



Montessori Matters

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Language and the Primary-Age Child

It is necessary for the teacher to guide the child without letting him feel her presence too much, so that she may always be ready to supply the desired help, but may never be the obstacle between the child and his experience.

- Dr. Maria Montessori

LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT FROM THREE TO SIX YEARS

Second in a series on Language by Lilian Bryan

This is a continuation of an article published in the January 2010 issue, where we looked at the language development in children from birth to three. We discussed that the first three years are primarily a period of absorption of language, internalizing all aspects of the language spoken around him, which includes vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, pronunciation, as well as understanding even subtle meanings and recognizing language as a tool for communication. From the time he was a newborn, every language exposure and every language experience has contributed to the child's construction of his language. By 2 ½ - 3 years the child is ready to make use of all she has absorbed. At this point the child can express herself at an astonishingly sophisticated level with great enthusiasm and energy. Montessori refers to this veritable outburst of language expression as an "explosion into language". Of course, one must realize that any child who takes a little longer to reach this stage of verbal expression is not at all slow of mind, but he has spent a longer time listening and absorbing, which usually gives the child even better language skills.

At about age three the child loves to talk, talk, talk. Now is the time when there is much we can do for the child to expand and enrich his language. We must not underestimate the child's ability to learn without effort, absorbing all aspects of language perfectly, and building his intellect through language. The first six years are critical periods in learning, depending very much on the language opportunities we offer the child.

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Here are some recommendations for parents of the child age 3-6 years:

- When the child speaks, or attempts to speak, we should listen attentively. Look into her eyes and wait while she formulates her thoughts before expressing them in words.
- Give the child time to complete her message. Confirm that you have listened by saying things like “Is that right?” “I am happy to hear that” “Tell me more.”
- Ask for details, such as, “What animals did you like best when you were at the zoo?” “What does that animal look like?” etc.
- When the child says grammatically incorrect words (such as ‘eated’), do not make a point of correcting him. Instead, paraphrase back the whole sentence using the correct terminology. “You **ate** lunch with your friends?” Paraphrasing confirms that you really listened to your child, and he will inadvertently hear the correct form of speech.
- When there is much adult conversation going on in the home, give your child a chance to chime in. Dinnertime is a great opportunity for family conversations, when the child should have his turn to speak.
- Teach your family good manners of not interrupting. Every member of the family – adults included – must follow these rules.
- Build up your child’s literacy by making books an enjoyable part of everyday life in the family. Let your children observe how much you like to read. Replace TV time with reading time. Read to the child daily, often best done at bedtime. Frequently bring in new books. Also, read familiar books the child wishes to hear again. Introduce the child to going to the library, or browsing in a bookstore. The selection of books should follow these criteria: Stories should reflect reality, because young children cannot yet discern fantasy from reality. They are learning from every book – why not about nature, adventure, life in different parts of the world, etc. Why confuse them with nonsensical fantasy. Young children will dwell on fantasy they see and hear, which is a deterrent to learning about the real world. After age six, children delight in fantasy, because they understand what is fantasy and what is reality. The books you choose for your child should be written intelligently, with beautifully selected words. Many children’s books ‘dumb down’ to children – what a pity. Select books with artistic illustrations, rather than garish cartoons. Your child’s aesthetic sense is formed by what he is exposed to.
- Bring poetry into your home. Reading poetry, reciting poetry and making up rhymes are enjoyed by all children.
- Sing lots of songs! Songs appeal to all children and they are another wonderful source for language enrichment. Make up songs; sing a request instead of speaking it.
- Enrich your child’s vocabulary by naming everything he encounters. For example, shopping for flowers, give the precise name of the flowers. Listening to music, name the composer and name the piece being played. Name the dog walking down the street, name the trees around your house, and name the birds coming to your bird feeder.

You might say that you can’t possibly know all those names – but remember that

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there are field guides that help identify every plant and every animal. Start collecting field guides and use them to look up names. Your child will have no difficulty remembering names, because he is still in the stage of absorbing language, rather than learning language by rote memorization, like adults do.

