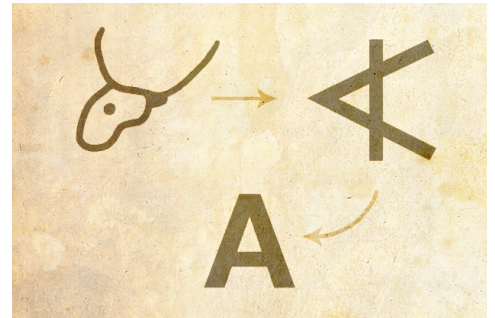


**“NOT ONLY DOES LANGUAGE FUSE MEN INTO GROUPS AND NATIONS, BUT IT IS THE CENTRAL POINT OF DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HUMAN SPECIES AND ALL OTHERS. LANGUAGE LIES AT THE ROOT OF THAT TRANSFORMATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT THAT WE CALL CIVILIZATION.”**

MARIA MONTESSORI



One of the most uniquely human abilities is the capacity for creating and understanding language. It is in our being that we have the tendency to communicate and socialize, to imitate and explore, and to discover and realize perfection. It was these tendencies, among others, that Maria Montessori discovered to be consistent across all types of people. These tendencies depend on our understanding of the world, our interactions in the world, and therefore, on our language. It is our language that allows us to communicate and form relationships, read and gain the knowledge needed to achieve a greater self. Language should be developed in the right environment: one that provides a healthy support structure and rich oral language experiences. This is evident in the structure behind the Montessori theory.

Language is an important part of the entire Montessori curriculum. Its

#### LANGUAGE

“A system of symbols with an agreed upon meaning that is used by a group of people. Language is a means of communication ideas or feelings by the use of conventionalized sounds and signs, thus, being the spoken and written language.”

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treatment as a separate subject comes only at the points in which it is necessary to give clarity to the child's mind – that is, to give him or her conscious awareness of language in order that it may be used more effectively. In the lower elementary classroom, the child begins to explore the various ways that language is organized and differentiated.

The Montessori Language curriculum is divided into four subareas: Grammar, Sentence Analysis, Word Study, and Mechanics. There are physical materials to teach parts of speech, sentence analysis, and grammar. These help make understanding the English language enticing and exciting while creating an understanding that moves from concrete to abstract. Grammar is introduced with inspirational stories of the function of words and organized for independent activity in the Command and Grammar Boxes. Children learn the function of words formally and then informally applying that knowledge to their reading and writing. Using symbols for the parts of speech, children can explore creating and decomposing paragraphs and sorting and classifying the grammar. Eventually these symbols can be used to examine the writing styles of authors of literature read at this level. Sentences are analyzed and understood in similar fashion using the sentence analysis materials.

The child's first introduction to each concept in all areas of the Language curriculum is called a **Key Experience**. Demonstrated by the teacher using objects and/or pictures, the Key Experience is the most concrete representation of the topic and repeated each year. The child is then directed to work on a series of lessons independently that develop his skills of the concept at hand. This follow-up work allows the child to practice what they have just learned with the use of the skyscrapers—a cabinet with labeled drawers containing multiple practice lessons of each concept—as well as with other materials. It is important to make the first presentation within each topic as concrete as possible. The use of objects and pictures, demonstration of writing, brainstorming examples together, etcetera, allows the child to build his skills concretely. Once he has a good grasp of the concepts in a concrete manner, only then should the child should utilize the lessons provided in the skyscraper. These lessons contain words only and are the most abstract representations of the concepts being taught.

**Grammar** in the lower elementary Montessori classroom is the foundation for the child's understanding of the function of words. Through extensive experiences, the child works through the various ways of understanding the nine

parts of speech: the noun, article, adjective, verb, preposition, adverb, pronoun, conjunction and the interjection. A 'miniature environment' serves as a way for the six year old to embark on his understanding of the parts of speech; again, this is the most concrete level of practice the child does independently. The Command Boxes and Grammar Boxes are organized for independent activity, allowing the child to abstractly put his new skills to practice once he has a solid understanding of the concepts concretely. Children learn the function of words formally and then informally, applying that knowledge to their reading and writing. Using symbols for the parts of speech, children can explore creating paragraphs and sorting and classifying the grammar. Eventually these symbols can be used to examine the writing styles of authors of literature read at this level. This progression of the curriculum enables a child to feel confident in his understanding of the function of words.

The **Sentence Analysis** curriculum begins once the child is introduced to the verb in grammar and then continues concurrently with the remaining grammar studies. This is because the child must have some understanding of basic word functions before understanding the relationship words can have when placed together in a sentence. Sentence Analysis is presented in three stages: reading analysis, sentence construction, and logical analysis. Reading analysis provides the child the opportunity to read and analyze simple sentences in terms of its parts. They begin to understand how words placed together influence their relationship and gives meaning to language all together. Then the child progresses by sentence construction, where the child forms sentences on his own and analyzes the relationships of the different parts. Once the child has had extensive practice and is proficient in the analysis of sentences, he is ready for the third stage: logical analysis. This final stage is the most abstract of the stages and occurs at two levels. In Level 1, the child gains a true understanding of the meaning and function of words in a sentence. Using simple sentences, the child is introduced to the terms 'predicate', 'subject', and 'direct object'. The first sentences contain only a noun (subject) and a verb (predicate) and gradually progresses to more complex

sentences that contain a subject, predicate and direct object. In the second level, knowledge acquired in the first level is strengthened through the analysis of more complex sentences, and then expands on these concepts, introducing indirect objects and adverbials. The first level is the focus in the lower elementary classroom and the second is explored in the upper elementary classroom.

