



Shalom Montessori

A practical handbook for Montessori teachers with
elements of Jewish education

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Introduction

Montessori and Jewish Education... How can these two concepts be combined? Is it possible, and what is needed to find common ground between these two approaches?

In "Shalom Montessori," we will try to explore both approaches to education and propose solutions that are common to both. We will do this using specific examples, tasks, and exercises to give teachers reading this publication clear and transparent guidelines for further work with children. So let's look for common ground between Maria Montessori's method and Jewish education.

During one of our conversations with Simonetta Bertoli, conducted during training at Casa dei Bambini in Italy, one of the course participants asked the expert what one piece of advice she would give to someone starting out on their journey as a Montessori teacher. Simonetta smiled meaningfully and gently, looked at the participants one by one, and then said, "A good Montessori teacher needs to have a lot of humility." Humility to searching, humility to observing and modifying what does not work. Humility towards children, towards the environment, towards one's work. Humility to admit mistakes and look for answers within oneself, not in the behavior of children. "What can I change in myself, in my attitude, in my environment, in my work so that the child can develop

our potential to the fullest? We also need humility when we encounter what is different, unknown, foreign, or even seemingly threatening. Especially in times when there are many wars and power struggles going on in the world, when we are bombarded with different media messages and live in our little information bubbles created by social media algorithms, it is so easy to fall into the trap of judging and expressing certain opinions. The work of a teacher requires great openness. After all, we work with children from various backgrounds on a daily basis, and we want not only to impart scientific knowledge to them, but also to shape the value system of these young people with our attitude, as they will one day grow up and carry on into the world what we teach them here and now.

In this handbook, we will not dwell too much on the history and principles of Maria Montessori's pedagogy – the literature that has been written on the subject so far is sufficient to explore this topic. However, we would like to focus on the values that this educational approach conveys to children, as here we find a significant connection with the introduction of knowledge about different cultures into education – including Jewish culture, which is the subject of this publication. The most important value conveyed by Montessori pedagogy is respect. Respect for the environment, respect for nature, for objects, for our work, for the work of others, but above all – for each other. Miriam Synger, who led our Jewish Education course, explaining what it actually entails, spoke about the Jewish community's great passion for discussing various topics. She also said that students have the space and are even encouraged to ask teachers questions or challenge their opinions. Every suggestion, every statement, every question is treated with great respect. Children learn to listen to each other, but they also learn to accept constructive criticism. Their voices really matter, as we experienced during our visit to the Gan Balagan Jewish center in Sofia, where, during their time together on the carpet, the children had the space to speak freely and talk about what really interests them. Isn't this how we would like children to grow up? In an atmosphere of mutual

respect, in an environment that truly supports their pace of development, natural needs, and sense of self-worth and agency? Don't we want them to remain open to the world and people, as they naturally are in their youth? Don't we want their first instinct to be a desire to help, rather than fear and prejudice? Because when people feel smart, empowered, and believe in themselves, only then can they truly do more for others.

So what will Jewish education actually consist of? Our primary concern is to broaden children's awareness. We will therefore focus on teaching them about Jewish culture, its traditions, and values. We will show children what Jewish holidays look like and offer exercises and tasks that will reinforce the knowledge they have acquired through creativity and play. We will use Montessori teaching methods as a basis and weave Jewish education into them.

During conversations with teachers at Gan Balagan, we learned that the basis of their Jewish education is to impart knowledge about the holidays celebrated in the Jewish community, as well as the values that are important to them. The curriculum is structured around this. However, it should be remembered that this institution is attended by children who have at least one Jewish parent, which is why Jewish education is an integral part of discovering their identity. Our task will be to teach about culture, to show that while most people celebrate Christmas with a Christmas tree and presents, some children do not have a Christmas tree. Instead, they celebrate a holiday called Hanukkah, with equally interesting rituals.

In "Shalom Montessori," Maria Montessori's pedagogy will serve as the foundation, with Jewish cultural education as an added element, and this is how we will structure this publication. We will describe the basics of the Montessori method along with practical exercises and tasks. We will also suggest ways in which we can convey knowledge about Jewish culture using Montessori methods and aids. We will pass on the valuable knowledge we have gained during our courses and practical training.

Who is a Jew, who is a Jewish woman?



As teachers, especially those working with young preschoolers, we know very well that no one can ask questions like they can. Questions to which we adults, surprisingly, do not always know the answers, and we can be sure that one question will soon give rise to several others. Children have a natural need to discover the world and are extremely curious. That is why we need to start the story of Jewish culture from the very beginning.

Let's start with what seems to be the simplest thing, with the question: who is a Jew, who is a Jewish woman? How would you answer this question? Because for children, Basia is just Basia. She has dark braids, purple Elsa shoes, and likes to draw, just like Ania, whose favorite color is blue. Basia is a Polish Jew, Ania is Polish. They have the same

years old, both are girls who like to do the same things, yet there is something different about them. Or that new boy in kindergarten, with longer hair on the sides, who comes in every day wearing a cap. Although the concept of identity may still be too abstract for children at this stage of development to understand, it is worth answering their questions as simply as we can, taking seriously their need to learn about the world around them.

So who is a Jew? Simply put, a person whose mother is Jewish or someone who has converted to Judaism. conversion and converted to Judaism. Judaism is a religion based on the Torah.

However, a Jew does not always have to profess Judaism or consider themselves a religious Jew in order to feel part of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, every person who professes Judaism will call themselves a Jew.

Complicated? Let's add to this the fact that although Israel is a Jewish state, the reality is that not every Jew feels that Israel is their country. That is why we see such a large dispersion, with half of all Jews not living in Israel. In this respect, it is unique, as there is probably no other national group that is so numerous outside its own country. What is more, Israel is not a state only for Jews, hence the large percentage of Arabs. In this respect, it is a unique situation because few countries have such a large minority.

What does a Jewish man or woman look like? They may look exactly like me or you. Belonging to the Jewish people does not necessarily define their appearance.

We can only talk about specific clothing or appearance in the case of Jews who consider themselves religious. Here, it is worth drawing children's attention to elements of Jewish religious clothing. These may include a yarmulke, tzitzit, sidelocks, or a tallit. Women may cover their hair with a scarf, and men may wrap tefillin around their arms during prayer.

A new word that is unfamiliar to children was also mentioned: **Torah**. You can be sure that they will ask, "What is the Torah?" You can tell them that it is the Five Books of Moses. It contains stories about the creation of the world, Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel, and Moses crossing the Red Sea. Some children may already know these stories. It is good for them to know that Jewish children also read these stories. Between these stories there is a collection of laws that form the basis of Judaism. They tell us what we can and cannot do. It contains 613 commandments – 365 prohibitions and 248 injunctions. What do the commandments concern? They contain ethical laws, laws rooted in Jewish history and tradition, and laws that have no logical explanation. In these commandments, we find, for example, instructions on what a religious Jew should wear, knowledge about what he can and cannot eat or do. Does every Jew follow these rules? The short answer is "no," because not every Jew is religious. However, we can show children what is most characteristic of Jewish culture, what they may encounter on the street, using picture material prepared in advance – one of the methods used in the Montessori environment. Symbols and objects such as the yarmulke, dreidel, tzitzit, challah, tallit, menorah, or even apples, honey, and pomegranates can be presented to children in this form.

Mini glossary:

Jew/Jewess

a person whose mother is Jewish or someone who has converted and converted to Judaism

Torah

the first five books of the Bible, containing a collection of laws and teachings given to Israel (i.e., the Jews)

Tallit

a rectangular scarf (prayer shawl) worn by Jews on their head or shoulders during prayer

Yarmulke

a small, flat cap that fits snugly on the top of the head, worn only by men

Sidelocks

long strands of hair growing from the temples and sides of the beard, worn by followers of Judaism

Tzitzit

an element of ritual Jewish clothing, tassels attached to the four corners of the tallit (tallit)



Chapter 1. An environment that supports

It is widely known that in order to grow, a child needs an environment full of care and support. They need to feel safe and at the same time free in their actions, so that they can fully discover their own potential. A supportive space provides structure, allows freedom of choice, and promotes children's autonomy.

This is what the Montessori environment is like. Warm, friendly, family-like. Orderly and organized. It is a space for experimentation and for building positive relationships with peers and teachers. Every element of it is carefully thought out, all objects, tasks, and aids inspire children to follow their inner needs, and teachers to observe and follow the needs of children. If the space is inspiring enough, "we almost always see a child who is calm, peaceful, and self-sufficient, as long as they are engaged in work that they consider serious."

Well... Serious, meaning what exactly? For a child, serious work is work that follows their inner need for self-improvement, for having a goal in their actions, but above all, it is work that is interesting and intriguing to them. It is in this serious work that space is created for the development of the child's internal motivation, which is conditioned by their individual compass of needs – not by external expectations. There is room for a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction with one's own actions, the first encounter with the concept of success, which is still abstract for the child.

So how do you organize such a space and what are its most important elements?

Let's start by organizing the space into zones. The best way to do this is with furniture – low cabinets or shelves where we can place the materials and tasks we have prepared, or fences that will clearly mark the boundaries of each zone. Then, fill each zone with activity suggestions and other items that will beautify the entire space and give children a feeling of homely coziness. It is important that the activity suggestions are clear; children need to know what to expect and what they can do in each of these zones. Order is a key element of the Montessori environment and a basic condition for working in this environment. Organizing the space and following the rules of order allows children to move from the role of an unconscious explorer to a conscious and active creator of their actions, a creator who is jointly responsible for their environment.

It is important that:

- The space has a warm, friendly, and family-oriented character
- It allows for free choice of tasks and unrestricted access to each zone
- It promotes the child's autonomy
- It be a space for experimentation and building positive relationships between children and teachers
- It has a properly organized space for individual work

How will we do it?

- We will decorate the space with fresh flowers in vases and pots,

real pictures (not illustrations from fairy tales) and beautiful decorations. We will use warm colors and cozy fabrics in the rooms. We will place real, non-toy items in the space, such as glass jugs, ceramic cups, metal containers, things that can break or get damaged. We will show children that we trust them and that they deserve beautiful things.

- The furniture will be adapted to the children's needs – to their height and abilities, so that they can freely reach for each task we have prepared for them.
- Each task will be prepared by us carefully and with attention to detail. It will have its place on the shelf, and we will designate a space for the child where they can work freely.
- We will observe. We will not scold or correct the child. We will show them and give them space to experiment and make mistakes. The child does not have to perform the task perfectly. Over time, they will begin to correct their mistakes and improve their own movements.
- We will respect the child's pace and will not rush them in their activities, as this may only discourage them from further attempts.
- We will offer help when the child needs it and when they ask for it.

All right. Now let's get specific. How will we divide our space? First, let's separate the indoor area from the outdoor area, i.e., the garden. Inside the Montessori preschool, we will find an entrance area, a bathroom area, a practical life area, a concentration area, a meeting area, a bedroom area, and a laboratory room. In the outdoor space, we will find a garden area, a meeting area, a symbolic area, a water point, and an area for larger groups of children to meet. So let's break down each of these areas into its constituent parts.



THE ENVIRONMENT INSIDE THE MONTESSORI FACILITY

ENTRANCE AREA

- Entrance to the main part, where parents do not have access.
- The cloakroom area is equipped with:
 - a locker where you can hang your jacket and store your personal belongings; each child's space is marked with their first and last name clearly written in lowercase italics.
 - a small table with two chairs;
 - small pictures on the walls for decoration.
 - Themed corner (with several items)
 - A dressing-up area with scarves, hats, bags, etc.; a telephone is essential "Classic" telephone with a dial

MEETING AREA

The meeting zone is divided into a carpet zone...

- A large carpet that can accommodate (seated) all children in the group. The carpet zone must be limited.
- Benches that limit space and serve as a place to sit
- Small armchair or chair for an adult
- Wall-mounted bags containing farm animals, wild animals/savanna animals;
- Shelves on which to place play elements on the carpet (e.g., train tracks, structures, etc.).

- Pictures on the walls.
- On the wall above the carpet, there is a shelf for placing items belonging to the teacher: (books, musical instruments, etc.)

...and a reading area

- Bookcase/library; armchairs; small table with chair
- A corner for cutouts
- A small house with furniture

CONCENTRATION AREA

- Cabinet for sensory materials
- Special cabinet for activities requiring concentration
- Drawing materials
- Table designed for "Hands that see"
- Table designed for the "Blue Chest"
- Table designed for "The Treasury"
- Cabinet for the educator/teacher
- Tables, chairs, and rugs for sensory work.

PRACTICAL LIFE AREA

- Sink (for free play and cleaning activities)
- Shelves for pouring
- Manipulation table

- Special cleaning cupboard (with a broom, dustpan, mop bucket, etc.)
- Special laundry/drying corner
- Special doll washing corner and changing table
- Shelf for kitchen activities
- Table for manipulating sponges
- Painting area: with an easel or wall panel and painting supplies
- Cabinet for equipment (dishes and tablecloths)

BATHROOM AREA

- Seats for children
- Seating for adults
- Cabinet for a change of clothes (with the child's name written in italics)
- Shoe cabinet for storing shoes/slippers
- Diaper container

SLEEPING AREA

- Wooden Montessori beds
- Wooden dividers
- Armchair for adults



OUTDOOR AREA OF THE MONTESSORI FACILITY

The garden plays a very important role in the Montessori space. It is not only a place for meetings and various physical activities, but also a space for cooperation between children, where their social relationships are strengthened. It is also a place to encounter the nature that surrounds us, an excuse to teach children the values that come from contact with the natural world around us, as well as respect for its elements. So how can this space be organized in such a way that it is both safe for children and fulfills its most important functions?

