



## Montessori in the Woods - CURRICULUM SERIES

### Washing Linen

Washing linen activity (this is the official term coined by Maria Montessori - in reality it's washing school laundry) is in the Practical life (PL) section in the Montessori curriculum.

Practical life is the most important area in Montessori. This is where the most important preparation happens. This is the epicenter of the classroom. Not language and math! The more practical life activities the students do, the better prepared they are for math and language. PL is hands-on, concrete learning, which has so many layers of acquiring knowledge.

Washing linen consists of a bench on which 2 large wash basins sit along with a tray with soap, sponge and cloth. Inside one of the wash basins is a washboard (the old-fashioned washboard our grandmothers used to have), there is also a bucket for water beside it on the floor and an apron neatly folded inside the wash basin.



Why do our students wash linen? We have a lot of activities that require cloths, when the cloths get dirty, children place them into the laundry basket. Eventually, there are no more cloths! So how do we get more cloths? Someone has to wash them! Just like at home, someone has to do the laundry. So, washing linen (cloths) promotes the thinking of the collective good, as well as the individual developmental need to 'wash something', exercise their muscles, handle/carry water and have the feeling of water on their hands and trying out the washboard and so on. The child who is being shown this work surely has seen their older friends doing it and they wished and hoped to be "big" soon so they can do this work now too. To wash linen, certain prerequisite work has to take place. So many things need to be considered, this is not an easy activity. It requires roughly 35 or more steps to accomplish this work. Think about it, a 4 or 5 year old child keeping 35 steps in their mind, that is incredible! Those steps have to be followed one after the other. This is where logic comes in. Can the child have logical and practical thinking if he/she is just sitting in the class listening to someone to teach him abstractly, without touching, manipulating, smelling, carrying etc.? Or worse yet, learning from TV or computer/phone screen? The latter scenario leaves the child guessing and the child can only imagine what it would feel like to wash linen or to carry water etc. In our Montessori learning there is no guessing, the child gets to DO. This is why Montessori children are resourceful, practical, inventive and very inquisitive and they have a way with language and expressing (you might not see this yet with your small child, but in the future you will).

What are they learning from this work? As mentioned before, logic and sequence (awesome for math), volume (how much water to bring?), light and heavy (when they carry the water and pouring it in the wash basin). They learn about their strength (I can carry half a bucket, but not full, etc.), can I negotiate pouring water into the basin easily (according to how much water is in my bucket). If the steps are mixed up, for example, if they do not wet their cloth and start applying soap, they see the consequence and have to pause and figure out what they missed (logic), how dirty is the cloth they are washing, was there food spill or paint spill on it, that means they have to apply more strength and scrub more, when rinsing from the first scrubbing and a lot of soap is left in the cloth, the water in the next basin (for rinsing) will get soapy, if too much soap is used, everything gets soapy, hands get soapy and it's hard to manipulate things. When wringing the cloth and it's not wrung enough water will drip all over the floor and underneath the drying rack - that gives them information too, and also the consequence; they have to clean the floor now. They also learn some laws of physics - gravity for example (without knowing it). Finally, this teaches them about responsibility, if a mess is made it has to be cleaned, their activity has to be tidy and properly "wrapped up" and replenished so the next child who wants to do this work does not come to uninviting mess.

Like if what we said was not already a lot, but there is another purpose here, the child is working with hands and this is amazing preparation for writing, as the wrist and hand get great work out. They learn new vocabulary here, like washboard, wash basins and their mind go through all those steps etc. Another great point here is that the child's self-esteem rises after doing such work, as they see such accomplishment, smell the fresh laundry, see how hard they worked, maybe they noticed they can carry more water now without spilling or that they cleaned up so well etc. We do not give them high fives or golden stars or even say anything (we do sometimes say thank you for washing it, the basket was overflowing) they do not need rewards, they feel the inner satisfaction, the accomplishment and it makes them into a slightly new person every time they do something like this.

We could probably add more here, but you get the picture, and this is only one of the many PL works the child will be working on during their 3-year cycles; for example, sewing a button, polishing brass, grinding spices, washing table/chair to name a few.



Philip is getting water and preparing for washing linen.



Here he is pouring water into the second wash bin. Notice the concentration on his face.



Philip is applying soap on the wet cloth. Notice how nicely and neatly he spread out the cloth on the wash board.



Now he is starting to rub the cloth on the washboard.



Here he is rinsing the cloth in the second wash bin.



After rinsing, he is wringing the cloth so it's ready to be hung.



After wringing the water from the cloth, Philip is hanging it on the drying rack.



At the end Philip is cleaning the bench, sponging up all the spills he made.