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Effects of Practical Life Activities and Normalization in the 3–6-year-old Classroom

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the effects Practical Life activities have on the process of normalization of students in a Montessori primary classroom. The research took place over six weeks and included 22 participants. Each day the participants were given Practical Life lessons, such as dry pouring, rolling up a work mat, walking around the ellipse, etc. Students who can concentrate and work freely in the Montessori classroom are moving toward normalization. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to examine the effects of how Practical Life activities assist the process of normalization of children ages 3-6. Findings suggest that given that students are given Practical Life activities, it is proven to help guide the normalization of the children in the Montessori classroom. When the children are self-regulated and deeply engaged in their work, they are normalized.

Keywords: Practical Life, normalization, concentration, self-regulation

In the Montessori Method of education, children develop social, emotional, and motor skills. They learn how to read and do mathematics. They develop a deeper understanding of culture, history, geography, and science. Among all areas of the Montessori method of education, Practical Life is the most crucial aspect of the Montessori classroom. When children attend Montessori school for the first time, they are immediately introduced to the practical life area.

I had a student who graduated from kindergarten this past school year, May of 2022. The student came to us in August 2020 after a horrible experience attending daycare. During the student's first three months of attendance, he refused to choose any activities on the shelf. The student chose to stay in the practical life area, and if he did choose an activity, he misused the materials or damaged the work. During these few months, he was also unwilling to partake in the Montessori classroom's additional areas.

As the student became more comfortable and trusting with us, the teachers, he gradually chose activities and occasionally asked for lessons in the practical life area. He was still unwilling to participate in the other areas of the classroom, but for him to choose activities and complete them was a vast accomplishment. For the remainder of the school year, his main desire was to work in the practical life area. He flourished and developed relationships with friends and his teachers.

In the following school year, 2021-2022, the student showed an interest in the classroom's Montessori language, math, and cultural areas. He was enthusiastic about learning to read and beginning the learning process of writing. The joy on his face was heart-stirring, noticing his feeling of accomplishment when he wrote his name for the first time. I felt a sense of gratification when he was intrigued to finish addition and subtraction math work. On the day of his kindergarten graduation, his father said, "my son was a child who was forgotten about at a

daycare and could barely contain his emotions, and you all transformed him.” “He will be a better human being because of the teaching and kindness you all have shown him.” His parents’ gratitude and kind words are far more rewarding than any material gift a parent can give a teacher. For this reason, is why I am a Montessori teacher. This student needed the activities in practical life to guide him to becoming self-regulated and able to concentrate on his work within the environment.

“Practical Life is the foundation for success in the rest of the classroom” (Gilder, 2012, p. 24). The practical life area consists of “care for the environment,” “care of the person,” “grace and courtesy,” and walking the line. Children who do practical life activities develop skills called executive functions. These executive functions are problem-solving, self-regulation, attention, concentration, organization, and problem-solving. When children are thoroughly engaged in practical life activities, they model self-knowledge and the capability of concentration.

When children fully concentrate and work freely in the Montessori classroom, they are normalized. Normalized students love to work, are self-disciplined, and are peaceful. The process of concentration developed by doing and completing practical life lessons results in a normalized child. Children must have practical life skills to reach normalization.

My small, southern Montessori primary school consists of 42 students aged 3 to 6. I have noticed the lack of normalized students in my classroom. At the end of the school year, some students continued to run in the classroom or could not complete the lesson. Other students were still unable to work independently or even hold a pencil correctly. The work period was not peaceful; it was loud every day. Those students who were not normalized interrupted those who were engaged in their work. The teachers were frustrated due to the students who were not working and being disruptive. These students lacked practical life activities that should have

been introduced at the beginning of the school year. Without the introduction of Practical Life activities, students do not reach normalization.

This study aims to improve the classroom environment by less interrupted work periods and improve the students' concentration and self-discipline by introducing the students to practical life activities.

Theoretical Framework

Constructivism is an epistemology theory, the view that knowledge is learned through the interaction of experiences in their environment (Ultanir, 2012). This theory supports Dr. Montessori's method of education process on self-direction and decentering of the teacher. The Montessori method of education is based on observation and scientific research, the use of self-directed materials, and the hands-on approach to help the natural development of the children. The foundation of the constructive theory is that we are not given knowledge; we build on it. Students build knowledge by working with the materials provided to them by the teachers. Ulrich explains that to have a constructive classroom, all those in the classroom must be working quietly while respecting all the materials being used (2014). Constructivism, a meta and scientific theory, details the probable limits of "daily life theories" for the creation of humankind (Ultanir, 2012). Constructivists believe that people are not passive learners; they learn by active participation. For students to be engaged, they are actively involved in their work (Scruggs, 2009).

Jean Piaget, a psychologist, and a theorist is well known for the creation of what constructivism is known to be. Piaget's main focal point of constructivism involves the individual and how that individual creates knowledge. Piaget states that children's interpretation of the world and decisions differs from that of adults. Piaget's understanding of the growth of

children's minds consists of four periods of development. In the first period, the Sensorimotor Stage, ages zero to two, children begin to understand their environment using their senses.

"Circular reactions" during the first two years of all babies' lives are cognitive development, beginning at this stage (Ultanir, 2012). During this stage, babies form relationships with others and form concepts of space and time. In the second period, the Pre-Operational Stage, from two years to seven years old, there is a "symbolic function" (Ultanir, 2012). During this stage, children can mentally produce an object or thing even after they are taken away. Also, children's development of language is at a fast pace. While the children are developing language skills, they can also determine the differentiation between objects and thoughts and recognize their relationship during the sub-stage of "intuitive thought" (Ultanir, 2012). Thirdly, Concrete Operational Stage, ages seven to eleven, children begin to discard perceptive thoughts with their rationale. Finally, in the fourth period, the Formal Operational Stage, from ages eleven to adulthood, humans begin solving problems utilizing a higher level or abstract way of thinking. Piaget was not focused on learning and education but on the expansion of knowledge.

In addition to Piaget, John Dewey is a contemporary who expanded the idea of constructivism. John Dewey, a theorist, was the driving force for progressive education in the United States. Dewey's epistemological approach to education is that the link between knowledge and reality is developed through individual and social experiences (Ultanir, 2012). Dewey believed that humans do not get knowledge by finding and recording reality; they must be a component of reality. Dewey believed that real education comes from experiences, and critical thinking must be encouraged. With this belief, Dewey promoted self-directed learning.

Dr. Maria Montessori (1917) believed, "To prepare such a school as perfectly as possible is therefore not only to prepare a better method for the education of children but also prepare the

materials for a renovated science” (p. 74). Teachers serve the children by preparing the environment and observing the children. The teachers must prepare the environment with clean apparatus neatly placed on the shelves in order. The environment is created for the children, and the teachers are patient guides observing the children working with the materials. Children desire organization. These children are self-disciplined, love to work, and desire order and peace. Through their environment, Montessori students have improved their social awareness and problem-solving skills. They are joyful learners who are intrinsically satisfied by their work. They are determined and exhibit independence. Through the normalization process, the teachers fade into the background, carefully observing the natural development of the children as they work.