How can we designate spaces dedicated to larger groups of children?

- using nets or fences with gates (we can also use portable fences). We close off and divide spaces into zones to make them safer
- using carpets on which the teacher places toys brought from inside to outside
- In the youngest group's room, if we have a window overlooking the garden, it would be a good idea to set up a suitable gate so that the children can see what is happening outside. The view from the window will become a source of observation and dialogue when young children are unable to go out into the garden.

We will create a meeting point for children with a specific structure.

This could be:

- an outdoor bench and table
- a bench for adults
- a fallen tree trunk that can be used as a "horse"

A water point is also very important.

- a drinking fountain or other water source, used, among other things, for tidying up and caring for the garden and outdoor plants
- if we do not have the possibility of connecting water in our garden, a good solution would be to use a large container with a tap and a bucket underneath.

What activities can we organize in our Montessori garden?

PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES

Tricycles with a track and/or a special path with a garage where they can be parked; swings, a playground with a slide, a trampoline for jumping, a climbing wall (supervised by an adult), wheelbarrows for gardening.

MANIPULATIVE ACTIVITIES

Activities with sand (it is important to be able to cover and close it), salt dough, or clay

SYMBOLIC ACTIVITIES

a garden house with chairs and a table where children can "pretend" to play house, hairdresser, mechanic, etc. It is also a good idea to create a mud kitchen with real kitchen elements where children can prepare various concoctions, soups, or cakes.

ACTIVITIES LED BY AN ADULT

Circle time, gymnastics, singing, mimed nursery rhymes and songs, ball games

SUMMER ACTIVITIES

- Big Garden Cleanup, wearing protective aprons and with bowls full of water, e.g., cleaning chairs, tables, glasses, snack plates, dusting plants, tricycles, etc.
- Water play (sand, water, soap bubbles, fishing, etc.)
- Art classes (easels, a cart with everything you need)
- Vegetable garden (can also be organized in boxes if you don't have a garden)
- Exploring the garden
- Walks

We can also set up a nature table in the oldest group's classroom: equipped with tools such as a magnifying glass, flashlight, tweezers, brush, etc., which gives children the opportunity to observe and catalog things they find during a walk or in the garden itself... e.g., stones, leaves, flowers, moss, etc., which they will bring to the designated corner of the room).

TU BISZWAT

The garden, crops, and respect for nature.

And God said, *"Let the earth bring forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, according to their kinds, on the earth."* And it was so.

BOOK OF GENESIS 1:11

In Maria Montessori's philosophy of education, particular importance is attached to respect for the environment, including respect for the nature that surrounds us. Children learn to keep things tidy not only inside the facility, but also around it. They learn about the world of fauna and flora, learn to care for planted plants and those that are already part of their space. They clean, water, tidy up, sow and harvest crops, build insect houses, and observe with curiosity every creature that visits their garden. Whether it is a snail, an ant, a butterfly, or a lizard, they respect its space and its right to be part of this world. The teacher sets a positive example with their attitude and reinforces respect for the space around us.

The holiday of Tu Bishvat in Jewish education is the perfect excuse to teach children the same values. Values that tell us that we should respect and care for the nature that surrounds us. After all, the earth is our most important home, and we should care for it just as it cares for us, providing us with sun, water, and food. Celebrating Tu Bishvat motivates us to talk to children about topics related to ecology, nature, the life cycle of trees and plants, their structure, and their significance. We can conduct gardening workshops with children, plant plants with them, encourage them to care for them, and watch them sprout together. These can be flowers, but also tree seeds, such as acorns, from which one of the most beautiful and majestic trees we know grows – the oak. A symbol of strength, power, and wisdom. A visual representation of how something so small can grow into something that can survive for hundreds of years and provide shelter for many other creatures.

What activities can we offer children during lessons about Tu Bishvat?

Gardening workshops: planting plants and seeds, creating a house for insects

Nature workshops on the plant growth cycle

Trips to a nearby park to learn how to identify tree species or measure the circumference of the thickest tree in the park

Artwork on the theme of trees and plants or using seeds to create pictures

Practical life activities: learning how to clean plant leaves, watering plants in the kindergarten

Focus zone: sorting seeds by type into various containers using tweezers, planting seeds, sorting acorns into containers numbered 0-9

Use of material picture Montessori: matching pictures of seeds to their real counterparts, matching pictures of trees to real seeds, matching pictures of trees to pictures of seeds that correspond to them

Use of sensory material: brown stairs: presentation of creating a vertical tower using this material

Chapter 2. The great importance of rituals.

About Hanukkah, Rosh Hashanah, and Shabbat.

What would our lives be without daily rituals? For us adults, morning coffee, a sweet kiss from our children as we leave for work, reading another chapter of our favorite book before bedtime—these are like little moments of respite in the rush of our daily duties.

They set the rhythm, highlight important moments spent with loved ones, and make us feel that we have a permanent place in this world. For children, repetition is a key element of their sense of security, stability, and predictability, even though we live in a world that is changing at an ever-increasing pace. This makes it all the more important for us as adults to give our children a point of reference. Children need to feel that they can rely on adults, that adults are predictable, so that their nervous system can develop in peace and harmony. In the Montessori space, a fixed daily routine is very important, as is a fixed place for all elements, tasks, activities, and zones. Every day, educational activities begin at the same time, the art studio opens at the same time, English classes are organized, fruit salad is made, the main meal is served, and time is set aside for outdoor activities. The day is divided into work time and relaxation time, which greatly organizes the work at the Montessori facility – the work of the children, but also the work of the teachers.

Rituals also speak about our traditions, what is important to us, and what values we pass on to future generations. They accompany everyday life, but also holiday celebrations, play a very important role in Jewish education, and are an essential element of the Montessori method. They organize the daily schedule, focus children's attention, and teach what we would today call mindfulness – the praise of attentiveness, focusing on the present moment. Not what was, or what will come in a moment, but what is within us and before us here and now. In Jewish education, rituals can be found, among other things, in the weekly celebration of Shabbat on Fridays, or in meeting with children in a circle on the carpet to talk to them about topics that interest them. Interestingly, at the Casa dei Bambini facility, where we had the opportunity to do an internship, Friday was also a special day for the 3-year-olds. On that day, the practical life area was closed, and the children spent their time outdoors, in laboratory classes, and in extracurricular activities. Friday was a day of rest and relaxation from everyday work. Both in the Montessori space and in the Jewish facility, we could observe the great importance of the moment of meeting, which truly deserves to be called a Ritual with a capital "R."

THE RITUAL OF MEETING

Every day at Casa dei Bambini, at fixed times, we observed moments of calm, small rituals that set the rhythm and were a moment of respite for the children. These rituals took the form of calming exercises, as well as educational moments in which the children's attention was focused on the teacher and on building connections and relationships. The atmosphere and attitude of the teacher were very important – theatrical, calm, even magical. The teacher used words, but also gestures, facial expressions, and movement. He set the rhythm and tone. He spoke to the children, but also listened with great attention. However, in order for the teacher to begin the moment of education and connection with the children, the space was specially prepared for this purpose. The windows were covered, and a soft "shhhhhh..." sound could be heard in the room, which the children took as a signal to put their work aside and begin.

to settle down and stop, to look at the teacher. However, it was not an unambiguous message to be quiet, but rather a desire to get the children's attention and communicate "I will want to talk to you in a moment." Even though the kindergarten was not completely silent, the teacher began talking to the children in a steady, calm, and quiet tone of voice. The children knew very well that after this moment, there would be no time to return to the tasks they had been doing earlier, because their meal was waiting for them. They were very familiar with the daily routine, thanks to the repetitiveness of daily activities and rituals. In the younger group, the meeting with the teacher took place on the carpet, while in the older group, it took place in the classroom.

At Gan Balagan, a Jewish institution that uses the Reggio Emilia approach, which differs from Montessori, meetings between teachers and children and between children and their peers were even more important due to the nature of the work, which follows the principles of this philosophy. Conversation and group work on projects were the starting point for creating strong social bonds, conversations, and exchanges of views. The teacher, acting as a facilitator of the children's activities, an observer, and a partner in the learning process, supported the children's investigations and provided material for acquiring knowledge. He was a co-creator of the entire process of discovering the world and building a community, which is why the children felt comfortable and safe with him. They knew that they could ask about anything and that the teacher would support their curiosity and openness to the world. Conversation, meeting, relationship, community, sense of belonging – these are the most important foundations of Jewish Education that we observed. The beautiful fruits of the Ritual of Meeting.

THE RITUAL OF LIGHT

Mindfulness in the Montessori space, or the ritual of lighting and extinguishing a candle, as well as the Hanukkah holiday.

One of the most popular calming activities for children in the Montessori method is "Lighting and extinguishing a candle." This exercise

is led by an adult. On a daily basis, all the elements needed for this exercise should be kept on the top shelf, out of reach of children. It is important for the teacher proposing this exercise to create a magical atmosphere that becomes a ritual.

What do we need?

- Tray
- Candle
- Candlestick
- Box of matches (as long as possible) and a container for used matches
- Candle snuffer
- A small table on which you can perform the exercise.

Course of the lesson:

To begin with, the teacher invites the children to sit around a large mat/carpet – preferably on benches or in designated places for children (e.g., using cushions or poufs). The exercise should be demonstrated on a small table, which should be placed at a certain distance from the children. The objects should not be removed from the tray, and each individual object should not be named during the exercise.

The instructor uses slow, quiet movements to ensure that the children are calm and quiet, creating a mysterious atmosphere, as if lighting and extinguishing a candle were something magical and extraordinary. After the demonstration, the teacher invites one child at a time to participate in blowing out the candle and repeats the exercise several times until everyone has taken part.

1. Create a dimly lit atmosphere (cover the windows with blinds or curtains).
2. Move the tray with the candle and matches from the shelf to the table in the middle of the carpet.
3. Slowly take the box of matches (they must be long), grab a match, and light it.
4. After a moment, slowly take the snuffer and extinguish the candle.
5. Place the snuffer back on the saucer.

This ritual can become the perfect excuse and an introduction to teaching about the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah, especially since this topic is scheduled for winter, which will help maintain the atmosphere of twilight and solemnity. What is more, Hanukkah falls close to Christmas, which gives us an opportunity to talk to children about the similarities and differences in the way both holidays are celebrated. This Ritual of Light can be an excuse to show children the Hanukkah menorah and tell them about the daily ritual of lighting one more candle each day for eight days. On the first day, one candle is lit, and on the last day, eight candles are lit.

CHANUKAH

About Hanukkah and Fat Thursday.

What do you need to know to be able to talk about it with your children?

The story begins with two kingdoms and a battle for faith.

Centuries ago, the Syrian Greeks forced the Jews to abandon their religion. They banned Jewish rituals and even destroyed their holy temple. Then an uprising broke out, led by a small group of Jews called the Maccabees. After three years, they declared victory! Following their victory, the Jews rededicated their temple, lighting an olive lamp in it to celebrate, but the amount of oil they had would only be enough to keep the lamp burning for one day. However, the lamp miraculously burned for eight days, which is why, in memory of these events, Jews around the world light a candelabra called a menorah for eight days once a year. Another custom is to eat foods fried in oil, such as doughnuts or potato pancakes. So feel free to organize a cooking class with your children to make or decorate doughnuts.

Talking about Hanukkah is also an opportunity to recall the Polish tradition of eating doughnuts on Fat Thursday and compare these two seemingly similar customs, which nevertheless have completely different roots. Or even the other way around – when celebrating Fat Thursday in kindergarten, we can refer to Hanukkah traditions for comparison. Did you know that before it became a symbol of the last day before Lent, Fat Thursday was a pagan holiday marking the end of winter and the arrival of spring? The ancient Greeks also celebrated a fat day to honor the first signs of spring. In Małopolska, according to a local legend, Fat Thursday has been celebrated since the 13th century in honor of the death of the mayor of Krakow, who oppressed and plundered the local population. When he died, the residents celebrated with great joy, throwing a lavish party with wine and fatty foods. As you can see, our Fat Thursday had little to do with Christianity, with which it became strongly associated.



What are the most important symbols of Hanukkah?

Hanukkah

a nine-branched candelabrum, in which one more candle is lit each day for eight days. On the first day, one candle is lit, and on the last day eight candles are lit

Dreidel

a spinning top, which is a traditional children's game during Hanukkah

Doughnuts and latkes

and all deep-fried foods in deep fat are a symbol of the miracle of the holy

What activities can we offer children when creating a lesson about Hanukkah?

Lighting and extinguishing candles
as a calming ritual

Cooking classes
making and frying fatty doughnuts

Making and playing with dreidels

Art classes
creating a Hanukkah menorah from loose materials

Reggio Emilia classes: Light Atelier using a UV lamp and colorful materials that glow in its light

SOUND RITUAL

A bell and a magic triangle. About silence and sound in the Montessori space. What is the Shofar and the Rosh Hashanah holiday?

During our visit to Casa dei Bambini, we also observed other calming rituals based on sound. The sound that filled the silence complemented it. Without one, there could be no place for the other, which the children were aware of and waited for the bell or triangle to play their melody.

