

Language

By: Angela Adams

Maria Montessori defined language simply as “communication between people”. Language aids people in establishing and maintaining social relationships. Education of language is therefore, of supreme importance. The Montessori Method provides the child a means of learning language that harnesses the child’s natural development, and is fun and interesting. The child comes to discover the joys of being able to communicate effectively through speech, writing, and reading.

From birth to the age of six the child is in a Sensitive Period for language. A Sensitive Period is a brief and intense time in the child’s life during which he/she can acquire a certain trait, characteristic or skill easily. The Montessori language curriculum is designed to capitalize on this Sensitive Period through exposing the child to a rich vocabulary, role modeling of appropriate use of language, and intertwining language with all other areas of the curriculum. Works throughout the classroom are sequenced from left to right, top to bottom, like we read. The child’s fine motor skills, such as the pincer grasp, are developed and refined through works in Practical Life. The child’s language skills are also developed and refined through Grace and Courtesy lessons. The child gains a great deal of vocabulary that can be applied to the outside world through working with the Sensorial materials. Math activities provide the child with practice in writing numbers, and application of symbols. The Culture and Science areas of the classroom assist the child in expanding his/her vocabulary and knowledge of the world.

The Language area of the Montessori classroom is made up of Language Development activities, “Key Lessons for reading and writing”, Writing activities, Reading activities, and Function of Word/Word Study activities. Language Development activities aid the child in development of oral, auditory, visual, and motor skills. The child is also exposed to literature daily. Dr. Montessori’s “Key Lessons for Reading and Writing” include the I Spy game,

the Large Movable Alphabet, Metal Insets, and Sandpaper Letters. These materials were developed by Montessori to aid the child in development of important skills and awareness. Writing works in the Montessori classroom include materials that focus on the development of the mechanics of writing, and writing as expression. Reading works provide the child the ability to understand and interpret the symbolic communication of others.



Di'Nya demonstrates tracing sandpaper letters.

Montessori curriculum is also designed to build self-confidence and provide a sense of “effortless learning”. The child is matched with reading materials, for example, as he/she is ready for them. With this approach, the child works with a material until he/she has mastered it and is then guided on to the next work in the series. The child goes from matching three letter phonetic words with objects, to matching three letter phonetic words with pictures, to reading three letter phonetic words, and then four letter phonetic words, then five to seven letter phonetic words. Next the child is guided on to phonetic early reader books which increase in difficulty. The child is provided lessons on sight words, punctuation, double letter sounds, and exceptions like “silent e” as those aspects appear in the reader set. The child tends to approach reading in a confident and enthusiastic way when guided in this fashion and will say things like “Can we do another reading work today?”. I must say, those are some of my favorite moments as a teacher!

“Key Lessons for Reading and Writing”

All of the works in the Language curriculum are important. The following materials, however, are the ones that were developed by Dr. Maria Montessori herself. The rest of the Language curriculum has been further developed and enriched by Montessorians to follow.

The I Spy game provides the child with awareness of the sounds of his/her own language and the fact that words are composed of different sounds. The Large Moveable Alphabet helps the child in exploration and analysis of language, and allows the child to write even before he/she can maneuver a writing implement. The Metal Insets provide the child practice in using a writing instrument, and aid in the development of lightness of touch and keeping within the limits. The Sandpaper Letters allow the child to associate letter sounds with their symbols by means of tactile, visual, and auditory senses. Come watch a lesson or ask your child to show you these materials – they are wonderful!