Review of Literature

This action research project aims to determine what activities in Practical Life effectively assist the normalization process of children ages 3-6. The students showed a lack of normalization in the past school year in the classroom. Because of this, the work periods are loud. The students are not independent workers, displaying signs of self-discipline and having focus issues.

The primary research question is: What are the effects of Practical Life activities and normalization of children aged 3-6? Incorporating Practical Life activities and normalization in the classroom would improve the class environment by having fewer disruptions. The students are more independent and focused on their work. The students would also appreciate the materials by taking care of and respecting their work. Ramani wrote, "every level of practical life thus has a significance not only at the personal level but also at the social level" (2013, p. 50). Children must create themselves by becoming part of the activity in Practical Life. On the social

level, children acclimate to cultures and communities. All areas of practical Life have importance not only for the individual but also for the community (Ramani, 2013). Practical life activities give children direction, identity, and a sense of belonging, giving purpose and context to their individual lives.

This section reviews the scholarly work done in the areas of normalization, activities in Practical Life, and the impact of Practical Life activities and the process of normalization. This section will be organized under headings: definition of normalization; achievement of normalization and the normalized classroom, activities in Practical Life; definition of Practical Life and the benefits to the children, community, and classroom environment; and the impact of Practical Life activities toward normalization; how normalization can be obtained by Practical Life, Practical Life activities that help achieve normalization, and normalization in the Montessori Practical Life area.

Definition of Normalization

When Montessori began to work with children in the 1900's she worked with children who were known as deficient. These children were either from low-income families or were homeless. After working with the children, "deviations" began to dissipate. Montessori referred to the children as "new or "normalized" (Chisnall, 2005). While children are in this state of mind, they are what Montessori called free of "deviations." Dr. Montessori simply defined this as the "naughtiness of small children." Montessori believed that children should be treated with love and care. Young children in early education should be treated gently and given the children the option to make good choices. Normalization comes naturally when children can make their own choices in the prepared environment.

Children who are normalized have gone through a change in their behavior. The change in their behavior is characterized by four specific stages (Linebarger, 2016). According to Linebarger, in each stage, children are working toward independence and self-reliance (2016). During this process, there is an "infinity of variations in children's behavior" (Linebarger, 2016). The first stage of the children's behavior is disorder. In the disorder stage, the children first depend on the adult to provide for them. The second stage of behavior is the onset of concentration. The onset of concentration is divided into substages separated by false fatigue. Prior to the second substage, false fatigue is the moment when the children present to be fidgety and weary of working. In the second substage, one may think the children are tired, but they are preparing for more challenging work, and once they are finished with the work, they seem to be energized. The children are being observed choosing familiar activities and completing the chosen materials satisfactorily. The children are observed as having more concentration and less fatigue, moving toward the third stage, the onset of completion. The children are now moving toward the ability to self-control, which is characterized as the fourth stage, the phenomenon of obedience (Linebarger, 2016).

Normalization is observed when the children are all working productively in their environment. This is without difficulties; the children are in a positive state of mind working effectively in their classroom. Rosanova states that all children must know how to manage their normalized behavior, and if for any reason they lose it, they must know how to regain it (2004). Dr. Montessori noticed that they were joyful and enthusiastic after the children had been constructively working. The classroom environment was peaceful. The normalized child is described as a positive model of health and intelligence (Rosanova, 2004). One of the main goals of Montessori is to arouse human development by presenting children with the convenience of

rewarding and engaging work. Research describes the qualities of a normalized child. True qualities include being helpful, kind, disciplined, and independent. The true nature of the unique child is the fully intergraded body and mind. The spiritual quality of normalization is broken down and defined as "the inner development of a child's best self." Normalization is reached when the children are deeply engaged in activities brought on by their concentration. Dr. Montessori wrote that normalization follows once the child is doing the work using their hands with real activities, work is backed by heavy concentration.

Additional research also defines the normalization of the children. True normalization is helping children learn to find their inner discipline with the guidance of the teachers working with the children to bring the class to a peaceful calm (Ulrich, 2014). The teachers can maintain control by letting go of their own needs to control the classroom and children. The teachers can do this by empowering the children and allowing them to solve their problems and find solutions. The children can find control within themselves when the teachers are free of control (Ulrich, 2014). As well as the research, Montessori equally expected the teachers' goals should lead the students on the path of self-control and independence.

Activities in Practical Life

In Italy, in 1907, Dr. Maria Montessori opened the "Children's House." The first materials introduced in the Children's House were Practical Life activities. Practical life work is made up of our everyday daily life activities. Practical is defined as doing something of action. Practical Life is Life in action, the work of Life (Ramani, 2013). Montessori describes a typical day in the Children's House beginning at 7 a.m. and ending at 6 p.m. The children were responsible for preparing at least two meals at the Children's House during a typical day. They not only prepared the meal, but they were responsible for the cleanup after each meal. They were

given various Practical Life activities throughout the school day. Montessori's intention for Practical Life activities was to allure children's motivation.

In addition, children ages 3- 6 begin to mimic skills and show signs of deep concentration. Maria Montessori identifies children from 3 – 6 years of age in their “sensitive periods,” in which children are at an optimum stage of development (Elcombe, 2017). The first stage of development occurs from newborn to age six. This stage is the absorbent mind, the stage where the construction of the human occurs. Children ages 3-6 years old have the will to learn consciously, actively think, and remember. This stage marks the sensitive periods for language, order, slight object fascination, grace and courtesy, refinements of the senses, and refinement of their movements.

While observing the children working, Dr. Montessori noticed the impact of Practical Life activities on concentration and normalization. Montessori believed that these types of activities were intelligent movements. Movement without a purpose was tiresome to children. Intelligent movement brings about concentration and normalization. Children who are doing purposeful activities are happy and feel like they are members of their community (Ramani, 2013).

Additional analysis states that children develop in intervals. Montessori was convinced that children develop at three-year intervals (Mrvos, 2003). Montessori schools provide Primary (ages 3 to 6), Elementary (ages 6 to 9), and (ages 9 to 12) curriculums. Typically, two to three guides teach a class containing 25 to 30 children (Mrvos, 2003). The Montessori classroom is free of desks in five rows; child-size tables and chairs are neatly arranged near low shelves, accompanied by organized work trays. The work should be placed on the eye-level shelf, arranged from concrete to abstract, and accessible to children. During the early sensitive years,

concrete materials are offered to the children because they can learn basic concepts. Using concrete hands-on materials makes abstract concepts clear. Montessori believed the brain and the hand must develop in unity. The hand reports to the brain; in return, the brain directs the hand. Maria Montessori, through scientific research, designed materials to support young children's fine motor ability, thus supporting their cognitive and social development (Mrvos, 2003). The Montessori classroom is a unique, child-friendly environment, with every inch of the classroom rendering educational materials (Mrvos, 2003).