How does the exercise work?

The teacher covers the windows and waits for the children to take their places in the room or on the carpet. Then, with a slow, theatrical movement, she takes a bell or triangle (musical triangle) out of the cupboard, shows it to the children and tells them about its magical properties and that it will play beautifully for us in a moment, but only if we can hear it.

When the bell rings, the teacher asks the children to freeze, turn into statues, so that the magical instrument can break the spell by ringing next to their ears. Then they can get up and slowly go to lunch. When the children freeze in silence and stillness, the teacher slowly begins to walk around the room, selecting those who can go to lunch one by one. The signal for a child to move and get up is the quiet sound of the magic bell ringing next to their ear.

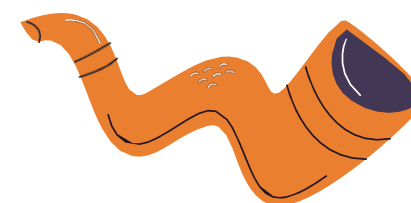
In the case of Triangolo (the magic triangle), the teacher also asks the children to freeze in silence and turn into statues. However, in order for the instrument to produce sound, we must break the spell with a magic incantation (a rhyme), which the children recite aloud together with the teacher. Then the instrument begins to work and produces its first sound – a signal to freeze. If it is too loud, the teacher can show the children that the triangle cannot make any sound because it is broken. However, once they manage to freeze in silence and stillness, the teacher

begins to walk around the room and, with a slow movement of her hand, which she places on the head of a selected child, gives a sign that they can move and go to lunch.

Sound Rituals are imbued with theatricality, grace, sensitivity, and even a magical and solemn atmosphere. You can feel the gravity of the situation in the air, the delicate tension associated with waiting for that first sound and being chosen to move. During our internship at Casa dei Bambini, without knowing Italian and not fully understanding what the teacher was saying, we felt that we were part of something important and magical. We caught ourselves freezing in place and subconsciously waiting for the teacher to come up to us and allow us to move. We felt calm and rooted in the present moment. Here and now.

Of course, we can create our own rituals using other musical instruments as well. It is important to maintain the right attitude and create a magical atmosphere of solemnity and mystery.

At the beginning of the school year, in September, during the Jewish holiday of Rosh Hashanah, we can use the shofar for this exercise! It is an ideal opportunity to interest children in Jewish culture.



What is a shofar?

It is a horn, e.g., a ram's horn, whose sound is supposed to stimulate the soul and call for action. Blowing it was a symbol of the beginning or end of important events. The perfect symbolism for the beginning of the school year, isn't it? You can be sure that when this instrument, unknown to children, appears in kindergarten, their inner need to discover the world will make them ask questions that will naturally allow us, teachers, to introduce children to the subject of Rosh Hashanah.

ROSH HASHANAH

Shana tova, or a few words about the Jewish New Year.

For Jews, it is simply the beginning of a new year, just as January 1 is for us. But why is it different for Jews?

Is it because their calendar differs from ours? While the whole world uses the Gregorian solar calendar, Jews count time based on the Hebrew calendar, which is based on the lunar and solar cycles. Each month begins with the new moon, or to put it simply: when we are in September, Jews have the month of Tishri, which lasts from the new moon in our September to the new moon in our October, with Rosh Hashanah celebrated on the 1st and 2nd days of Tishri. Every two or three years, the year has thirteen months instead of twelve. In 2025, the Jewish year was 5785/86. But why have so many years passed in the Jewish calendar, while for us it is only 2025? Because Jews do not count the passage of time in the new era from the birth of Christ. The counting of years in the Jewish calendar begins with the day of the creation of the world, which, according to Jewish religious authorities, fell on October 7, 3761 BC.

How do Jews celebrate Rosh Hashanah and what are the most important symbols associated with this holiday?

Rosh Hashanah is a holiday commemorating the creation of the world and reminding us of God's judgment. It lasts two days and opens the period of repentance. It is also called the Feast of Trumpets. During Rosh Hashanah, no work is allowed. It is a time dedicated to reflecting on one's behavior over the past year. Jews celebrate by going to synagogue for liturgy, but also by having an evening feast, blowing the Shofar, and exchanging New Year's greetings - Shana tova umetuka, which means: a good and sweet year.

The most important symbols of Rosh Hashanah are:

Honey and Apple

so that the whole next year will be as sweet as honey and apples

Pomegranate

so that our good deeds are as numerous as pomegranate seeds

Fish head

so that we use our heads all year long

The shofar

its sound is meant to stimulate our soul to action

What activities can we offer children when creating lessons about Rosh Hashanah?

Blowing the shofar as a calming Montessori ritual

Activities in the nature observation corner: learning about the structure of an apple, a pomegranate, the life cycle of a bee, and how honey is made.

Activities in the concentration and sensory zone: pouring yellow-colored rice, symbolizing pollen into pre-prepared honeycomb-shaped containers; removing pomegranate seeds with tweezers; threading red string onto a cardboard apple shape; punching holes and tearing out apple or pomegranate shapes – which can be used in further art projects.

Art and laboratory classes: creating New Year's cards or symbols related to Rosh Hashanah; creating trumpets symbolizing the Shofar; painting with stamps made from apples and pomegranates; art projects on the theme of bees and honey, apple stained glass.

SHABBAT SHALOM

About the ritual of rest and communal celebration.

When writing about rituals and Jewish education, we cannot overlook Shabbat, which is important to this community. Shabbat is a holy day, a day of rest, which begins with a family supper. There are numerous rituals associated with the Shabbat supper, which we will try to describe briefly here.

The celebration of Shabbat begins on Friday evening after sunset and lasts until sunset the following day, when three stars are visible in the sky. It is the seventh day of the week, when rest is most important. Shabbat begins with the Shabbat dinner.

How does the Sabbath dinner proceed?

1. Shabbat candles are lit 18 minutes before sunset. According to tradition, the candles are usually lit by the lady of the house, after which a blessing is recited, during which the woman covers her eyes.
2. Prayer in the synagogue
3. Blessing of the angels, singing of the Shalom Aleichem song, blessing of the children, singing of a passage from the Book of Proverbs
4. Reciting Kiddush – blessings over wine or grape juice
5. Ritual washing of hands
6. Sharing of challah
7. Blessing of thanksgiving for the meal



What are the most important symbols of the Sabbath dinner?

Candles

two, lit before the beginning of Shabbat

Wiuo

children drink grape juice instead of wine

Havdalah candle

a distinctive candle with several wicks braided together

Challah

a sweet type of bread braided into a plait

Silver cup

used to bless wine

Wonności

besamin, aromatic spices used during the Havdalah ceremony

In Jewish community centers, Shabbat dinner is reenacted by children during classes and accompanied by various activities that teach children about their roots. Our task will be to broaden the children's knowledge of the symbols associated with Shabbat, which can be used as a basis for practical exercises in the Montessori method. We will answer questions about what Shabbat is, why it is observed, and what it looks like.

What activities can we offer children during the Shabbat lesson?

Sensory activities: recognizing the smell of spices enclosed in bags and matching them to pictures

Cooking activities:
making and baking challah

Art activities:
making braided Havdalah candles

Practical life activities
Learning how to braid hair

The ritual of lighting and extinguishing a candle



Chapter 3. The art of everyday life

When the first Children's Home was opened in Via dei Marsi in Rome in 1907, great emphasis was placed on caring for children's health and environment.

This gave rise to the need to teach them practical knowledge about simple everyday activities related to hygiene and caring for their surroundings. The children learned at the Children's House and then transferred what they had learned to their homes.

Why was this so important?

Due to the motor and mental dimensions. Children have a constant and natural need for movement, but they need not only to develop their motor skills, but also to acquire the ability to control themselves: this is because the motor and mental dimensions are closely related. Therefore, taking both of these potentials into account, our role as teachers is to offer children the opportunity to direct their need for movement towards objects and tasks that enable goal-oriented action. This will give the child the opportunity to develop skills such as:

comparison • deduction • organizational skills searching for solutions • mastery of temporal motor sequences

Once a child has mastered these skills, the natural consequence will be satisfaction from achieving success, enjoyment from performing tasks, and the development of self-esteem.

What elements can we find in everyday life?

We can list a few of them, which can of course be expanded with others that you consider appropriate and applicable in everyday life in today's world.

clothing

fastening buttons, expressers, clips, tying knots

hangers

placed low enough for the child to comfortably reach and learn how to put on their jacket or sweatshirt

washbasins

or a small bowl standing on a small table with a jug and a container for used water, mainly used for washing hands

dressing table and combs

a dressing table topped with a mirror so that the child can see themselves while sitting

vases with flowers

slightly wilted, so that the water can be changed more often

broom, dustpan, mop

sweeping and washing the floor and other surfaces such as tables

cloths and dusters

for dusting, wiping dirty tables after work

napkins, towels, tablecloths

cleaning and setting the table, washing items, drying hands, learning how to fold napkins

brushes

for cleaning shoes, carpets or clothes, narrow enough that a tiny hand can grasp them fully

carpets

for unfolding and rolling up after use

figurines

for learning how to keep things clean, cleaning, polishing, dusting

trash can

colorful, clearly visible, attracting the child's attention

Practical life classes prepare you for life in a real environment.

They are usually very attractive to children and also educational, as all tasks are focused on a specific goal and because children want to become masters of their own actions. The role of the teacher in the practical life area is primarily to devise and prepare tasks, materials, and space for the children to work. What is more, before a task is introduced, the teacher needs to try it out beforehand, taking on the role of a child who

will perform this task. The teacher therefore experiments, checks, tests, and modifies tasks, trying to guess what might be most attractive to the child. The teacher then observes the children as they interact with the material. The mere preparation of the material does not mean that it will be unconditionally accepted by the children. It may turn out that the task prepared by the teacher will be unattractive to the child – then the teacher's role is to modify it or prepare new material.

The teacher in the practical life zone:

Thinks • Prepares • Experiments • Checks

How to present the classes?

The role of the teacher in the zone of practical life is limited to accompanying children while they perform tasks; the teacher does not present prepared materials. They only show the correct way to carry and hold instruments and leave the children to experiment with the material. They intervene with help only if necessary, in a controlled manner and with very slow, precise gestures. The caregiver should never scold or correct

the child if the task has not been performed correctly. As soon as another opportunity arises for the child to undertake the selected task, it can be used to show again how to perform the activity correctly.

Work time and rhythm

The classes do not have a predetermined time limit; the child works as long as they feel the need to. They need to feel comfortable in their activities. The aim of the tasks is to master the skill of giving oneself time to complete a task, which is why it is so important that the teacher does not rush the child in their activities. This can be quite a challenge for an adult, especially with the rush of daily activities and responsibilities. The rhythm of a child who is just learning to perform new activities differs from that of an adult who has long since mastered them. Therefore, it is important for the caregiver to remain attentive not only to the needs of children, but also to their own automatic thoughts and reactions – especially to the feeling of irritation that arises when a child performs activities at their own pace.
at a "slow" pace.

What do practical life activities develop?

- Practical skills
 - Fine and gross motor skills
 - Self-esteem and joy from performing activities independently
 - Ability to control one's own movements
 - Manual skills
 - Hand-eye coordination
- Social skills
 - Mental structures and intellectual development
 - Ability to deduce, organize, solve problems, spatial and motor sequences
 - Experiencing dimensions: depth, weight, force, width, volume, density, noise, etc.

Motor alphabet
of Practical Life

| | | |
|-------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Pull Insert Slide | Pull Clamp | Turn Touch |
| Open Close | Manipulate | Pull out Hold |
| Screw on | Touch | Press Roll |
| Unscrew Screw | Take Grasp | Rub Place |
| in Tap/hit | Drop Lift | Crush |
| | Shake Clamp | Put inside |

| | | |
|------|-------|------|
| Push | Throw | Hide |
|------|-------|------|

This list includes all the basic activities performed by a child and perfected with proper hand exercises. The teacher's task is to suggest activities in the environment that will allow the child to achieve and perfect these movements.

ACTIVITIES IN THE CLOAKROOM

We will begin our journey through practical life skills from the very beginning. From the moment the child arrives at preschool. From the first moment the child encounters the Montessori environment, which is a very important element in developing the child's autonomy and independence.

It is often the case that saying goodbye to a parent is a difficult experience for a young child, which is why it is so important to take the right approach and engage the child from the moment they enter the facility. Neither the teacher nor the parent should treat this moment in an overly emotional way, as this will reinforce the child's difficult emotions at the moment of parting with their parent. On the contrary, the child's arrival at preschool should be treated with lightness and joy, as something natural.

"Now you go to kindergarten, I go to work, and we'll see each other later."

When supporting a child during this difficult time, we can also suggest shared rituals that will engage the child and distract them from the separation from their parent. This could be a special "high five" goodbye, ringing a "magic" bell to say hello, choosing a favorite way to greet the teacher, or even a special dance routine that the child performs with their parent before parting. The more interesting the idea for a ritual, the better – this way, we start the day with fun and a smile on our faces.



But why is it so important?

giving your child tasks from the moment they start

kindergarten?

