

Take A Closer Look at Glass in Class

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Can Children Really Handle Glass?

Put away the plastic, parents. You really can have Glass at Home
A brave teacher takes on a touchy topic. Read Glass in Class
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Glass at Home

by Tim Seldin, *How to Raise an Amazing Child the Montessori Way*

Whenever possible, try to build a control of error into each activity so it becomes clear to your child when she has made a mistake. The rationale behind letting children use cups and bowls that break if they are dropped or misused is that children quickly learn to be careful and controlled when they use them. Mistakes are an opportunity for patiently showing your child once more how to do a task correctly, and generally lead to a new lesson in problem-solving: “How do we gather up all those beads?” or “How do we safely clean up the broken pieces?”

Select toys, tools, and other everyday items that your child will use on the basis of their appropriate size, ease of handling, and beauty. When you choose trays, pitchers, and other utensils for your child to use in everyday life, avoid things which are cheap and made of plastic. Look instead for the most attractive materials you can find and afford. Children respond to the beauty of wood, glass, silver, brass, and similar natural materials.

Young children absorb and remember every nuance of their early home environments. The aim is for **you to design activities that will draw your child’s interest and to create prepared surroundings that are harmonious and beautiful.**

Glass in Class

by Kelly Mannion, M. Ed.

Shall I use wood or plastic trays in my classroom? Work with traditional materials or make my own? **Have sewn polish cloths or let the children wrap the flannel squares around their tiny fingers? We’re pretty specific, we Montessorians.** We like things just so. We tend to prepare our environments somewhat methodically. Like most teachers, I have a rationale for a certain way of doing things and a preference to which I am unwaveringly committed.

So why glass? Ahh, the appeal of smooth, solid, aesthetically-**pleasing glass... the good weight in the hand that makes for real substance.** The swishing sound of grain poured into a glass bowl is just plain **satisfying.** **And who doesn’t get a little kick out of the clinking point of interest that a bean or a bead makes when it hits the bottom of a glass bowl?**

Let the Children do WHAT!?!

While I thought my trainers insightful for suggesting we provide real objects for the children, I thought it preposterous when they advised us to let the children experience firsthand the consequence of dropping a breakable glass —and then allow them to clean up themselves!

However, this convert will tell you there is nothing quite like watching the young child realize that a **broken glass or plate is not a disaster. It’s just a broken glass or plate** and it can be cleaned up simply,

easily, and proudly. That's the best part —when a child can take care of self and environment, the inner gratification is palpable.

I am obviously not proposing that our youngest children go around fiddling with bits of broken glass! Children can, however, develop competence and confidence when the consequences of a natural event are handled naturally. Allow the child to pick up pieces which are safe for that child and then you (the adult) finish the rest.

Take the time in the classroom, and at home, to allow children the satisfaction of caring for their environment —**it is simply an extension of “don't cry over spilled milk,” except the children clean up the milk and the glass!**

Rigid? Me?

We Montessori teachers are completely open to the unlimited potentials latent beneath the surface of **each child's exuberant face yet we tend to care deeply which way our pitcher handles point as they sit** on a tray. Dare I say we might even seem rigid? Why is that? Why are we so compelled to do things in **a certain way? I sometimes think it's the way we balance following the child. To enable the child's freedom, we have to be very picky about the child's environment.**

It may be a gift from my trainers, who first introduced me to the intricacies of Montessori philosophy **and practice. But let's be really honest, the legacy lives on in the children. For most of us, our “certain way” was introduced in our training and refined by years of observing children and their individual successes.**

Our trainers pointed out that the fragility of glass is a reality children will surely encounter and therefore a valid learning experience under controlled conditions —safe conditions created by doing **things a certain way. It's a good thing. So no matter which way we point the handles, our pitchers will be glass. And when the children experience a mishap that ends with broken glass, they'll learn to take care of it safely.**

– **Kelly Griffith Mannion's credentials include a Montessori Primary and a Lower Elementary Credential, as well as a Master's of Education in Early Childhood, Montessori Education. Kelly has worn many Montessori hats, acting at various times as a teacher, administrator, teacher trainer, and board member.**