Practical Life activities such as baking bread, scrubbing the floor or a table, and washing dishes help develop fine and gross motor skills. At the same time, it also gives the children the feeling of belonging and contributing to their community. "These types of practical tasks support the movement of a child's whole person" (Beagle, 2022, p. 6). For a Montessori classroom to be authentic, it is necessary to have practical activities of Life's messy everyday duties. The Montessori teacher takes pride and spends a great deal of time preparing the environment to encourage the learning process to happen (Dore, 2014). The teacher is constantly changing or adjusting the work in the environment to meet the ever-changing needs of the students.

When students are first introduced to the Montessori classroom, the children begin in Practical Life. Practical Life is purposeful lessons that develop fine motor skills, concentration, independence, and a sense of responsibility. For some toddlers, the start of Montessori school is where they experience a group setting for the first time (Dore, 2014). For the new toddler, social skills are among one the most critical skills toddler will learn. Grace and courtesy are also introduced to toddlers. Moral and ethical behavior develops naturally in children through respectful and appropriate teacher interaction. In caring for themselves, the toddlers learn to wipe their noses, dress, undress, and prepare snacks. They learn to care for the environment by

ensuring the classroom is clean and beautiful. Transferring items using tongs or spoons and water or dry pouring helps the children to develop gross and fine motor skills. The Montessori toddler teacher's job is to allow the children the convenience and the freedom to learn and teach themselves in the classroom (Dore, 2014). The teachers observe the children while they work.

The children are given various lessons on self-care and care for the environment. Montessori intended practical life activities to have a practical purpose in care of oneself, the environment, and the community (Lillard, 2008). Examples of lessons in Practical Life are rice spooning, water pouring, table washing, and floor-sweeping. These lessons teach the children to care for their environment. Brushing teeth, washing hands, tying one's own shoes, and putting on a jacket are self-care lessons. The Dressing frames are an activity in practical Life that gives children a place to interpret and perform the movements needed for the actual work with clothes (Lillard, 2008). The children also learn grace and courtesy, meaning they learn to greet their friends or visitors at school. The children may greet their friends with a welcoming handshake and a smile. The children learn to choose the work on the shelf and return it to where it belongs. Research proves Practical Life activities are meaningful by the type of exercises introduced to children.

The Impact of Practical Life Activities Toward Normalization

“It is the adult’s task to build an environment superimposed on nature, an outward work calling for activity and intelligent effort; it is what we call productive work, and is by its nature social, collective and organized” (Montessori, 1936, p. 212). It is the teacher’s responsibility to work with the children toward the process of normalization. Learning from others occurs by *shared focus*, a type of attention recently studied in brain development and ethnographic research. The ethnographic research involved the observation of children over a three-year time.

The study was done in Montessori classrooms observing children's concentration. Children use shared focus when they laugh and play together. Children may also use share focus instead of concentration during their work period because they naturally want to be with the other children (Epstein, 2013). While observing the children concentrating, Montessori indicated this act of concentration as a personal transformation.

The teacher's responsibility is to guide the children toward normalization to concentration. With the onset of concentration, the children continuously work with the materials and develop coordination. The teachers observe the children and do not interrupt them as they work. The teachers watch the children as they master the skill or activity. The concentration of the materials turns into normalization (Epstein, 2013). The phenomenon of concentration and cultural conditions were investigated by ethnographic research (Epstein, 2013). Studies report that cultures are groups of people that gather for a uniform purpose. In Montessori classrooms, the children work together and understand themselves and their own behavior as meaningful and purposeful. When children are together, just like members of cultural groups, they teach one another to execute similar behaviors in situations such as in social roles or while doing activities. The new children in the classroom may feel confused or nervous because they are unfamiliar with the expectations. The other children will help or tell the teachers about those children who are not doing what is culturally expected of them. Children learn by participating in activities with their peers and socially construct what is happening around them.

A longitudinal study comparing Montessori and traditional schools further proves the beneficial impact of the Montessori method of education on children. Seventy children in two public Montessori schools and seventy-one students in traditional schools participated in the longitudinal study with preschool-aged children aged 3-6. The longitudinal study shows the

children who attended Montessori schools exceed in academic achievement and self-control more than those in traditional preschools (Lillard et al., 2017). This study examines how Montessori and traditional school students change their environment over three years. This study supports Maria Montessori's principles because the students excel academically, and the children exhibit self-control. The children are meant to enjoy the freedom to choose work, the freedom to move about the classroom, and the freedom to repeat chosen work.

Conclusion

The information provided states that Practical Life activities effectively assist the normalization of children ages 3-6. Supporting research explains that Practical Life activities support the students' normalization process. All studies in this literature review have conclusive data advising Practical Life activities assist children toward the process of normalization. Studies have shown that teacher-centered classrooms prove students are less engaged due to no student input or the teachers are less concerned with students understanding the materials given to them (Scruggs, 2019). The Montessori classroom is hands-on learning, and self-directed activities have proven to be more effective for the children. Montessori is education and preparation for Life resulting in a long-term superior outcome. Children will be confident and prepared for Life and learn the skills for adaptation to help them compensate for their weaknesses and excel in their strengths.

Methodology

This study examined the effects of practical life activities that assisted in the normalization process of students in a primary Montessori classroom. I have noticed a lack of normalization in my students. Many of the students had difficulties choosing or completing work. They were disruptive to their fellow students engaging in activities. The lack of focus and self-regulation caused work periods to be unproductive and loud. Data were collected over six weeks from September 2022 through November 2022. During the study, all practical life activities were demonstrated to ensure the students understood what they were asked to do. Each participant was given practical life lessons over the course of six weeks. Once a practical life lesson was introduced to the participants, they had the opportunity to complete the activity. Every participant had the same lessons and time to complete each task. The Montessori classroom consisted of 44 students aged 3 – 6 years. Of the 42 students, a total of 22 students participated in the study. Of the twenty-two participants, sixteen were new to the Montessori Method of education, and the remaining six were returning students. The students were middle to upper class, and the study was completed at a small private primary Montessori school in southwest Louisiana.

Once the practical life lesson (See Appendix F) was introduced to the participant, the participant repeated the process. Data were collected on the participant's progress toward normalization. Normalization is reached when the children deeply engage in activities brought on by their concentration. I measured the participants' progress by the following: quantitative data collected by pre- and post-student self-assessment surveys, qualitative data collected on qualities of normalization, quantitative data collected by on-task behavior, and qualitative data collected by my daily observations.