When children arrive at the facility in the morning, they usually show a natural desire to be active, so it is very important to prepare an organized space for the cloakroom, which will help welcome them by giving them a task to do right away. In this way, we help them when they say goodbye to their parents. For this reason, it is necessary to prepare a special corner dedicated to the cloakroom, where children can stay independently, and their names, along with the names of all the other children, will be written on a cardboard box, preferably in small cursive letters. It is very important to organize these cardboard boxes as early as July, so that the children are already in our thoughts, and by the time they arrive in September, we will already have a place organized and ready. This can be a locker or drawer and an individual clothes hanger.

Equally important will be the earlier bell, which we will place at the entrance. It will be activated after saying goodbye to the parent, thus symbolizing the moment of separation, which will take place in a cheerful manner.

If we want to include cloakroom activities in the daily schedule, avoiding situations where parents have already undressed their children before entering, we should discuss this with parents at the September meeting or during the first conversation, making them aware of the importance of the welcome at the entrance and the activities in the cloakroom, explaining that this is a real activity that develops and raises the child's awareness. An activity that they can do on their own or initially with the help of a teacher.

How to organize the space in the cloakroom?

In the cloakroom, we place:

- 1 small table
- 2 chairs or high chairs next to the table
- name tags placed on cabinets and coat racks
- additionally, we decorate the space with pictures and plants to create a cozy, homely atmosphere
- we can also place a large mirror in which children can look at themselves

What activities do we suggest for children in the

cloakroom? Teaching them how to hang their jackets or sweatshirts on a hanger and how to fasten and unfasten buttons or zippers.

Presentation

1. We stand on the left side of the child, lowering ourselves to their height so that they can clearly see the movement of our hands
2. Grab the edge of the collar of your coat or sweatshirt with your left hand, then slide it all the way up to your neck with your right hand.
3. Place the coat or sweatshirt on the edge of the table and slide it across the table, unfolding it
4. Encourage the child to bring a hanger from its designated place

5. Take the hanger they brought you and place it in the middle of the coat.
6. With your left hand, grab the side edge of the collar and slide it down to the bottom of the zipper and fold it
7. Do the same with the other side and join both sides together.
8. Adjust the sleeves.
9. We take the zipper and show that it moves up and down, then pull it down, show that the grip between the index finger and thumb blocks the zipper (we point to the "hole") and slide it in with the other hand.
10. We lift the zipper flap and move it halfway, encouraging the child to take the zipper and finish it themselves by pulling it up (this is already the first time).
11. We grab the hanger with our hand and hang it in the child's place - we show their name and indicate that this is indeed their place.

It is very important that the teacher's movements are accompanied by as few words and explanations as possible, so that the child can concentrate on the movements of our hands. Hand movements should be slow, with a few words spoken in a hushed voice, and we should remain at the child's disposal.

It is necessary for the teacher to remember all the steps and then show them to the child. Later, while observing the child, the teacher can accompany them with a little partial assistance.

AUTONOMY IN THE BATHROOM

Autonomy in the bathroom is part of personal hygiene classes and involves a whole series of simple activities. In practice, it should be considered a real class, as it is a very important part of the child's daily routine and development of autonomy.

The teacher invites a small group of children (maximum 4/5) to the bathroom. They will deal with each child individually, providing partial assistance, never losing sight of the rest of the group. If necessary, they can also respond to requests from other children, always giving priority to the child they are currently dealing with. The most important thing that promotes autonomy in the bathroom is good space organization.

Organization of bathroom space

The structure of the bathroom in the kindergarten is divided into 3 zones:

1 Zone: sinks

2 Zone: undressing and dressing

3 Zone: toilets

Washbasins should be low with a footrest or non-slip mat underneath. There should be a mirror above the sink, towel hooks next to it, and a small soap dish. If parents in the 3-year-old group request it, a set of toothbrushes can be considered, but only if the children are learning to brush their teeth at home.

In the changing area, it is ideal to have a chest of drawers with individual, labeled compartments for clothes, a bench for up to four children, a shoe cabinet or a place for non-slip socks (e.g., a basket), and a bench for adults placed opposite the children's bench. It is important to remember that only one child should be the focus of the teacher's attention at a time, so that the other children learn patience while waiting for their turn.

In the toilet area, it is important that the toilets are small, adapted to the height of children, so that children have easy access to toilet paper and the flush, because flushing after use is very "fascinating" for children. In this way, the child has the opportunity to perform activities independently and thus develop through experience and independent action.

The attitude of an adult in the bathroom space should be:

Encouraging • Calm • Attentive • Respectful Ready to help when needed

In the bathroom, as in other Montessori spaces, the relationship between the child and the teacher is very important. The teacher knows that autonomy in the bathroom is important and will devote as much time as necessary to this moment, without rushing or worrying about taking time away from other activities. In a Montessori preschool, all activities are equally important.

How can you support your child in toilet-related activities at home?

You can place steps under the toilet so that your child can climb onto the toilet independently.

It is recommended that parents pay attention to the moment when dialogue between adult and child can be established and an atmosphere of intimacy created, which is very valuable for both parties.

Cooperation with parents, even when starting to use the toilet, is crucial for the child to recognize the same procedures and feel safe, so that this transition is natural for them.

Presentation of the space and activities performed in the bathroom area:

We enter the bathroom with a group of children and explore the room, pointing out the things that are there and what they are used for: a sink for washing hands, soap, a place for a towel, a toilet, toilet paper. It must be a neat, clean, tidy, and decorated room, even with a plant or a bouquet of herbs or dried flowers.

We demonstrate how to use the toilet:

1. Taking off pants and underwear: Slowly lift the seat and, standing next to the toilet, imitate the movement of lowering your pants and then your underwear. How to do it? Show your hands clearly, with your thumb and index finger open and the other fingers closed, grab the elastic band of your pants at hip level and push them down below your knees. Repeat the same movement with your underwear.
2. Using toilet paper: To demonstrate how to wipe one's bottom, the teacher stands next to the toilet, slowly tears off a piece of toilet paper with their right hand, and slowly shows how to wipe one's bottom and throw the paper into the toilet. Then, they make sure that the paper has definitely gone into the toilet, that the area around it is clean, and lower the seat.
3. Putting on pants and underwear: The teacher again uses their thumb and index finger to show the motion of pulling up the underwear, then the pants.

Then, with an open, outstretched hand, they show how to tuck a T-shirt into the pants: first at the back, then at the front on the stomach.

4. Flushing: Finally, the teacher shows how to use the flush.

5. Hand washing: The teacher reminds the children that they must wash their hands after using the toilet.

Presentation of hand washing in the bathroom

We move slowly and precisely.

1. We press the soap dispenser once and lather our hands, then the backs of our hands, washing with our fingers interlaced, as during a massage, as well as our fingertips and nails.

2. Gently and slowly turn on the water and rinse the soap off your hands.

3. After rinsing our hands and turning off the tap, we carefully shake our hands inside the sink, taking care not to splash the surrounding area, floor, or mirror.

4. We show them how to collect the last drop on their hand and approach the towel, slowly take it off the hook and wipe first the inside of the hand, then the back of the hand, and finally one finger at a time, and carefully hang the towel back up.

5. Finally, show the children your washed and fragrant (from the soap) hands. Fragrant hands will be a sign that they are clean and thoroughly washed.

What is important in the toilet area?

- Turn the tap gently, only as much as necessary to avoid wasting water.
- Show children exactly how to turn the tap on and off
- Providing guidance on the amount of soap to use

- Use a nice-smelling soap
- Shake hands inside the sink without splashing water around
- Demonstrate exactly how to pull down and pull up pants and underwear
- Show how much toilet paper to tear off (e.g., one sheet)
- Leaving the bathroom in the same condition as we found it.
- If there is water on the floor, wipe it up.

SIMPLE ACTIVITIES

Simple activities are all spontaneous actions that a child performs without instruction.

For example, threading takes place both at the treasure basket, at the treasure chest (children under one year of age), and during table activities, but also when the child sees a hole and instinctively puts their finger in it. These are motor (movement) and visual-manual skills.

Activities at the table are suggested when the child begins to move around safely. At the same time, the child develops a need to move their hands through more structured activities that help them develop and coordinate a set of "Simple Activities."

It is important that each activity is organized and prepared on a tray to facilitate transport to the table. The transport itself is already a simple activity.

The teacher shows the child how to hold the tray and put it back in its place. They allow the child to spontaneously choose an activity and take it to the table themselves. The teacher remains an observer, ready to assist the child only when really necessary. They assess whether to intervene during tidying up, accompanying the child in this activity, always remembering that everything must be returned to its place.

It is important that all activities performed at the table have their permanent place on the shelf and are respected by both the children and the person themselves.

leading. Keeping things tidy is important for children because it helps them build mental order, provides a point of reference, and gives them a sense of security, allowing them to move around independently and master their space.

What do we consider simple, i.e., one-time activities?

Opening - closing • Inserting - removing • Screwing - unscrewing Tapping / hitting • Associations, e.g., shape or color (similarities/differences) Moving • Hiding

Dedicated table

These are activities that the child finds already set up at the table, as they require complicated transport or give the child the opportunity to work at the table independently, without disturbing them. It is useful to have several dedicated tables in the group space.

Organizing the tray

The activity at the table begins when the child picks up the tray with both hands, places it on the table, then moves the chair back and sits down.

When tidying up, the child stands up, places the chair under the table, then takes the tray and puts it back where they found it, i.e., in its place.

POUING AND TRANSFERRING

Transferring contents is a very attractive activity for children over 12 months of age. These activities involve transferring solid or liquid substances from one container to another.

It is important to organize these activities in a dedicated corner, in a focus zone. All pouring and transferring exercises should be placed in one place and separated from other materials, such as puzzles or blocks. This is an activity that can also be done outdoors, with a very similar organization as indoors. In this case, you will need trolleys for storing trays and outdoor tables.

The tools may vary: ladle, funnel, spoon. The base is fixed and consists of a tray and small bowls, jugs, or cups, but the accessories may vary depending on the skills acquired by the children and the improvement of their hand-eye coordination.

Why are pouring and transferring activities an important part of the Montessori environment?

- Pouring solids or liquids is an excellent task to start practicing concentration and hand-eye coordination.
- Pouring and transferring liquids is a natural need for children, which manifests itself as early as one to one and a half years of age.

- Thanks to this type of manipulation, even the youngest children can see the results of their actions and experience the effectiveness of their gestures. They also gain awareness of their ability to modify their environment.

- During these activities, children also learn to take care of their surroundings by tidying up their workspace and putting things back in their place. Tidying up is an integral part of these activities.

Whether pouring solids or liquids, the containers should be the same as those we use in everyday life, preferably ones that can be broken. This way, the child will learn the correct movements freely, through self-correction, perhaps causing minor damage. If the child breaks a glass, they will be more careful with their movements the next time they try the exercise. What is more, it is important to remember to embellish and modify the exercises, e.g., by frequently changing the type of material being poured, changing the bowls, dishes, and tools used for pouring and transferring. By observing children and their progress, we should also modify the difficulty level of the exercise, for example by changing the type of material being poured from large peas to finer groats, and then to flour, which is more difficult to pour.

How to propose and conduct classes?

In first place we prepare the necessary materials and place them on a shelf dedicated to this type of activity. We show the children only how to move the material from shelf to table and correctly grasping tools and containers (bowls, cups, jugs). To child should continue experimenting with the prepared materials. If something falls or spills outside the tray, remind the child to clean it up with a dustpan or brush, accompanying them in this process at first. It is important for the child to know that they should work within the tray and not spill substances on the table or floor. When working

with liquids, we can also place small sponges on the tray to wipe up any water droplets that did not end up in the appropriate containers. Loose substances can be swept up on the tray using a small dustpan or a larger brush.

WHAT EXERCISES CAN WE OFFER CHILDREN?

Pouring solid substances (loose products)

We start with the largest and easiest products to pour, i.e., beans, peas, or pasta. Over time, we can modify the weight of the products and suggest that children pour substances such as rice or semolina, ending with flour, which is the most difficult to pour. Transfer activities can also be started by working within a large container.



1. Transferring large balls (e.g., tennis balls) from one container to another.
2. The first transfer of substances within a large container placed in a fixed location. This exercise does not require the ability to move the material to another location. We can place semolina or sand in the container and suggest transferring it using two cups, a spoon and a cup, a jug and a cup, two containers and a ladle, etc.
3. Transferring from one glass to another on a tray. This activity takes place at the table.
4. Transferring from one jug to another on a tray. The activity takes place at the table.
5. Transferring from one bowl to another on a tray using a large ladle. The activity takes place at the table.
6. Transferring liquids from one container to another using a spoon on a tray. This activity takes place at the table.

Pouring liquids

1. Free pouring into a sink, large bowl, or container. I only provide the child with various tools for the task and give them the freedom to experiment. The only rule is: "into the middle." There must be a hanger nearby with an apron made of waxed fabric, so it is waterproof. The first step is for the child to put on the apron.
2. Pouring using a sponge, within a structure that has a fixed, immovable place. The child works standing up. The teacher provides the appropriate materials and containers. The child's task is to pour water from one container to another using a sponge, not a spoon or ladle. Here, too, the child must put on an apron before starting work.

3. Pouring from one container to another within a tray. This can be pouring from a jug to a jug, from a jug to a glass, from a glass to a glass, or from one container to another using a funnel. Once the children have mastered the simplest pouring sequences, we can modify the difficulty level of this exercise by drawing lines on the containers to show how full they should be. We can also offer the option of pouring using various tools such as spoons, ladles, strainers, funnels, and colanders. If this is a systematic activity, i.e., consisting of several steps, the teacher must show the child all the steps in sequence.

