results that I get from this research, however none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any staff, administration, parents, or students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Only I will (and teachers choosing to participate in collecting data) have access to the identifiable data for this study; it will be kept confidential.

When I am done, my work will be electronically available online at the St. Kate's library in a system called SOPHIA, which holds published reports written by faculty and graduate students at St. Catherine University. The goal of sharing my final research study report is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

The anticipated benefits to this research include accelerated process of "normalization" for the child and establishing best practices in the fields of teaching and child development with no foreseeable risks.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire, regarding personal views on practical life activities and materials, when we meet for our fall parent/teacher conference. The conference is allotted 20 minutes with an additional 10 minutes to fill out and discuss the questionnaire for a total of 30 minutes.

This study is voluntary. If you decide you do want to be a participant and/or have your data from the conference included in my study, you need to check the appropriate box(es), sign this form, and return it by 10/1/2016. If at any time you decide you do not want to

continue participation and/or allow your data to be included in the study, you can notify me and I will remove included data to the best of my ability.

If you decide you do not want to participate and/or have your data included in my study, you do not need to do anything. There is no penalty for not participating or having your data involved in the study.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Leah Linebarger. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, you can ask me or my advisor, Nicole Wilcox, ndwilcox@st.kate.edu, who will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Opt In

Please check all that apply. I DO want to:

- participate in this study.
- have my data included in this study.

Signature of Participant in Research

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Please respond by 10/1/2016

Appendix C
Beneficial Effects of Practical Life Activities
Parent/Teacher Assessment - Conference

After going through the student's record keeping book at Parent/Teacher Fall Conference, 6 weeks after the start of school, the following statement and questions will be presented as a short hand-out and filled out only by parent participants that chose "opt-in" on form Appendix F. The answers will be discussed during the conference to assure participants understanding of the study and assess whether goals, particularly those associated with normalization, such as independence and self-reliance are seen as supported best through the Practical Life activities in the classroom according to the participants.

My research question asks- What is the effect of practical life activities on the child's ability to "normalize" in the Montessori toddler and primary classrooms? "Normalization" is a term used in Montessori with a key component being the ability to self-regulate, calm oneself.

1. What are your goals for your child? This question was also asked on the student enrollment form.

2. What areas of the classroom do you feel support these goals?

3. Feelings about Practical Life Curriculum- (circle one)
More As Less
important than academic curricula such as Math, Language and Science?

Comments:

Appendix D

Teacher Pre-study Discussion & Questionnaire (presented with active consent form)

1. One sentence describing components of “Normalization”.
2. One Sentence describing “deviation” in behavior.
3. What do you do when a child is exhibiting a behavior “deviation”?
4. What practical life activity do you feel is most calming? (personally and for students)
5. Number of returning students and total enrollment

Appendix E
Beneficial Effects of Practical Life Activities
Active Consent Form

Dear Teachers,

As you may know, I am a St. Catherine University student pursuing a Masters of Education degree. An important part of my program is the Action Research project.

As a toddler teacher of students at Soaring Wings International Montessori School, I have chosen to learn what effect practical life activities will have on the child's ability to "normalize" in the Montessori toddler and primary classrooms because of literature I have reviewed on the topic, experiences I have had in my own classroom and because of important components these activities promote such as independence, concentration and development of social skills social. "Normalization" is a term used in Montessori with a key component being the ability to self-regulate. I am working with a faculty member at St. Catherine University and an advisor to complete this particular project.

I will be writing about the results that I get from this research, however none of the writing that I do will include the name of this school, the names of any staff, administration, parents, or students, or any references that would make it possible to identify outcomes connected to a particular student. Only I will (and teachers choosing to participate in collecting data) have access to the identifiable data for this study; it will be kept confidential.

When I am done, my work will be electronically available online at the St. Kate's library in a system called SOPHIA, which holds published reports written by faculty and graduate students at St. Catherine University. The goal of sharing my final research study report is to help other teachers who are also trying to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

The anticipated benefits to this research include accelerated process of "normalization" for the child and establishing best practices in the fields of teaching and child development with no foreseeable risks.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill in information on a behavior log when you observe a child showing a behavior deviation. The log will ask you what behavior you observed, age of child, date and time a day, what activity the child went to or was directed to, how long it took the child to reconcile behavior deviation and if it occurred again the same day or multiple days of the week. It is designed to supplement daily record logs and as to not take more than a few extra minutes out of the day. The log will be kept through the first six week of school, the "normalization" period.

This study is voluntary. If you decide you do want to be a participant and/or have your data from the behavior log or daily record log included in my study, included in my study, you need to check the appropriate box(es), sign this form, and return it by 10/1/2016. If at any time you decide you do not want to continue participation and/or allow your data to be included in the study, you can notify me and I will remove included data to the best of my ability.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Opt In

Please check all that apply. I DO want to:

- participate in this study.
- have my data included in this study.

Signature of Participant in Research

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Please respond by 8/22/2016

If you would like to be recognized for your contributions to this research, please write your name here as you would like it to be included.