Before beginning any intervention, the participants were given a student self-assessment survey (See Appendix A) in week one. Some examples of the student-assessment survey given to each participant are “I know how to tuck in my chair.”, “I know how to roll up my work mat.”, “I know to walk around the ellipse.” and “I know how to hold my work tray.” Each statement has an answer with a picture of a thumbs up for “yes” and a picture with a thumbs down for “no.” I read each statement on the self-assessment survey to each participant. The student assessment in week one gave me an insight into what each participant felt they knew of the classroom expectations.

To measure student normalization, I observed the participants while they worked with the practical life activities. When assessing student normalization (See Appendix C), I looked for qualities of normalization each participant portrayed. Data was collected based on participants’ actions, such as “are students selecting work?” and “are students repeating activities?” On the student normalization chart (See Appendix C), participants are identified by a “letter” to remain anonymous. Observations for qualities of normalization were done every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 9:30 a.m. until 10:00 a.m. for six weeks. The data from the student normalization chart (See Appendix C) were compared at the end of the sixth-week study. The data collection was meant to prove that the participants would move toward normalization, given adequate practical life activities (See Appendix F).

An on-task behavior chart (See Appendix D) determined if the participants were effectively working on the practical life activities (See Appendix F). The on-task behavior chart used tally marks for participants who demonstrated concentration and actively engaged in practical life activities. Some examples of on-task behavior (See Appendix D) I looked for were “engaging with a purpose,” “caring for the classroom,” “misusing of materials,” and “completing

a work cycle.” Data was collected Monday through Friday at 10:00 a.m. for six weeks. At the end of the study, the data were analyzed and compared, proving that the participants moved toward normalization.

On week six, the participants were given the post-student self-assessment survey (See Appendix B). I read each statement on the survey to each participant. At the end of the six weeks process, I could compare the survey questions' results between weeks one and six. The student self-assessment survey showed each participant's self-perception over the six weeks. By the end of the six weeks, the data showed the participants to be more confident and self-assured.

Analysis of Data

This study aimed to examine how practical life activities assist students in moving toward the normalization process. The study was completed in a Montessori primary classroom with students 3-6 years of age. A total of twenty-two students, of which sixteen students were new to the Montessori Method, and the remaining six students were returning students. The 22 participants included in the study, ages three to six years old, consisted of twelve girls and ten boys (See Table 1). The research strategy had twenty-seven practical life lessons (See Appendix F), which were introduced to the students. A variety of practical life lessons chosen from “care of the environment,” “care of self,” and “grace and courtesy” were given daily to each student (See Figures 1-8). The goal of practical life activities is designed to help students develop self-regulation and concentration. The tools the students develop by doing practical life activities assist in the process of normalization. Qualitative data included qualities of normalization charts and notes of daily observations of the participants. Quantitative data included pre- and post-student self-assessment surveys and an on-task behavior chart.

Table 1*Participant Demographic Breakdown*

Age	Number of Boys	Number of Girls
3	6	5
4	4	4
5	0	2
6	0	1

Note. The table shows a breakdown of the participants by age and gender.

Figure 1.

Transfer work using a tong.



Figure 2.

Transfer work using a scooper.



Figure 3.

Dry pouring.



Figure 4.

Table sweeping.



Figure 5.

Flower arranging.



Figure 6.

Large button dressing frame



Figure 7.

Cinnamon grating using a cheese grater.



Figure 8.

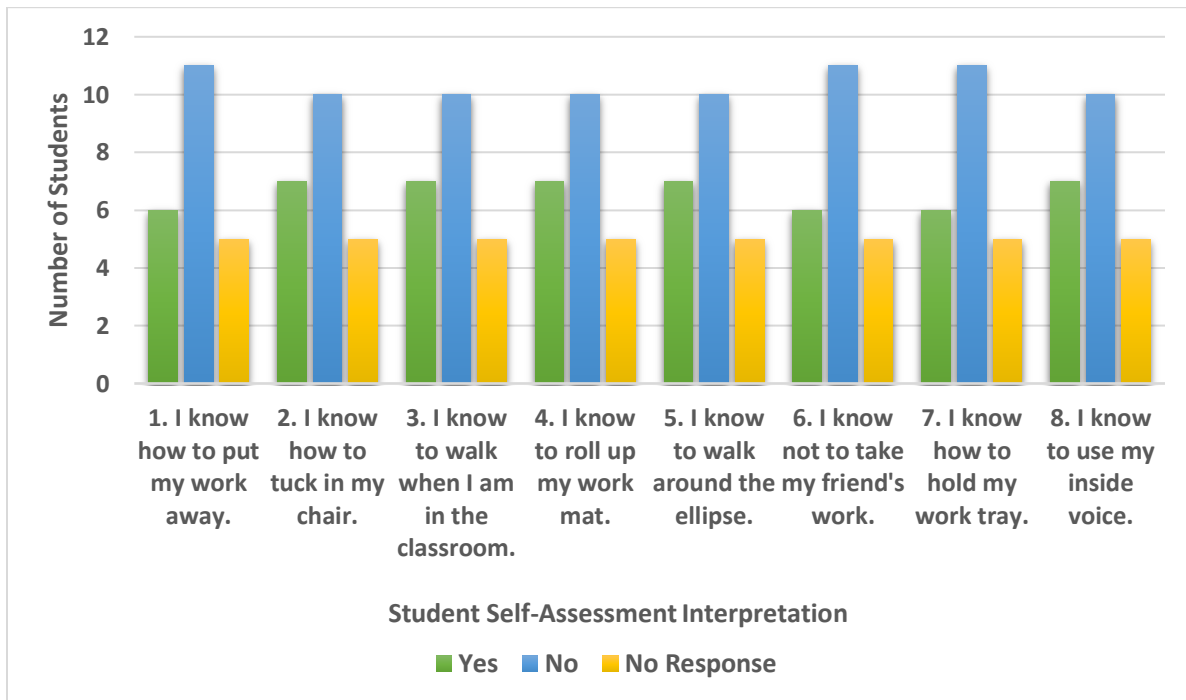
Sewing work.

**Student Self-Assessment**

A student self-assessment questionnaire including eight statements (See Appendix A) was administered to each of the twenty-two participants before the start of the study to establish a baseline for the student's knowledge of the Montessori Practical Life Curriculum. The participants completed the self-assessment. As I read the statement, I asked them to show me a thumbs up for "yes" or a thumbs down for "no." Figure 9 shows the participant's responses to each statement before the study, and Figure 10 shows the participant's responses at the end of the six weeks study.

Figure 9.

Student Self-Assessment (Pre-Study)



Note. This figure demonstrates the results of the participant’s responses to each statement on the pre-study student self-assessment. The statements include the following: I know how to put my work away, tuck in my chair, walk in the classroom, roll up my mat, walk around the ellipse, not take my friend’s work, hold my work tray, and use my inside voice. The pre-study student self-assessment was given to each participant during week 1 of the intervention.