Fishing out ping pong balls... We need:

- 2 bowls: a large one for water and balls, and a smaller one for the balls that have been fished out
- a jug for pouring water
- balls
- a strainer
- apron

Fixed structure or on a tray. The child works standing up.

The teacher demonstrates:

- How to properly grasp and carry a jug.
- How to pour water into the jug and from the jug into the bowl.
- How to hold the strainer.
- How to scoop balls out of a large bowl and transfer them to another bowl.

Exercise for the teacher, preceding the introduction of the task:

- practice the pouring action
- analyze the movements involved in this activity and write them down
- Perform the action, slowly articulating your movements

What are the differences between the work of an adult and that of a child?

- Adults perform movements quickly because they have mastered these activities (e.g., driving a car, walking, pouring water).
- sequences of movements combine into a single gesture
- pouring/putting food on a plate: we know how much we want, how much to put in the ladle, where to pour according to the consistency of the food we choose, etc.
- Children perceive gestures as impossible to repeat because they are performed too quickly.
- gestures are difficult because they require hand-eye coordination, which the child needs to improve
- A child's language/communication differs from that of an adult.
- we coordinate several parts of the body at the same time
- children under the age of 3 work with one hand at a time, the opposite hand gesture is not yet mastered

TIDYING UP

Repair activities (tidying up) are all activities that require the child to tidy up the space where something has been spilled, scattered, or dirtied.

Wiping a dirty table and sweeping the floor are part of "repair activities," i.e., activities that are performed (or rather must be performed) every time an activity causes "mess." These are activities that begin in parallel with the children's activities, as tidying up is an integral part of the activities.

Remedial actions include sweeping, washing the table or floor. Washing the paintbrush after art class is also a remedial action. Even if the child is not yet able to use a broom, it is important that they understand that everything should be put back in its place. In the meantime, the teacher will support the child in learning how to tidy up and use tidying tools accompanying them in performing these activities or providing assistance.

Activities aimed at caring for and looking after the environment

These are all activities dedicated to caring for and maintaining the space in which we live. Wiping dust, washing glasses, or caring for plants or flowers not are because remedial, but activities related to caring for the environment. These activities are offered to children when they are already able to perform sequences of movements independently.

The importance of tidying up

- is an integral part of the activities
- If the child is unable to do this, it means that:
 - they are not ready, meaning more work needs to be done on heuristic play
 - the adult needs to accompany them more closely

Sequence: the child takes the tray, brings it to the table, does the exercise, cleans up, and puts everything back in its place. The adult must accompany the child, so they say, "This is indeed its place!"

The concept of "accompanying the child"

- The teacher's task is to prepare the tray and place it in a specific location or offer it to the child at the right time.
- The child must have plenty of space to experiment, encounter difficulties, try to overcome them, and solve problems.
- During tray activities, you should accompany the children rather than presenting the exercise. (For example, I present the transfer and removal of utensils, but not the entire activity).

Where to store materials/tools related to tidying up the space?

These materials must have a permanent, clearly defined place and should be easily accessible to children. Children must have free access to all materials. Ideally, they should be stored in a specially designated cupboard, but a wall-mounted rack on which all utensils and aprons can be hung is also a good solution.

SWEEPING

When performing various practical activities or workshop tasks, it is normal for pieces of paper or material to fall on the floor. After the activity is over, we can ask the child to pick up what has fallen using a dustpan – a small one for tidying up the table and a larger one for sweeping the floor.

Floor sweeping exercise:

1. Use colored tape to mark out a square area on the floor where you will sweep all the dirt from onto the floor. The square should be large enough, preferably as large as the side of a trash can. This square can be left on the floor all year round to serve as a reference point for your child.
2. Show your child how to hold the brush.
3. I carefully and slowly sweep all the dirt into the square.
7. I sweep all the elements inside the square, telling the child "All the little pieces here."
4. If there are still small pieces left, I can encourage the child to pick them up by saying, "Look, there's a small piece left here."
5. Then I take the trash can and place it on one side of the square.
6. I lift the dustpan slightly and use a brush to sweep all the small pieces onto the dustpan.
7. Finally, I throw the swept-up pieces into the trash can by tilting the dustpan.

Using a brush for sweeping is important in order to:

- show your child that you care about the environment.
- allow them to see the reality that children experience in their everyday lives and during various activities.

Practicing using a small dustpan:

1. I take a dustpan with a tong handle.
2. I sweep the dirt with the brush from left to right or from bottom to top, holding the dustpan still (only the brush moves, the dustpan remains still), in a square.
3. I place the dustpan on the side of the square.
4. I take the dirt to the trash can.

A small dustpan, together with a large brush, should always be at hand, hanging on a hook. It can be used when you need to pick up small pieces from the floor or table, when there is not much material spilled.

DUSTING

This is a very important activity because it teaches the child where to put things in their environment. It is recommended once the child has mastered their surroundings.

What do we need to do this exercise?

- Everything that is on the shelves within the child's reach. All trays and objects placed on the shelves are an opportunity to dust them.

- A small free table nearby on which to place trays or objects lying on the shelf.
- An apron with a pocket that can hold a small dustpan, brush, and cloth.
- Dust cloths measuring approximately 14x14cm
- Flat duster approximately 2.5/3 cm long with a short handle

What is the role of the teacher?

The teacher accompanies the child in picking up and carrying the material, shows them how to hold the cloth in their hand or how to hold the brush and dustpan, and shows them how to start dusting the shelf from left to right.

The course of the dusting activity:

1. After putting on an apron and taking a cloth, the child places it in the pocket of the apron.
2. They choose a free bench or table on which to place all the items from the shelf to be dusted.
3. He moves all the items from the shelf to the selected place, one by one, so that the shelf is gradually emptied.
4. He places the cloth on the table, folds it by bending each corner inwards, then moves the folded cloth to the shelf and begins to dust it with a left-to-right motion.
5. When finished, she walks away and shakes the cloth in a place in the room where she can drop the collected dust.

6. If there are hard-to-reach corners in the drawer or on the shelf, she can use a duster.
7. She puts the items that were on the shelf back in their place.

WASHING DISHES

Washing dishes for a child around the age of 3 is the goal, but you need to start by washing a single glass, spoon, etc., so everything must be done gradually.

The first thing to consider is the organization and equipment for washing dishes, which must take place at the sink, if there is one in the classroom, or alternatively at a small table set up for this activity.

What do we need to carry out this exercise?

- 1 oilcloth apron
- 2 bowls (inside the sink or placed on the table)
- 1 jug (if washing at the table)
- 1 dish rack
- 1 bucket (if washing at the table)
- 1 soap dispenser
- 1 dishwashing brush or sponge



Presentation of dishwashing activities:

1. The child puts on an apron with the teacher's help.
2. If the child is washing dishes at the table, the teacher shows them how to place two bowls next to each other and then fill them using a jug.
3. She shows how to add dishwashing liquid to the first bowl.
4. The teacher then demonstrates how to hold the brush or sponge and how to wash the dishes: first on the back with a circular motion, then on the front.
5. The teacher rinses the first dish in the second bowl and places it on the drying rack.
6. The teacher leaves the child to repeat the sequence of movements on their own.
7. After washing the dishes, they must be dried.

DRYING WASHED DISHES

Equipment for drying dishes:

- apron
- Small towel
- Dishcloth
- Table

Presentation of dish drying activities:

1. We spread a dishcloth on the table.
2. Take a dish from the dish rack and start drying it with the second

(smaller) dishcloth, always using a circular motion, first from the back and then from the front.

3. Place the dried dishes on top of each other.
4. Then the teacher leaves the child to repeat this sequence of movements on their own.

Tidying up

1. The child turns the bowl upside down and empties it into the sink. If working at the table, they empty one bowl at a time (using both hands) into a bucket placed under the table, which is then emptied in the bathroom (into the sink or toilet).
2. The child who was drying the dishes folds the dishcloths and puts the stacked dishes in the cupboard.
3. Finally, they both take off their aprons and hang them back in their place.

BATHING THE DOLL

Materials needed:

- Doll
- Water jug
- Bar of soap with a dish
- Baby sponge with stand
- Talcum powder in a special container and a brush/spray bottle
- Bucket

- Baby bath
- Children's bathrobe with hood
- Pillow
- Zippered pillowcase
- Clean clothes (shorts, T-shirts, possibly with ties)
- Clothes drawer (or wardrobe)
- Laundry basket
- Small table for placing materials and a baby bath
- Oilcloth tablecloth to cover the side table
- Small table on which to place a pillow and bathrobe for the doll to dry
- Cloth for drying (tub and support table)
- Hand towel
- Oilcloth apron
- Protective sleeves
- Anti-slip mat

Presentation

1. We put on aprons and start by bringing water from the sink.
2. We take the jug from the table and hold it with our right hand on the handle and our left hand on the bottom.
3. We fill the jug and place it on the table.
4. We sit the doll on a child's bathrobe to undress her. First

We take the shirt off the right shoulder, then the left. If the shirt is fastened at the back, we take it off over our head, otherwise we proceed to unfasten the shirt. We put the shirt in the laundry basket next to us. Take off your shorts, first the right leg, then the left, and also put them in the laundry basket.

5. Pour half of the water from the jug slowly into the bathtub. If necessary, run your fingers along the rim of the jug to get the last drop out. Put the jug on the table next to the bathtub.

6. Holding the doll with your left hand under its neck and your right hand under its bottom, as if it were a baby, gently place it in the bathtub so that its head remains above the water.

7. Take the sponge in your right hand, dip it in the water, and squeeze it. Transfer the sponge to your left hand, take the bar of soap in your right hand, and lather the sponge with circular movements. Put the bar of soap aside.

8. Supporting the doll's neck with your left hand, start cleaning it, beginning with the neck. Then gently clean the shoulders, the right arm in all its parts, including the armpit, from the top to the hand. Clean the left arm in the same way. Then clean the torso and finally the legs, first the upper part of the right leg and the right foot, then the upper part of the left leg and the left foot.

9. Turn the doll over to wash the back, holding it by the stomach and chest. Clean the back of the neck, shoulders, back of the legs, and heels, always starting with the right leg and then the left.

10. We place the doll back in the bathtub. We dip the sponge in water to rinse it, squeeze it in the bucket again until the last drop, and put it back on the saucer.

11. Move on to washing the face. Gently wash the face with your fingertips, rinsing them several times in the sink, starting with the forehead and then moving down to the nose, cheeks, and ears.

12. If necessary, wash the hair with your hands. Take water from the tub and, paying attention to the eyes, wet the hair, lather it, rub it, rinse it with water from a jug, and also rinse the body from top to bottom.

13. Squeeze the hair, gathering it in your left hand, which usually supports the back of the head, and in this way, with your right hand under the doll's bottom, transfer the doll to the bathrobe.

14. Using your fingertips, take the bottom corners of the bathrobe and wrap them around the doll's stomach, keeping your left hand on top, because with your right hand you first stroke the hair, then the face, neck, shoulders (first the right, then the left), then the legs and feet (first the right, then the left). Wrap the doll in the baby bathrobe and lift it, leaning on the bend of your arm (as if rocking a baby).

15. We place the doll on the changing table to dress her. We always open the towel by grasping its corners with our fingertips.

16. We dress the doll. We take the shorts and then the T-shirt out of the appropriate drawer. We place them on the towel on the left side of the doll, spread out nicely. First, we put on the shorts, always the right leg first, then the left leg, and we also pull up the back of the shorts.

17. We sit the doll down. If the T-shirt is closed, we put it on first over the head, then over the right shoulder, and finally over the left shoulder. Otherwise, we put the arms in and only then tie the back.

Tidying up:

1. Pour the dirty water from the tub, holding it with both hands, into the center of the bucket on the floor, next to the table, always to the last drop.

2. Empty the bucket of water.

3. Dry the tub and side table with a drying cloth. Hang the cloth on a special hook.

4. Dry your hands with a towel and hang it on a special hook.



WASHING CLOTHES

Materials needed:

- Montessori washbasin with a tray or a large bowl and a tray for washing clothes
- A jug with water and a stand
- Soap (preferably gray/Marseille soap) with a stand
- Brush with a stand
- Coaster with a sponge
- Two bowls/basins
- Two benches (one on the right and one on the left side of the washing station)
- Laundry dryer
- Container for clothes hangers
- Bucket
- Towel
- Oilcloth apron with sleeves
- Cloth bag for dirty clothes
- Non-slip mat

Presentation

1. Put on an apron and (if necessary) sleeves.
2. Unroll the non-slip mat.
3. Place the bucket in front of the center bowl.
4. Scoop up water using the jug.
5. Make sure the bowl is directly under the sink.
6. Stand behind the bowl, lean over, and slowly pour the water.
7. Set the jug aside.
8. Grasp the dirty cloth with both hands by its upper edges and dip it into the water (with your palm open).
9. Pull and "slide" the dirty cloth onto the sink.
10. Place the cloth on the sink board.
11. Take the soap and lather the entire cloth with slow movements from left to right and from top to bottom.
12. Put the soap aside.
13. If the cloth is long, fold the dry part over with both hands.
14. Fold it and rub it with your right hand clenched into a fist.
15. Open the cloth again and scrub with vertical movements from top to bottom.
16. Grab the cloth with both hands from above and dip it into the bowl.
17. Lift the cloth, allowing it to drip dry.
18. Bring the two sides of the cloth together using a "tweezers" motion (thumb and index finger).