- Around the age of four, your child will become interested in the graphic symbols for the language he has learned to speak. It will make learning to write and read much easier for him, if you give him the sound of each letter, rather than its name. For example, the letter C: its name is “see” which is not what it sounds like in a word. Therefore, we should give the pure sound “c” like in cup, or candy. Or, “M” is not “em”, simply “m” like in mother, or milk. Play this ‘Sound Game’ with your child, making sure to make it fun for him. Once he can hear the sounds in words and recognize the symbols for each sound, he is well on his way to writing and reading.
- It is important not to pressure children to write and read. It is an arrival that happens spontaneously and joyfully when the child has been prepared. There are some wonderful activities in the Montessori classroom that help prepare the child. Parents must trust that writing and reading is a developmental process that will come at the right time for each child.

Finally, I want to emphasize that language skills are very much affected by one’s self-confidence. Haven’t we experienced that we stutter or can’t find the right words when we are upset or unsure of ourselves? In the same way, the child must have a healthy self-image and self-confidence to be able to express himself clearly and to venture into reading and writing without fear. The child will build up his self-confidence by learning to master tasks. From accomplishing very simple tasks to more complex tasks, the child gains confidence in his abilities. Every independent action leads the child to feel sure about himself, to trust in himself and to be open to new experiences. Parents can support this important aspect of their child’s development by giving their child every chance to act for himself and by himself.

The positive outcome cannot be overestimated. If we give the right help and support, the child will emerge to become a joyous and confident child who is at ease with his own spoken language skills and who ventures into the world of the written word with

MIT Hosts Guest Speakers in March

On Thursday, March 11 international Montessori trainer, school consultant and parenting expert Lilian Bryan (see article above) will speak to families about Montessori as an education for life. Space is limited, so we request that parents and their guests reserve a seat. Ms. Bryan's talk will be held at Montessori In Town's Poncey Highland campus from 6:30-8:00 p.m. On Friday, March 26 Jackie Hornbeck-Wall will host a Morning Coffee at Montessori In Town's Glen Castle campus from 8:45-10:00 a.m. As an AMI-trained practitioner and educational director at the Assistants to Infancy (birth to three years) level, Jackie will talk with parents of young children about toddlers and readiness for the Montessori Primary (three to six years) program including toileting and supporting independence at home. RSVPs may be made by telephone (404-784-1038) or email (nikki-mit@mindspring.com).

Annual TV Turn-Off Potluck

April 19 marks the start of
National TV Turn-Off Week!

This nationally recognized event dovetails wonderfully with Montessori philosophy and the idea that children learn through real life experiences.

Here at MIT we will kick off this special week with a family event: our annual potluck dinner. Join us on **Monday, April 19th at the Poncey Highland campus from 6:00-7:30 p.m.** So mark your calendars and plan on joining us for good food and plenty of outdoor fun.

Stay tuned for more details to follow in the upcoming weeks!

CONSIDER A CAREER AS A MONTESSORI TEACHER

THE MONTESSORI INSTITUTE OF ATLANTA WILL BE HOLDING TWO FREE INFORMATION SESSIONS FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE PRIMARY (AGES 3-6+) AND ELEMENTARY (AGES 6-12) TRAINING PROGRAMS IN ATLANTA:

SUNDAY, MARCH 21, 2010
2:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

TUESDAY, APRIL 27, 2010
6:30 P.M. – 8:30 P.M.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:
WWW.MONTESSORI-MIA.ORG

RSVP: 404-325-7264

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MARCH 11: PARENT EVENING
WITH LILIAN BRYAN
6:30 – 8:00 P.M.
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS

MARCH 26: MORNING COFFEE
WITH JACKIE HORNBECK-WALL
8:45 – 10:00 A.M.
GLEN CASTLE CAMPUS

MARCH 29: CLASS PHOTOS
GLEN CASTLE CAMPUS

MARCH 30: CLASS PHOTOS
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS

MARCH 31: EARLY DISMISSAL
CONFERENCES BEGIN
12:00 NOON DISMISSAL

APRIL 1-2: PARENT CONFERENCES
NO SCHOOL

APRIL 5-9: SPRING BREAK
NO SCHOOL

APRIL 17: OUTDOOR WORKDAY
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS
GLEN CASTLE CAMPUS
9:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

APRIL 19: TV TURN-OFF POTLUCK
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS
6:00 P.M. – 7:30 P.M.