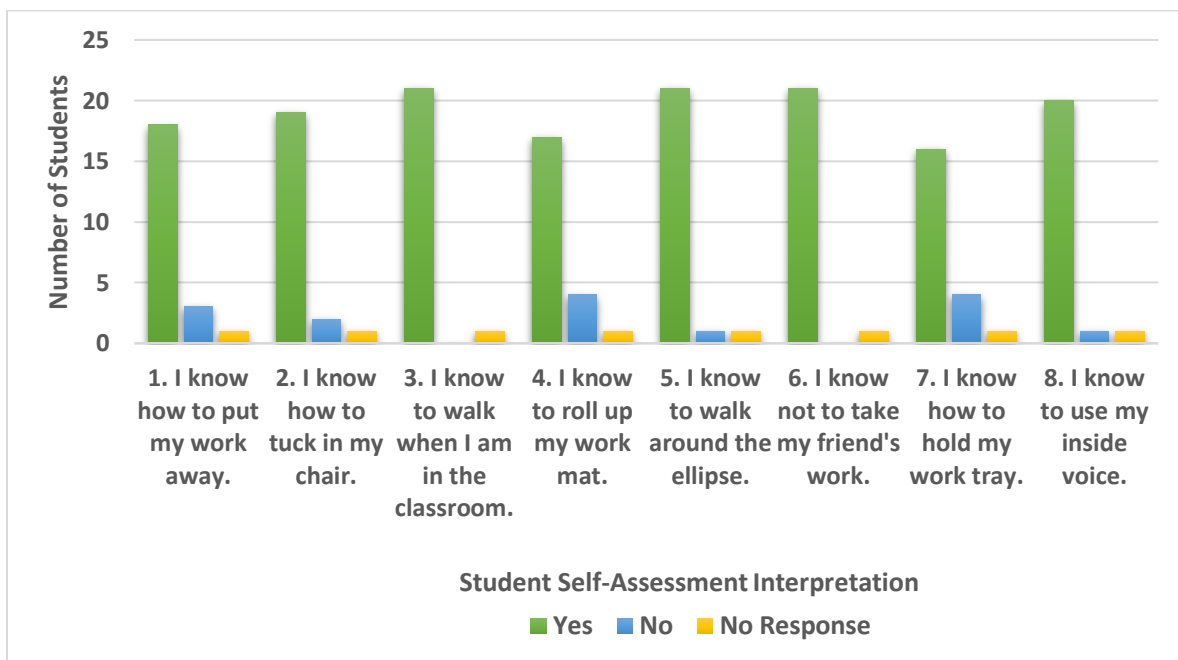
The student self-assessment was given to twenty-two students before the study. The participants’ responses show more than half of the participants were unfamiliar with the role of the Montessori student. The students who responded with a “no” for all eight statements were new to the Montessori Method. In addition, five out of the twenty-two participants did not respond to any of the statements, while seven students answered no. The remaining six students responded with a yes to all eight statements. For the intervention, I purposely chose six returning

students to participate in the study to show the correlation between returning and new students. As expected, all six returning students answered yes to all eight statements, while the remaining sixteen either said “thumbs down” or did not respond. The high amount of uncertainty from the students’ results of the post-study student self-assessment was expected.

At the end of week six, participants completed the self-assessment (See Appendix B). I read the statement and asked each student to show me a thumbs up for “yes” or a thumbs down for “no.” Figure 10 shows the participant’s responses at the end of the six weeks of study.

Figure 10.

Student Self-Assessment (Post-Study)



Note. This figure demonstrates the results of the participant’s responses to each statement on the post-study student self-assessment. The statements include the following: I know how to put my work away, tuck in my chair, walk in the classroom, roll up my mat, walk around the ellipse, not take my friend’s work, hold my work tray, and use my inside voice. The post-study student self-assessment was given to each participant at the end of week 6 of the intervention.

The student self-assessment was given to twenty-two participants at the end of the study. The participants' responses show more than half of the participants positively answered all eight statements with a "yes" or a thumbs up. The study proved by the end of the six weeks; the participants were more confident in their role as Montessori students. Only one out of the twenty-two participants did not respond to any of the statements given, and this was one of the five non-responsive participants of the pre-study self-assessment. The non-responsive participant is a 3-year-old student new to our school. This student started attending our school in August, two weeks before the start of the study. The student is shy but is slowly becoming comfortable with the teachers.

The four students who did not respond to the pre-study self-assessment did respond to all eight statements on the post-study-assessment. By the end of the six weeks, the four participants were more comfortable in the classroom with their peers and teachers. When interviewed at the end of the intervention, the four participants were eager to answer each statement. It was a proud moment for me as their teacher because just six weeks earlier, these four students would not speak when I read the statements to them, and now they are speaking with teachers and working alongside friends.

Twenty-one out of twenty-two participants who did respond to the post self-assessment, eleven gave a "thumbs up" for all the statements. Like in the pre-study self-assessment, all six returning students responded yes to all statements. Unlike the pre-study self-assessment results, the remaining fifteen new students gave a thumbs up for mostly all eight statements. By week six, the fifteen students were more confident and eager to respond to the self-assessment. Three out of the eight statements students answered with a "thumbs down" to statement #1, "I know how to put my work away," and four for statements #4, "I know how to roll up my mat," and #7,

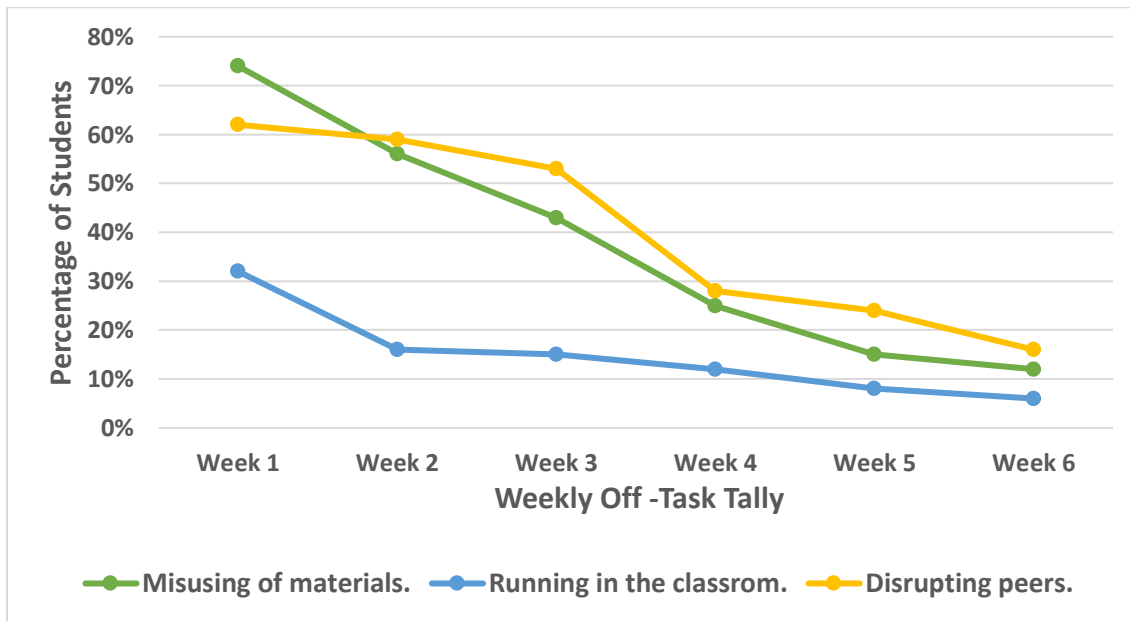
“I know how to hold my work tray.” In addition, two “thumbs down” was answered to statement #2. “I know how to tuck in my chair,” and one “thumbs down” to statement #5. “I know to walk around the ellipse,” #8. “I know to use my inside voice.” The students were given repeat lessons on the activities. The participants who replied with a “thumbs down” to the statements were new students at school.