19. Squeeze from top to bottom (form a ring around the cloth with your left hand and squeeze down).
20. Grasp the bottom end of the fabric and join it to the top end.
21. Squeeze again with opposite hand movements (back and forth).
22. Put the soaped cloth in the left bowl.
23. Wash other cloths, if any.
24. Wash the brush inside the dripping sink and put it back in its place.
25. Rinse the sink: using a jug, pour water from left to right.
26. Set the jug aside.
27. Take the sponge and wipe it from left to right, carefully place it under the sink and squeeze the sponge until the last drop.
28. Put the sponge away.
29. Pour the soapy water into the bucket.
30. Take the jug and pour water into the sink.
31. Set the jug aside.
32. Take the cloth out of the bowl on the left.
33. Open the cloth and dip it in the water.
34. Pull the cloth upward.
35. Join the two sides of the cloth with a "tweezers" movement (thumb and index finger).
36. Squeeze from top to bottom (in a looping motion).
37. Grab the bottom end of the fabric and connect it to the top end.
38. Squeeze again with opposite hand movements.

39. Put the cloth in the right bowl.
40. Rinse the sink: using a jug, pour water from left to right.
41. Set the jug aside.
42. Take a sponge and wipe the sink from left to right, being careful underneath.
43. Wring out the sponge in the bowl: hold the sponge firmly in your left hand and press with your index and middle fingers of your right hand.
44. Pour the "dirty" water into the bucket.
45. Place the bowl on the floor and wipe the sink floor with the sponge.
46. Put the bowl back in its place.
47. Dry the bowl.
48. Squeeze the sponge into the bucket.
49. Put the sponge back in its place.
50. Empty the bucket in the bathroom.
51. Dry your hands with a towel.
52. Take the right bowl and hang up the cloths.

HANGING UP THE LAUNDRY

Materials needed:

- Bowl with freshly washed cloths (clothes, etc.)
- Bench (place the bowl on it)
- Clothesline at child height

- Container for clothes pegs
- Protective apron (worn by the child during washing)

The material should be placed near all laundry supplies to make it easier for the child to hang clothes after washing.

Presentation:

1. After washing the clothes, proceed to hang them up.
2. Slowly approach the dryer, holding the bowl with freshly washed clothes in both hands.
3. Place the basin on the bench.
4. Take the fabric and grab its corner with the thumb and index finger of your left hand. Then, using the thumb and index finger of your right hand, "iron" the edge of the fabric several times, using very slow movements.
5. Then iron all 4 sides.
6. Place the fabric on the dryer and "iron"/straighten it again on the string/wire.
7. Very carefully and slowly, check the position of both ends, making sure that the fabric is exactly in the middle.
8. Grasp the clothespin with your thumb and index finger and open and close it twice in front of the child, moving very slowly so that the grip is noticed.
9. Place the clothespin on the fabric on the left side.
10. Take another clothespin and perform the same movement to demonstrate the grasp.
11. Place the clothespin on the right side of the fabric.

12. Take another washed cloth, spread it out, and slowly "stretch" its edges again.
13. Always follow the movements to "iron" all four sides of the fabric.
14. Place the fabric on the dryer.
15. Check the position of the ends by ironing the sides with your fingers.
16. Take a clothes hanger, again slowly showing the grip, and place it on the left edge.
17. Take another clothespin, again showing the grip, and place it on the right side.
18. After hanging all the clothes, tidy up by putting the bowl back in its place.

PESACH

What do Montessori practical life activities have in common with Jewish education?

About Passover and the ritual of tidying up.

Passover, also known as Pesach, is an event commemorating the exodus of the Jews from Egyptian slavery. Almost everyone knows the story of Moses, the ten plagues of Egypt, and the parting of the Red Sea. In Hebrew, this story is called the Haggadah. According to the Bible, The "miraculous crossing of the Red Sea" was a manifestation of divine intervention that protected the Jewish people and led to the destruction of the Egyptians. The exodus of the Israelites from Egypt is one of the most important events described in the Bible, forming the central point of Israel's history. Passover is celebrated by the Jewish people every year on the 14th day of Nissan, in the spring, and lasts for 8 days (7 days in Israel). It begins with a Passover dinner, called Seder, which has its own special procedure. During Passover, grain products are not eaten, but are replaced with matzo.

So what does Passover have in common? with the Montessori Practical Life Area?

First of all, the rituals of tidying up before celebrating the holiday. Cleaning, sweeping, dusting, and more specifically, removing all crumbs left over from flour products, so that not a single crumb remains. In Montessori terms, you could say: "to the last crumb!" What's more, before Passover, the household cleans all the dishes. They take out the ones they will use during Passover and put away the ones they won't need. We also put aside products that we will not eat during Passover in a separate place. On the evening before Passover, the entire house is thoroughly searched to make sure that there is no chametz, i.e., crumbs of grain products, specifically five grains: rye, wheat, spelt, oats

and barley. Literally, chametz in Hebrew means leaven. On the morning of Passover, any remaining chametz is burned. During Passover dinner, the story of the Jews' exodus from Egypt is told, and the household eats and celebrates, and for the next eight days they eat matzo – a special unleavened bread.



Mini Passover glossary:

Passover

the word "pesach" = passover means to pass over, to bypass

Chametz

Chametz refers to products made from one of five grains: rye, wheat, spelt, oats and barley, or containing even trace amounts of them

Wine

a symbol of the blood of the lamb, which the Israelites marked on their doors on Passover night to protect themselves from the angel of death.

Salt water

It reminds us of the tears of the Israeli people in Egyptian captivity.

Moses

prophet and leader of the Israelites, led the Jews out of Egyptian slavery

Matzah

flat, crispy unleavened bread eaten during the Jewish Passover holiday to commemorate the Israelites' exodus from Egyptian slavery; it is a symbol of freedom

The plagues of Egypt

10 plagues that God sent upon Egypt: blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock disease, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn

Bitter herbs

They symbolize the bitterness and hardships of Jewish slavery in Egypt

So what Montessori activities can we offer children when telling them about Passover?

The Great Kindergarten Cleanup

sweeping, dusting, washing dishes, Scavenger Hunt: searching for hidden objects (e.g., Passover symbols) in the kindergarten or garden

Cooking classes

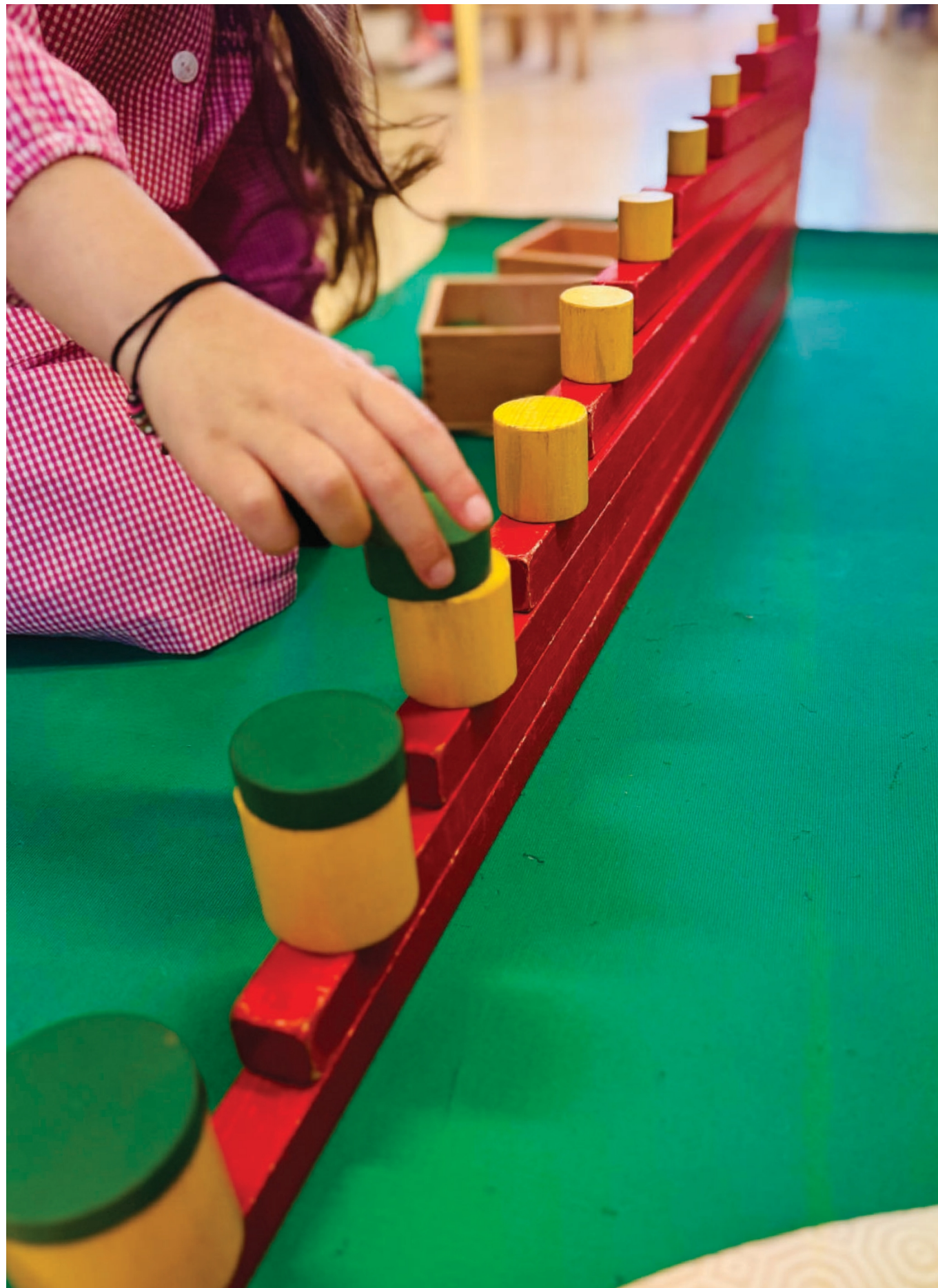
making matzo bread, recognizing the taste of bitter herbs

Art, workshop, and laboratory classes

whose main theme will be the exodus of the Jews from Egypt and the ten plagues of Egypt: Monster plagues made from toilet paper rolls

Physical games

hide and seek, blind man's buff, Baba Yaga is watching, etc.



Chapter 4. Montessori sensory aids

Sensory materials were created using a scientific method inspired by the experiments of Itard and Seguin on children with disabilities.

Sensory materials consist of a system of objects grouped according to certain physical characteristics of bodies, such as color, shape, size, sound, roughness, weight, and temperature.

Each material has its own scale, gradation, and therefore has a "maximum" and a "minimum" that define its limits. When these two extremes are close together, they show the most obvious difference that exists in the series and thus create the most striking contrast possible for a given material. By highlighting the differences, the child is interested.

Sensory material sensory material through its use, helps the child in their mental and, consequently, cultural development.

The materials should be placed in an area where there are tables and sufficient space to lay out mats or rugs that mark the boundaries of the children's work with sensory materials. The materials must be placed on special shelves so that they are at the child's height. The use of the materials must be the child's voluntary decision.

The Montessori teacher knows the age of the children to whom the materials are to be made available. What is more, they must know exactly how they are to be presented, must provide them with a permanent place in the space, and must supervise their organization.

The basic benefits that a child derives from working with sensory materials are:

- the ability to control mistakes
- memorizing sequences of movements and successive activities
- setting boundaries for your work
- sensitizing to the beauty of objects
- purchase, mindfulness, and concentration
- developing visual perception
- improving hand-eye coordination

What materials are included in Montessori sensory aids?



BROWN STAIRS

The brown stairs are part of the sensory material intended for children over 3 years of age. They should be placed on a special shelf located in the concentration zone.

The set consists of 10 brown cubes of varying sizes. They differ in two dimensions: height and width, while their length remains unchanged at 20 cm.

Brown stairs are material sensory used by children to learn about the concept of difference in thickness. Children learn to name the blocks using vocabulary such as thin/thick, thinner, thinnest, thickest. Over time, they learn to to scale the concept of thickness and arrange blocks from thickest to thinnest.

Naming of brown stairs: thin • thick •
thinnest • thickest thinner • thicker

First presentation of the material:

1. Before starting to move the blocks, the teacher invites the child to unroll the carpet. If the child is not yet able to unroll and roll up the carpet, the teacher demonstrates how to do this with slow movements.
2. Next, the teacher approaches the shelf and, together with the child, checks the arrangement of the elements on the shelf.
3. At this point, the teacher shows how to grasp individual elements. They move the steps onto the carpet, holding them with their whole hands and all fingers on both ends of the block. They grasp the thinnest element with three fingers on each side. It is important that the grip is stable, using both hands each time, and that the child does not carry several elements at once. As a reminder of the grip, the teacher can simply pick up the element, then put it back on the shelf and ask the child to repeat the action themselves.
4. All elements are placed on the rug in any order.
5. Once the elements are on the rug, the teacher and the child sit in front of the rug and use their right hand to move all the elements to the upper right corner.
6. Then, they select the two outer elements and place them in the middle of the rug to draw the child's attention to them.
7. The teacher shows the **thin** element, names it, gives it to the child, and repeats the word **thin**. It is very important that the teacher uses only one word instead of a full sentence: "this is thin."
8. Then the teacher shows the **thick** element, names it, gives it to the child, and repeats the word **gruby**.
9. Finally, we put all the blocks back on the rug together with the child and ask the child: **Do you want to build steps?**

During the first presentation of the material, the teacher begins to build steps from the first three largest blocks, then allows the child to continue and gives them space and freedom to experiment further on their own. After the work is completed, the teacher reminds the child to tidy up and put all the elements back in their place.