In the **Word Study** curriculum, the child discovers the different ways of constructing words. The child also learns how the various ways of the construction of words can manipulate their meaning. The compound words, prefix and suffix lessons demonstrate how new words can be constructed by combining root words or by adding groups of letters to a root word. With antonyms and synonyms, the child learns that two words can have opposite or similar meanings. Presentations on homophones, homonyms, and homographs allows the child to understand that words can have things in common, such as their spelling or pronunciation, but can also carry very different meanings. The skyscrapers contain many follow-up lessons to these concepts however, as discussed before, they are the most abstract representation of the concepts and should be used once the child has worked through the more concrete lessons.

In the area of **Mechanics**, the child learns the skills they need to know when writing sentences: capitalization and punctuation. The first topic presented to the child in this area is capitalization. The child already has some knowledge of the two different types of letters, uppercase and lowercase letters, making capitalization a logical starting point. Their awareness of the letters allows an instant connection in their understanding of this new concept of mechanics. The child then learns many other uses of capitalization: particular names, using the word "I", the days of the week, the months of the year, geographical locations, and proper names to name a few. Next, the child learns the period, another of the mechanics concepts he is already familiar with. He is introduced to the two purposes of the period: to stop a sentence and to abbreviate words. Through a variety of lessons, he is able to comprehend the differences between sentences and phrases and how to turn phrases into sentences. The remaining concepts of the Mechanics area are the

question mark, exclamation mark, apostrophe, comma, quotation marks, hyphen, and colon. These lessons teach the child many of the ways he can use mechanics to add expression to his writing.

**W**hile the teacher herself instills the beauty of language through her interactions among children, the Montessori Language materials further enhance language acquisition. The importance of language in the classroom parallels the distinction it has within mankind. The Montessori environment provides the child with all he needs to become a master of the spoken and written word. It is his mastery [of language] that will guide him to reach his full potential, exercise his imagination, allow him to have confidence in his abilities and in his voice, thus laying the foundation of his future creations and ultimately, his impact on our world.

**"NOT ONLY CAN IMAGINATION TRAVEL THROUGH INFINITE SPACE, BUT ALSO THROUGH INFINITE TIME; WE CAN GO BACKWARDS THROUGH THE EPOCHS, AND HAVE THE VISION OF THE EARTH AS IT WAS, WITH THE CREATURES THAT INHABITED IT."**

**MARIA MONTESSORI**

*Outline the formal teaching of reading in a Montessori classroom. Include information about phonics, writing, grammar, word study, mechanics, and research. Include information from various language texts used about the components of a whole language program and how these components integrate with the Montessori materials and method.*

**"A CHILD DOES NOT READ UNTIL HE RECEIVES  
IDEAS FROM THE WRITTEN WORD."**

MARIA MONTESSORI,  
THE DISCOVERY OF THE CHILD

As the basis for all communication, there is no area more integrated with the balance of the curriculum than language. Language is an important part of the entire Montessori curriculum. Its treatment as a separate subject comes only at the points in which it is necessary to give clarity to the child's mind – that is, to give him or her conscious awareness of language in order that it may be used more effectively. Otherwise, while still presenting the child with the practical tools for encoding and decoding words, sentences and paragraphs, the study of language is never seen as an isolated exercise. Geometry is language. Botany is language. Math is language. Zoology is language. Cosmic studies are language. In this way, the students never lose sight of the power of language as a means of conveying ideas.

In the lower elementary classroom, the child begins to explore the various ways that language is organized and differentiated. Montessori recognized that a child actually goes through two sensitive periods for language development: one is the periods from birth to about five years old, the other is from the age of about six to nine years. The first period is concerned with the more sensorial aspects and the voicing and repetition of simple sounds, then moves to the crucial understanding that everything has its own name. Furthermore, there is an increasing interest in the elements of sound and shape, and ultimately the child moves on to his abilities of writing, reading, and increasing explorations into the communication of meaning.

During the lower elementary years (6-9), the child has a fascination with construction and is able to express this with his grammar studies. A child will progress from an emergent reader to an independent and proficient reader, using phonetic decoding, contextual clues and sight words. Vocabulary and comprehension are enhanced by learning to use dictionaries and other research tools, and also by the grammar studies including parts of speech and sentence analysis. Mechanics such as handwriting, punctuation, and spelling also receive attention in the classroom. Writing study moves from physical proficiency to areas of composition, including revising and editing, factual and creative writing, development of ideas, and research skills. Montessori found that reading occurred only when the child had made the connection with the written word. The child is exposed to classic and current fictional and non-fictional literature, as well as reference books sparking both their imagination and knowledge of the world around them.