On-Task Behavior in the Classroom

Over the six-week interventions, tallies tracked the student’s on-task behavior in the classroom (See Appendix D). Tally marks were included for practical life activities in “care of the environment” and “grace and courtesy.” The twenty-two participants were tracked daily during the morning work period. During the first two weeks of the study, students were still learning the routines in the classroom. “Misusing of materials,” “running while in the classroom,” and “disrupting peers” showed a high number of tallies for weeks one and two. Many students wandered about the classroom, unsure of what to do. On -Task and off-task behavior tallies were divided into two graphs to show classroom behavior. Figure 11 shows the tallies of off-task behavior in the classroom, “misusing of materials,” “running while in the classroom,” and “disrupting peers.

Figure 11.

Off-Task Behavior Task Tally



Note. This figure demonstrates the results of the participant’s off-task behavior, including the following: misusing materials, running in the classroom, and disrupting peers. The results show that off-task behavior was tracked for a period of six weeks.

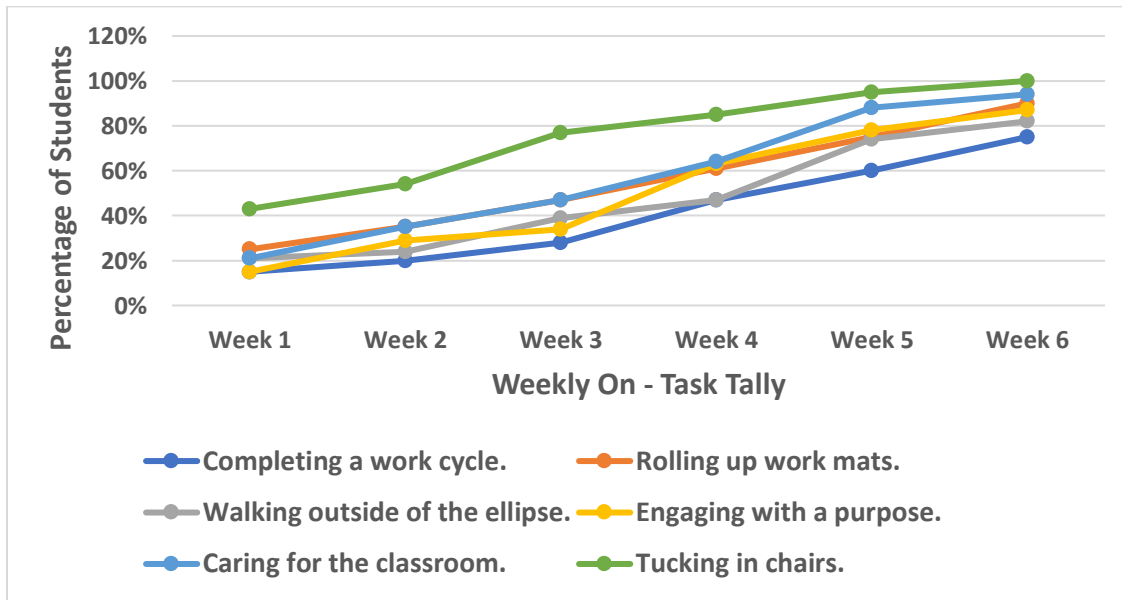
The off-task behavior shows that over 60% of participants between week one, and week two, were misusing the materials and disrupting peers. The participants who were presented with off-task behavior were new to the school. At the end of the intervention, the participant’s off-task behavior of misusing the materials dropped to 12%, running in the classroom dropped to 6%, and disrupting peers dropped to 16%.

Over six weeks, student on-task behavior in the classroom was observed and recorded. Examples of on-task behavior are as follows: engaging with a purpose, tucking in chairs, caring for the classroom, walking outside of the ellipse, rolling up work mats, and completing a work cycle. The study proved the introduction of practical life activities guided the students to self-

regulation and concentration. Figure 12 shows tallies tracked the student’s on-task behavior in the classroom (See Appendix D).

Figure 12.

On-Task Behavior Task Tally



Note. This figure demonstrates the results of the participant’s on-task behavior, including the following: completing a work cycle, walking outside of the ellipse, caring for the classroom, rolling up work mats, engaging with a purpose, and tucking in chairs. The results show that on-task behavior was tracked for a period of six weeks.

The study showed the percentage of participants’ performance in completing a work cycle and engaging with a purpose was 15% during week one. At the end of week six, 90% of students completed a work cycle, and 87% of the participants were engaged with a purpose. Students learn classroom procedures, concentration, and self-regulation through “care of the environment” and “grace and courtesy” lessons. At the end of the study, on-task behavior was observed and tallied. “Caring for the classroom” increased from 21% to 94% by the end of the intervention. During week six of the intervention, participants were observed: as 100% “tucking