Second presentation of the material:

This is a presentation of the correct way to arrange stair elements. It is very important for Montessori teachers to remember what stage each child in their class is at in terms of working with a particular material, whether they have already worked with it or whether this is their first encounter with it. This will enable them to know how best to support the children during their work.

On the next attempt, after moving all the stair elements onto the carpet, the teacher:

1. They pick out the largest piece of the brown stairs, then look for the next largest of all the remaining pieces and place it next to the previous one, sliding it across the carpet. In this way, they place the first few pieces next to each other and ask the child to repeat the sequence, placing the next largest piece and then the next largest piece from the remaining pieces on the carpet.
2. The teacher always checks that the pieces are well aligned.
3. After completing the staircase, feel the steps with two fingers (index and middle) and run your fingers up and down the steps. You can also check whether the thinnest element fits into the space between the successive brown stair elements.
4. After completing the exercise, the child can put the steps back on the shelf, ready for reuse. If the stairs are not arranged in the correct order, the teacher will not point out the mistake to the child and will tidy them up in a way that is unnoticeable to the child.

Modifications:

Once the child has become sufficiently familiar with this sensory material, the teacher can suggest other modifications and arrangements of the brown stairs, such as placing them vertically and aligning them to the right or left, or to their central axis. However, we will often notice that during the experimentation phase, children intuitively arrange the brown stairs in various interesting ways. One of the most engaging and interesting modifications of this exercise for the child is to build a tall tower out of brown stairs, i.e., to place them vertically, one on top of the other. This is quite a difficult modification, requiring even greater concentration and hand-eye coordination from the child.

The vertical tower built of brown stairs is so tall that special steps are needed to place the thinnest elements at its top. This allows the child to be in constant motion while being very attentive to their surroundings. Any wrong or too quick movement can cause this beautiful and majestic structure to collapse. What's more, we will observe that children will be very eager to compare their height with the tower they have built!



PINK TOWER

The pink tower is a series of wooden cubes painted pink with sides measuring 1 to 10 cm. This material represents a gradation of size from small to large and refers to classic building blocks. Children are fascinated by this material, they perceive it as a valuable object, they have a very deep connection with it because it touches on the neurological process. The first challenge is to build a tower without it falling, and when they succeed, they are very proud of themselves. In this way, they build their inner sense of self-worth and agency. The second challenge is to repeat and repeat this exercise, experimenting and striving to improve their movements. With each attempt at the same task, the child gains more and more control over their movements and learns successive cause-and-effect relationships. Over time, it will become easier for them to build the entire tower without accidentally knocking any pieces over. What's more, with each subsequent attempt, they learn that it is better to perform each movement without rushing, and thus, building the tower will take on the form of meditation, focus, being here and now without rushing. This will undoubtedly be a moment of calm for the child.

The pink tower has its permanent place in the classroom, but it is not located on the shelf with other sensory aids. Although it is located in the same concentration zone, near other sensory materials, it is positioned vertically on a special base (or stool), without the smallest element. The so-called "**tiny**" is hidden in a small, pretty box, which we can call "the **tiny house**." The teacher only gives it to the child when they start working with the pink tower.

Presentation of the pink tower:

1. The teacher invites the child to unfold the rug. If necessary, she helps him unfold it.
2. Then, they show the correct way to pick up the pieces. The smallest ones are picked up with three fingers. In the case of larger cubes that do not fit in the palm of the hand, the teacher picks them up with three fingers and places their other hand under the cube for support.
3. The teacher shows the child how to move the pieces onto the mat: one by one, never several at a time.
4. After two or three cubes, the teacher asks the child: "**Will you help me? Will you place them one by one on the mat?**"
5. The transfer is done in a standing position (never kneeling), so it is a good idea to place the rug further away from where the pink tower usually stands.
6. When all the cubes are on the carpet in random order, the teacher moves them to the edge of the carpet with their right hand, kneeling to make room for building the tower. Then they pick out a small element, call it "**small**," and hand it to the child, repeating the word "**small**." They do the same with the "**big**" piece, emphasizing the word with appropriate intonation and hand movements showing how big the piece is. In the next step, the teacher invites the child to touch the piece themselves and check how big and heavy it really is.
6. At the end of this stage, the teacher suggests that the child build a tower by saying, "**Would you like to build a tower?**" and leaves them to continue trying and experimenting with the pink tower on their own.

The result is not important; what is important for us is to show the correct grip, how to move the elements onto the rug, how to arrange them on the mat, and to show the small and large elements and name them. There is nothing wrong with experimenting; the child can also build horizontally, and we do not intervene.

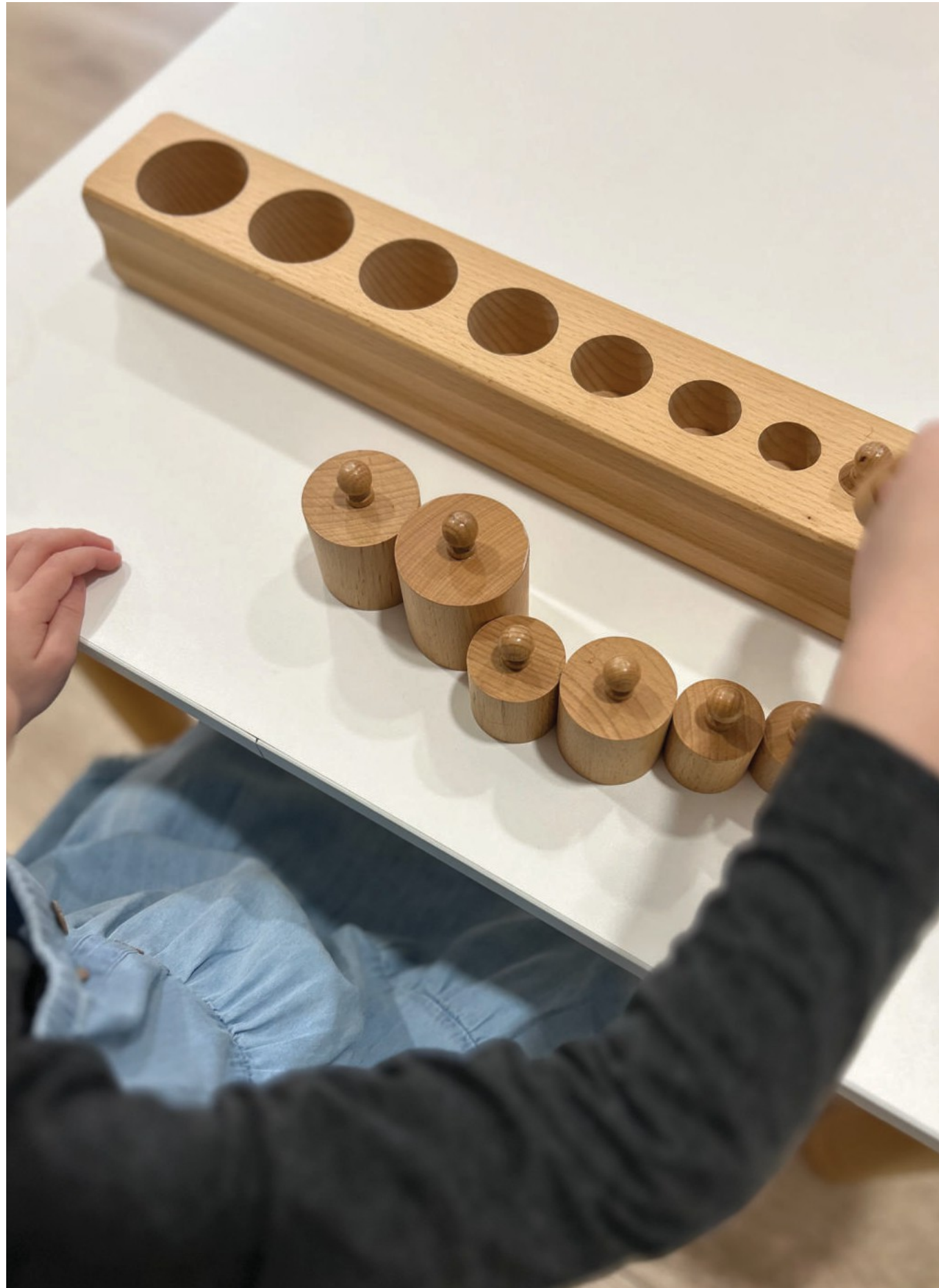
Tidying up

Tidying up must be done standing up and without correcting the child's mistakes. The adult does not require the child to build a perfect tower. The teacher tidies up only when the child has finished the exercise, so that it is ready for the next child who wants to build it later, but never does so in front of the child who tidied up the pink tower.

Naming the pink tower:

small • large • tiny • huge

smallest • largest • bigger • smaller



CYLINDERS FOR PLACING

There are four sets of hard sensory blocks that can be offered to children from the age of 2.5 years. Initially, the first three sets are recommended, due to the gradation of difficulty of each set. Once children have become familiar with the first three types of blocks, a fourth, inversely proportional set of blocks can be added.

This material requires a dedicated place in the concentration zone, preferably on a specially designed cabinet.

What does the teacher present at the beginning of working with this material?

Grasping: The teacher takes the set with both hands from the cabinet, moves it away from the body, and puts it back on the shelf.

Carrying with both hands (away from the body): the teacher encourages the child to pick up the set on their own and carry it to the table.

The teacher sits next to the child (the child is on the left). She prepares three fingers (thumb, index finger, middle finger). She takes a cylinder peg, lifts it, moves it, and places it on the table. She repeats this action for a maximum of two or three cylinders. Then she allows the child to continue experimenting with the whole set on their own. At the end of the activity, the teacher can add the movement of sliding her fingers at the base of the pegs, look at the child, smile, and add: "Everything is aligned."

which will create an additional point of interest and satisfaction from the work. After finishing the work, the cylinders should be tidied up, i.e., put back in their proper place on the shelf.

To increase the level of difficulty, suggest that the child work with two sets at the same time, then three and four. When working with two and three sets of cylinders for nesting, place them in front of the child on the table in the shape of a triangle. When working with four sets at once, place them in the shape of a square. The cylinders are placed inside the shapes formed by the blocks.



Naming

When separating the elements, the teacher verbalizes and names each element: "thin," "thick," "tall," "short." Once the child has gained considerable experience with the material, the caregiver can add another step by asking them to pick up individual cylinders, for example, thick, thin, tall, or short.

When working with sensory materials, Maria Montessori asked herself many questions, such as:

What is the deeper purpose of these activities with blocks?

Is it important for a 3-year-old child to be able to recognize the differences?

Is it important for the child to always perform the exercise with the blocks correctly?

What should the teacher do to get the child interested in the exercise of connecting these blocks with the appropriate solid?

What must a teacher do to enable a child to clearly see the differences?

She answered as follows:

Hard blocks are a means of practice, an external stimulus, a testing ground for intelligence, a psychologically reactive medium.

It is not important to achieve a result.

It is not important for the child to do well right away, or even to do well later; it is important for the teacher to avoid this way of thinking altogether.

The teacher provides materials to stimulate interest.

The teacher should do nothing to prevent the child from noticing all the differences. Let the child experiment!



COLORED CYLINDERS

This is a set of 4 boxes containing 10 cylinders each, the same size as those in the nesting cylinder set, but without handles. The cylinders are smooth and colored to match the box they belong to. The boxes and cylinders differ in color:

Red box:

thick-thin, cylinders have a constant height and decreasing diameter

Yellow box:

large-small, height and diameter of cylinders gradually increase in three dimensions

Blue box:

tall-short, cylinders have increasing height and constant diameter

Green box:

low wide-tall thin, cylinders have increasing height and decreasing diameter

Presentation:

1. We begin working with the cylinders by unfolding the rug.
2. The teacher shows the child how to hold and carry one of the boxes, and then encourages them to carry the box onto the previously unrolled rug on their own.
3. They show how to open the box: they grasp the lid with both hands and place it next to the box.

4. Demonstrates how to grasp and remove cylinders from the box: one cylinder at a time, grasping it with three fingers (thumb, index, and middle) and slowly transferring the cylinder to the rug.
5. Places the cylinders on the other side of the box in a scattered manner.
6. Leaves the child to continue experimenting on their own.

Horizontal presentation (gradation of elements):

1. The presentation can be started with any box. Usually, the teacher encourages the child to choose one of them on their own.
2. After moving the box to the rug, the teacher kneels next to the child, on their right side, paying attention to their position.

Note: Work on the carpet should be done in a kneeling position with the heels under the buttocks. If necessary, the teacher shows the child how to position their knees correctly and corrects their position. This kneeling position allows the child a great deal of freedom of movement while maintaining a stable body position and keeping the spine straight while working.