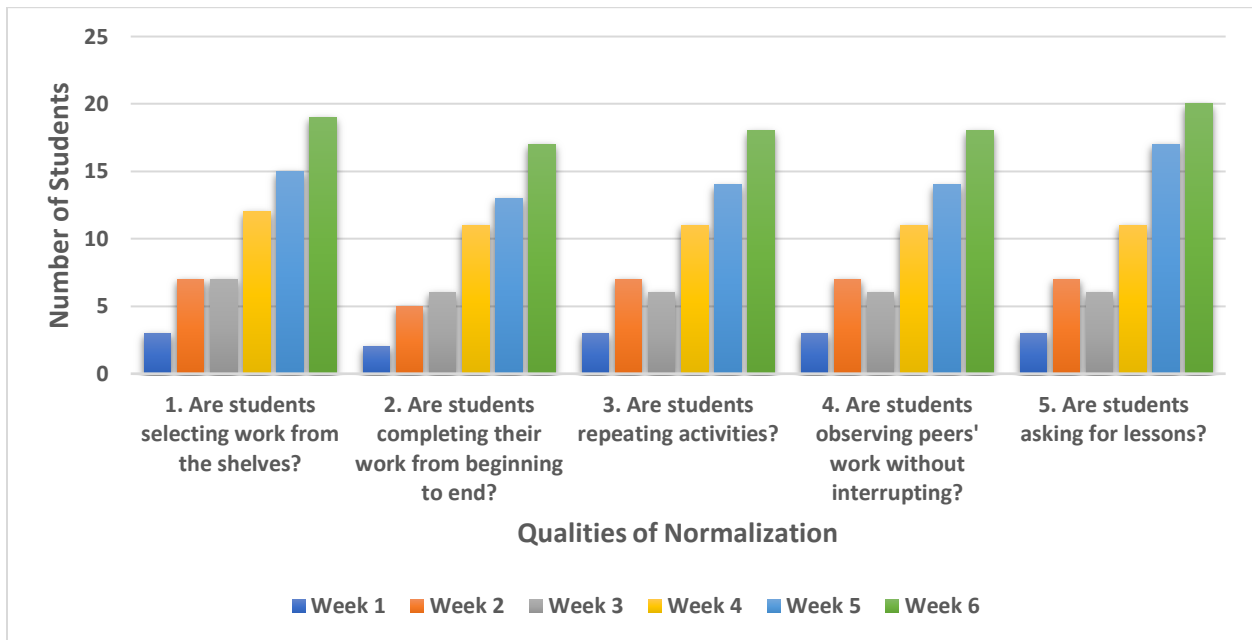
in their chairs.” One of the most significant obstacles I find is the student’s ability to “walk outside the ellipse.” Before the student learns to walk around the ellipse, many will run or walk through the ellipse to reach the other side of the classroom or if they want to choose an activity off the shelf. The participants practiced “walking outside of the ellipse” daily, and if they were observed walking or running through the ellipse, they were redirected to walk around the ellipse. At the start of the study, two weeks after school began, “walking outside of the ellipse” tallied at 21%, and by week six, the participants were tallied at 82%.

Normalization

Normalization in the Montessori classroom is reached when the students concentrate and engage in meaningful work in the Montessori environment. The normalized child exercises self-regulation, self-discipline, and peace. During the six-week intervention, students were observed while they were working with practical life activities. Each participant was identified with a “letter.” Students were recorded by their identified letter on the qualities showing normalization chart (See Appendix C). Examples of observed qualities of normalization are as follows: 1. Are students selecting work from the shelves? 2. Are students completing their work from beginning to end? 3. Are students repeating activities? 4. Are students observing peers' work without interruption? 5. Are students asking for lessons? Figure 13 shows the participants who portrayed the qualities of normalization (See Appendix C). The study recorded the data for the twenty-two students over six weeks.

Figure 13.

Student Normalization



Note. This figure demonstrates the results of the participants showing qualities of normalization. Qualities of normalization include the following: 1. Are students selecting work from the shelves? 2. Are students completing their work from beginning to end? 3. Are students repeating activities? 4. Are students observing peers' work without interrupting? and 5. Are students asking for lessons? The results show the qualities of normalization were tracked for a period of six weeks.

Data proved that by the intervention’s end, students improved their capabilities of moving toward the normalization process. Students were observed selecting work and completing the activities. In early September, students were unsure of what to expect at school, and by November, they were confidently and independently working with practical life activities. Normalization qualities included: 1. Are students selecting work from the shelves? 2. Are students completing their work from beginning to end? 3. Are students repeating activities? 4.

Are students observing peers' work without interrupting? and 5. Are students asking for lessons?

The data collected shows that nineteen out of the twenty-two students selected work from the shelves at the end of the intervention. Seventeen of the participants are completing their work from beginning to end. At the end of week six, eighteen students were repeating activities and observing peers' work without interrupting. Finally, twenty out of the twenty-two students selected work from the shelves.

Daily Journaling

Data was also collected by daily journaling. Throughout the six weeks of the intervention, data were collected by observing the participants working practical life activities during the morning work period. Student D would walk about the classroom and disturb other participants when not engaged in practical life activities. A teacher would redirect student D to choose an activity. The student would again do the activity for a short period of time and then interrupt others while they worked.

Student B, the participant who did not respond to either self-assessment survey, observed others' work. When student B did choose an activity, the participant would work quietly. If a group lesson was offered, the participant would observe but not speak if the teacher asked a question. Students A and F would also work quietly and did not speak or ask for lessons during the first two weeks of the intervention. As the weeks progressed, they became more comfortable at school and interacted with peers and teachers. This led to asking for lessons and participating in group or individual lessons with the teacher.

Students C, H, L, and U were constantly engaged in activities. These students would complete lessons. These students were also observed helping peers with activities. Students I, O, R, T, and V would work but with the guidance of the teacher. The teacher usually had to redirect

them to choose an activity. Student N was noticed doing an activity for at least 30 minutes, repeating the activity. Students G and R would have outbursts if they were redirected or if they wanted an activity a peer was currently engaged in that activity.

In addition, Student H was one of the sixteen new students this year. By week 3, the student was engaged in practical life activities. Student H showed curiosity in language as well as math. This surprised me because most of our new students would rather stay in practical life until they are comfortable exploring other areas of the Montessori Classroom. Student H was also noticed working with the six returning students. Student H would follow suit as the returning students chose to do math or language work.

By the end of the intervention, the classroom was quieter because students were engaged in activities. During the first two weeks of the intervention, the students were observed being loud, and if they were doing a practical life activity, they did not complete the work and quickly chose a new activity. As a result of giving lessons multiple times, the students began to learn classroom routines. It was observed that those students working quietly, walking outside of the ellipse, caring for the classroom, and not disturbing peers influenced their peers to do the same. I believe it is natural for students to want to model their peers, and as the intervention progressed, students mimicked the on-task behavior of their peers while in the classroom.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aims to determine the effects Practical Life activities have on the process of normalization of students in a Montessori primary classroom. Findings showed that most students were engaged in practical life activities during the morning work period. Normalization occurs when children can work freely in the Montessori environment, showing signs of self-discipline and peace.

“The child can only develop fully by means of experience through his environment. We call such experience work” (Montessori, 1967, p.88). Practical life is purposeful lessons that develop fine motor skills and concentration. Because of practical life lessons, the children develop independence and a sense of responsibility. Through observation, when students were given lessons in practical life, data suggests they were calmer and focused on their work.

With supporting evidence from the literature review, this action research concluded the need for practical life activities on the process of normalization of students in a Montessori primary classroom. The study consisted of twenty-two participants, of which sixteen were new to Montessori, and the remaining six were returning students. The students ranged from 3-6 years of age. When given adequate practical life lessons, I found that students became motivated to learn these everyday routines and practices.