3. The teacher opens the box and places the lid on the side.
4. They arrange the cylinders in random order, moving them with three fingers.
5. They close the box and move it to the upper right corner of the carpet so that it does not disturb the child while they are working.
6. The teacher asks the child what they want to build – a tower or a staircase?
7. If the child chooses the highest one, the teacher says, "Now we'll take the highest one," and places it on the left side of the rug, right in front of the child.
8. The teacher asks the child another question: "Which of the remaining ones is the tallest?" When the child points to the next tallest one, the teacher places it next to the one they placed earlier, very carefully and precisely.

9. The teacher asks the child to help. They may ask: "One more , the tallest?" or "Next , the tallest?" And , and so on until the lowest one, until the gradation is complete.

Vertical presentation (tower arrangement):

We proceed in the same way as in the case of presenting gradation, with the difference that we arrange the elements one on top of the other in a vertical position. We also we start with the highest or thickest cylinder. The exception is the Green Box, where we need to start building the tower from the widest and lowest element, but we do not show this to the child, who should intuitively notice that it is not possible to build a tower starting with a tall and thin element.

Note: We present only one box to each child, and the child discovers the next ones on their own. The presentation is about showing how to move and grasp the elements and arrange them on the carpet. If we notice that the child does not know how to perform these activities, we repeat the presentation. We leave further improvement of movements and exercises with this material to the child.

Improving the child's work:

Building several towers on the carpet.

By working with several colors of cylinders at the same time, the child is able to notice the differences and similarities between individual elements, which ultimately leads to the development of their creativity. Knowing the properties of the cylinders and the relationships between them, the child will begin to experiment with combining them. In this exercise, the child moves one box at a time onto the carpet and builds single-color towers in sequence.

Combinations:

One of the most important properties of Montessori sensory materials is that they are compatible with other materials. If a child becomes familiar with each of them, they will be able to notice the similarities and combine them using their creativity, but also using logical, mathematical relationships. The dimensions of each material are well thought out and consistent, never random.



Combining colored cylinders into a single tower: red, green, yellow

Combinations can be created using three boxes, except for the blue box with high-low cylinders.

1. The first stage of the exercise is to arrange all three gradations horizontally.
2. Then, three single-color towers are arranged.
3. The final step is to stack all three sets of cylinders on top of each other, creating a single, colorful, tall tower.
4. After completing the exercise, tidy up the work area and put all the boxes back in their proper place on the shelf.

Colorful star:

red green yellow blue

All four gradations of cylinders can be arranged in the shape of a star.

1. The boxes are placed in the four corners of the carpet.
2. We begin by placing the thickest one in the center of the carpet.
3. We continue the gradation, creating the first ray.
4. Starting again from the center, we arrange another gradation in a different color, creating a second ray.
5. Yes do do for the two gradations of colored cylinders.
6. After finishing the work, we tidy up.

Combining colored cylinders with cylinders for embedding:

The colored cylinders also connect with the set of cylinders for embedding in blocks. They have the same sizes and values, so both materials can be connected with each other.

1. We place four blocks of cylinders for embedding on the four sides of the carpet.
2. On one side of the carpet, we place four boxes with colored cylinders, one below the other.
3. We open the boxes and place the corresponding gradations next to them in order.
4. Next to the corresponding cylinders, we place matching cylinders with handles in the same gradation.
5. Then place the cylinders with handles on the corresponding colored cylinders.
6. When the work is finished, everything is returned to its place.

Colorful blocks for embedding:

The second exercise combining both materials involves matching colored cylinders to four blocks:

1. Place all four blocks of cylinders for embedding in the middle of the carpet, forming a closed square shape.
2. Take all the cylinders out of each block one by one and place them in a mixed order inside the square.
3. One by one, we move all the boxes with colored cylinders onto the carpet and place them outside the square, on the side of the carpet, and then empty them one by one.

4. Mix all the colored cylinders with the nesting cylinders, placing them inside the square.

5. The child's task is to match the colored cylinders to their corresponding places in the empty blocks.

6. After completing the task, tidy up your workspace and put all materials back in their place.

Colored star with overlays:

This exercise is a modification of the "colorful star" using blocks for embedding.

1. We arrange a colorful star from four colors of cylinders.
2. Then bring the nesting blocks to the carpet, one by one.
3. Place the cylinders with blocks on corresponding colored cylinders.

RED BEAMS

*Using such long and awkward objects requires the child to move their entire body: they must walk back and forth to carry these rods and place them close to each other, in order of length, giving the whole thing the shape of an organ pipe. The place for arranging them is the floor, on which the child has previously laid out a mat large enough for themselves and the material. After building the organ pipe arrangement, the rods are then scattered, mixed, and rearranged as many times as the child feels satisfied."**

Maria Montessori

The red beams are wooden rods painted in a uniform color (red or blue) with a square cross-section (2.5 cm x 2.5 cm), whose length varies gradually from 10 to 100 cm. The ratio between the longest and shortest rods is 1 to 10. The difference between the rods concerns only one dimension, i.e., length.

The rods are located in the classroom on a designated shelf, arranged in order of gradation and aligned to the left, with the shortest one in the foreground in relation to the viewer.

*Maria Montessori, "The Discovery of the Child," Chapter 8, p. 140

Presentation of the material:

1. We begin by laying out a sufficiently large rug for arranging the red beams. It is best to use a square mat with sides measuring 1.5 meters to allow for a wide range of arrangement possibilities.
2. The teacher and the child approach the shelf and look at the arrangement of the beams together. The rods form a kind of staircase, but they can also be associated with the layout of an organ. The longest rod is at the top of the shelf, and the rest of the elements are arranged in descending order.
3. The caregiver notices that all the rods are aligned to the left and are neatly arranged. He shows this with a hand gesture, touching both the side and the top, pointing out that the arrangement of the red beams resembles an organ. He stops and says, "Let's check if they are arranged correctly."
4. The next step is to demonstrate the grip. The correct grip is to hold each beam with both hands at both ends. That is why it is so important to introduce this exercise to children who are able to hold the longest, one-meter beam in this way. Younger children, aged two and a half, have arms that are too short and will not be able to grasp the beams correctly.
5. The teacher shows how to carry the beams onto the carpet. They do this one at a time, holding them slightly away from their body.
6. Place the first two or three beams on the mat (anywhere) and encourage the child to continue on their own.
7. Once the beams are laid out on the carpet, the teacher makes sure that they are parallel to each other and not arranged on the same axis (two next to each other). At this stage, the beams do not need to be arranged in order of size; it is important that they are placed one under the other, regardless of order, across the entire surface of the carpet.
8. The teacher then prepares an empty space by moving

all the beams to the left, upper edge of the carpet (we narrow them).

9. The teacher takes the longest and shortest beams and places them in front of themselves and the child.
10. Bring the two beams closer together and name each of them in turn, moving two fingers—the index and middle fingers—along their entire length, emphasizing their names with a single word. Say "short" more quickly and "long" more slowly until your fingers reach the end of the long beam.
11. Then, encourage the child to touch and name both beams in the same way.
12. The teacher then puts both bars back with the others and encourages the child to freely experiment with arranging the bars and the relationships between them. At this stage, we do not recreate the organ arrangement. It serves to familiarize the child with the material and its properties, as well as the rules for using it.

Arranging beam gradation:

Once the child has become sufficiently familiar with the material and has gone through the stage of free experimentation, the teacher can demonstrate how to create an organ arrangement and other modifications and arrangements.

1. The beginning of the work is the same as in the first stage of learning the material. We roll out the carpet, move the beams, arrange them on the carpet mixed one under the other, but we do not move them to the upper left edge of the carpet. We leave the beams in the middle of the carpet, as we will need the upper left edge to recreate the organ arrangement.
2. After moving all the beams onto the carpet and placing them one under the other, the teacher looks for the longest one and places it in front of themselves and the child. They grasp the beam with their left hand using a pincer grip to hold it in place, then slide two fingers of their right hand along its length.

3. When the hand stops at the end of the bar, he says, "**It ends here.**"
4. The teacher then encourages the child to repeat this movement. If necessary, he or she shows the position of the right hand again and guides the child's hand.
5. He then takes the red beam with both hands at its ends and places it high on the carpet, close to the left upper edge.
6. Then they look for the next longest beam, saying, "**Now we are looking for the longest beam among those that remain.**"
7. The teacher looks for and then picks up the selected beam again, touches it, and allows the child to repeat the same movement.
8. The teacher places the next beam directly under the previously placed one, carefully checking that they are correctly aligned to the left.
9. This process is repeated until the organ system is complete. Finally, we carefully check that the bars are arranged in the correct order.

Improvements and modifications

Once the reconstruction of the rods is complete, the result should be a staircase that gradually decreases by one step at a time, to the same extent as the shortest rod. To check this, you can gradually place this rod at the end of the others and note the equality with the rod that follows it.

There are also many possibilities for modifying the arrangement of the beams. Many of them will be created intuitively by children. However, it is important for children to remember that in order to move on to the next stage, they must recreate the organ arrangement each time.

Another modification will be to create **a vertical organ arrangement**, which, contrary to appearances, is not so easy and requires the child to

mastering the correct grip, high concentration, and the ability to control over one's body and movement. Another modification is to align the beams to their central axis and create **a pyramid**. Once the pyramid has been created, you can move on to building a three-dimensional structure – **a huge star**, which is created by rotating each of the elements around their central axis. The final stage is to create **a maze**. This modification is particularly loved by children, as at the very end they can walk through the maze, taking care not to destroy it. You can also give your child a ball on a spoon or a small bell to hold while going through the maze. The ball must not fall on the floor and the bell must not ring until they exit the maze. These are tasks that help children practice mindfulness and concentration and control over movement of one's own body.

SUKOT

What could the Feast of Tabernacles and Montessori sensory materials possibly have in common?

You shall dwell in booths for seven days (...). So that your future generations may know that I made the Israelites dwell in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt.

Leviticus 23:42–43

The Feast of Sukkot is celebrated in autumn, between the 15th and 21st days of the month of Tishri, after the end of Yom Kippur. Along with Passover and Shavuot, it is one of the biblical pilgrimage holidays, i.e., those during which it was necessary to make a pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem and offer sacrifices from the year's harvest.

Today, the feast of Sukkot lasts seven days, in accordance with the biblical commandment, and is celebrated in commemoration of the Jews' exodus from Egypt and their forty-year wandering through the desert. During this journey to the Holy Land, the Jews lived under the open sky or in huts that they managed to build. Therefore, **the sukkah, or festive hut**, is built with a minimum of three stable walls and **an** open roof, through which sunlight enters during the day and the stars can be observed at night. The walls of the sukkah can be made of any material, and the openwork roof is made exclusively of plants and tree branches. The interior of the hut is richly decorated with drawings, paintings, lush autumn vegetation, grasses, grain, branches and fruit. Shelters are erected in gardens, orchards, or backyards.

What is the purpose of moving to a hut for seven days?

First of all, it is a way to break away from everyday life, problems, and civilization—a return to one's roots, to nature, to unity with God. The open roof of the hut, the schach, symbolizes a special, deep bond and closeness with the Creator.

Of course, today, especially in Poland, living in such a hut in the fall, for seven days, under the open sky, can be quite a challenge. In countries where the weather does not allow Sukkot to be celebrated outdoors, tradition exempts people from the necessity of staying in a sukkah. The holiday is celebrated mainly through solemn rituals during services in the synagogue... and simply in warm homes.

So what does the Sukkot holiday have in common with Montessori sensory materials?

Building! Developing imagination through one simple question, encouragement, provocation: "**Can you build a hut?**" while working with sensory materials. Of course, we will propose this task to children who are already very familiar with sensory materials and have learned the basic rules for using them. Otherwise, we could mislead children about the purpose of the material. However, when discussing the Sukkot holiday, we can offer a new modification of the exercise. We can also suggest working in groups and jointly figuring out how to build a hut using all the sensory aids available in the room. This will teach children cooperation and improve their conflict resolution and communication skills.

What other activities can we offer children during Sukkot?

Recognizing autumn crops
using picture material

Building a sukkah during a walk in the park or in the kindergarten garden using branches, leaves, and grass
and other natural elements found on the way to the park or brought earlier by children to the kindergarten

Decorating the kindergarten together with gifts of autumn
Cooking classes: autumn vegetable salad

Artwork using autumn
vegetables and fruits, grains, grasses, rowan berries

The most important symbols of Sukkot:

Sukkah

a temporary structure in which, according to tradition, Jews celebrate Sukkot

Schach

a translucent roof of a sukkah hut, which is woven from leafy branches

Ushpizim

mystical guests appearing in tents during the Feast of Sukkot, biblical fathers and rulers. Therefore, it is part of the tradition of the Feast of Tabernacles to invite both friends and as well as the poor, homeless, and lonely.

Arba minim

a bouquet with which Jews praise God during synagogue ceremonies and psalm recitations, which is meant to commemorate the exodus from Egypt and expresses faith in salvation. These are:

Etrog

citron, a plant that symbolizes people who possess knowledge and perform good deeds

Hadas

myrtle, a plant that is a symbol of an uneducated but righteous person


Arawa

willow, a plant that symbolizes those who are uneducated and do not practice the principles of faith

Lulav

a palm branch, a symbol of people who have biblical knowledge, scholars of the scriptures, whose deeds are not as perfect as their teachings

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