Throughout the study, I presented practical life exercises to the students. Lessons were given during the morning work period, beginning at 9:00 a.m. each day. Some examples of practical life lessons are as follows: carrying a tray, walking the line, spooning, hand washing, and using a cheese grater. As the researcher, I intentionally chose to give lessons during the early morning work period. The students concentrate and focus during the early morning work period rather than the afternoon. Having lessons introduced early, the students were more inclined to work and were motivated to ask for additional lessons.

The participants were given pre- and post-self-assessment surveys consisting of eight statements. The self-assessment examined the student’s self-perception, responsibility, and knowledge of the Montessori classroom. The self-assessment statements are as follows: “I know how to put my work away, I know how to tuck in my chair, I know how to roll up my mat, I know how to hold my work tray, I know to walk when I am in the classroom, I know to walk

around the ellipse, I know not to take my friend's work, and I know to use my inside voice. The pre-study self-assessment was given two weeks after the start of the school year but one week before the beginning of the study. The pre-self-assessment was an important tool that I utilized as a baseline of the participant's self-perception before the intervention. The pre-study self-assessment concluded more than half of the participants were unfamiliar with the role of a Montessori student. Fifteen out of the twenty-two participants responded to each statement with a "thumbs down" or "no." One student did not respond to the pre-study self-assessment, and the remaining six answered with a "thumbs up" or "yes." Six participants were returning students, while the remaining sixteen were new to Montessori school. In the future, it may be essential to begin the intervention within the second week of the beginning of the school year. In doing so, the pre-self-assessment questionnaire should be given during the second week of school to accurately measure the student's self-perception pre-and post-intervention.

At the end of the intervention, the post-study self-assessment was given to each student, and the data were compared with the pre-study self-assessment. Only one participant did not answer the post-study self-assessment survey. The remaining twenty-one participants did participate in the post-study self-assessment survey. In the future, I recommend administering pre- and post-self-assessment questionnaires to compare how each student's self-perception, responsibility, and knowledge of the Montessori classroom varied from before the intervention and at the end of the study.

In addition, to the self-survey questionnaire, various observational methods were used to collect data. Data was gathered and recorded for six weeks. The observational data recorded was information from an on-task behavior tally chart, qualities of normalization chart, and a daily journal. The participants were observed daily between 9:30 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. For the first two

weeks of the intervention, the participants were unsure what to do in the classroom. During the first two weeks, the participants struggled with running in the classroom and walking through the ellipse. By week three, the students were choosing practical life activities and completing the work. Those students who were yet to complete a work cycle seemed to be calmer because their peers were busy working.

As the weeks progressed, the evidence demonstrated almost all participants were engaged and independently working on practical life lessons. Evidence shows by the end of the interventions; nearly all the participants were fully engaged in practical activities. The literature review supports the findings of this action research.

This study determined the effects Practical Life activities have on the process of normalization of students in a Montessori primary classroom. Evidence supports Practical Life is needed for the process of normalization of students in the Montessori environment. For future interventions, I recommend researchers and educators extend the original six-week period of the study to add at least two additional weeks. Adding two or more weeks to the intervention would provide more accurate collective data.

I found that the first two weeks of the intervention were more of an orientation for the new students to the Montessori environment. The new students were very unsure of the expectations that were asked of them at school. Secondly, some new students were not yet comfortable with the teachers, so they were reticent or cried because they missed their parents. Thirdly, the new students were too shy to participate in group or individual lessons for at least the first three weeks of school.

Recommendations for future researchers and educators should also add an additional self-assessment survey mid-intervention to accurately account for data. I regret I did not give the

participants a self-assessment survey during week three of the intervention. If I had given the self-assessment in week three, I would be able to compare data from week one and week three. As mentioned above, fifteen participants' responses to the pre-self-assessment were answered with a "no," and one did not respond to any of the statements. The post-self-assessment was successfully answered with a "yes" by twenty-one students. I regret not having the data from week three to compare with week one. For future researchers, I recommend adding the self-assessment survey, for it may have an improvement between the three weeks during the intervention.

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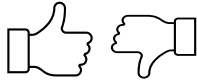
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Appendix A

Student Self-Assessment: Week 1

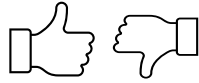


Yes or No

















I know how to put my work away.		
I know how to tuck in my chair.		
I know to walk when I am in the classroom.		
I know how to roll up my work mat.		
I know to walk around the ellipse.		
I know not to take my friend's work.		
I know how to hold my work tray.		
I know how to use my inside voice.		

Appendix B

Student Self-Assessment: Week 6



Yes or No

I know how to put my work away.	 
I know how to tuck in my chair.	 
I know to walk when I am in the classroom.	 
I know how to roll up my work mat.	 
I know to walk around the ellipse.	 
I know not to take my friend's work.	 
I know how to hold my work tray.	 
I know to use my inside voice.	 

Appendix C

Student Normalization

Week of: _____

Qualities of Normalization	Monday 9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.	Wednesday 9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.	Friday 9:30 a.m.–10:00 a.m.
Are students selecting work from the shelves?			
Are students completing their work from beginning to end?			
Are students repeating activities?			
Are students observing peers' work without interrupting?			
Are students asking for lessons?			

Note: Students Identification is a “Letter”

Appendix D

On-Task Behavior Weekly Tally

Week of: _____

On Task Behavior	Monday 10:00 a.m.	Tuesday 10:00 a.m.	Wednesday 10:00 a.m.	Thursday 10:00 am.	Friday 10:00 a.m.
Engaging with a purpose					
Tucking in chairs					
Misusing of materials					
Caring for the classroom					
Running while in the classroom					
Walking outside of the ellipse					
Disrupting peers					
Rolling up work mats					
Completing a work cycle					

Appendix E

Daily Student Observation

9:30 a.m. – 10:00 a.m.

Date: _____	Notes
Monday	
Tuesday	
Wednesday	
Thursday	
Friday	

Appendix F

Practical Life Exercises

Practical Life Lessons ➔ Lessons are given Daily for a 6 Week Time Period		Observations on Tuesdays and Fridays
Dusting Furniture	Dressing Frames with Large Buttons	Opening and Closing Bentgo Box
Table Washing	Hand Washing	Greeting Peers and Teachers
Sweeping the Floor	Taking off Shoes	Opening and Closing a Door
Polishing	Pouring	Walking the Line
Folding Wash Cloths	Spooning	Walking Quietly
Unrolling and Rolling a Mat	Absorbent Sponge	Blowing Nose
Carrying a Tray	Arranging Flowers	Tucking in Chairs
Handling a Book Correctly	Cutting with Scissors	Knocking on Bathroom Door Before Opening
Returning Finished Work to Shelf	Cheese Grater	The Silence Game