MAY 21: LAST DAY OF SCHOOL
12:00 NOON DISMISSAL

JUNE 7-11 & 14-18: CAMP LADYBUG
PONCEY HIGHLAND CAMPUS

JULY 5-9 & 12-16: CAMP LADYBUG
GLEN CASTLE CAMPUS

Camp Ladybug

Camp Ladybug is back! Montessori In Town children and their friends and neighbors (turning 3 to 6 years old) are invited to join us for summer-time fun. Sessions I (June 7-11) and II (June 14-18) will be held at the Poncey Highland campus and Sessions III (July 5-9) and IV (July 12-16) will be held at the Glen Castle campus. Campers will enjoy a hands-on nature-based camp including gardening, art, cooperative games, water play, and picnic lunches. Registrations may be found on our website or by contacting Claire at montintownoffice@gmail.com

OBSERVATION: THE HEART OF OUR WORK WITH CHILDREN

by Anne King, Primary Guide

Montessori teachers know that observation is at the core of our work and our relationships with children. Observation is a skill we are trained in and yet, when we put it into practice in our classrooms, we realize how much work it takes to become proficient at it. Over time, we learn to observe and guide gently. Observation was the topic at our annual AMI Montessori Refresher Course this year.

We spent the better part of a weekend rediscovering and going deeper into this vital part of our work, looking at it both from a spiritual/personal as well as a scientific point of view.

Everything we learn about the children in our lives (in our classrooms, our families, our society) is enhanced and improved by observation. In our classrooms we like to challenge ourselves, before ever stepping into a situation, to "wait and see" with the understanding that any correction or help should serve the development of the child. Dr. Montessori said, "Wait, and observe while waiting". When I reflect upon the valuable insights and experiences I have gained each time I have willed myself to "wait and see" I feel awed and inspired. Children show us so much when when allow them to unfold before us.

I would urge all parents to continually strive to increase and improve their moments and experiences of observing their children. As adults, watching and listening to children is at the heart of our work with them. So often children show us and tell us so much more than we ever would have expected. When we commit to "wait, and observe while waiting" and to guide gently based on our observations, we find our understanding of children and our connection to them will deepen and improve daily.



Become a Fan of MIT

Facebook users, did you know Montessori In Town has its own fan page? Join our group and invite your friends and family to join as well. Let's not let Montessori education remain the best-kept secret!

SENSORY INTEGRATION AND FLOORTIME: LEARN MORE ABOUT IT

On March 24, *Floortime Atlanta* will offer its popular **DIR/Floortime overview for parents** from 7:00 – 8:30 p.m. The overview will explore DIR/Floortime philosophy in supporting children with difficulties relating and communicating. This is a developmental and relationship-based approach that is increasingly used by parents, therapists and schools who serve children with a wide range of developmental difficulties. The presentation will include a description of the model, videotape illustrations, and Q + A. The cost of the overview is \$15.00 per family and pre-registration is strongly encouraged to reserve your space. To register or for further details, please email *Floortime Atlanta* at infor@floortimeatlanta.com or visit their website www.floortimeatlanta.com

Some may also want to explore the **Social Thinking Groups** for children 5 and up led by Julie Carnes (LPC at *Floortime Atlanta*). Offered throughout the summer, these groups provide children an opportunity to better understand themselves and others through interactive play with like-aged peers. Group sizes are limited to maximize situation specific coaching and exploration. For more information contact Nikki for a brochure or email Julie Carnes at: j_carnes@bellsouth.net

Decatur-based Occupational Therapist Christy Kennedy offers useful and practical information for parents and caregivers through her **Sensory Integration workshops**. This four-part series explores the following: an overview of sensory processing; creating a “sensory diet” for making a difference at home and school; empowering children to manage their feelings and behavior; and how to support and reinforce skills at home.

Christy also offers a summer program entitled **Move, Feel, Learn ~ Live It!** The program for children ages 4-6 will be held the week of June 21. This program will integrate gross motor activities, fine and perceptual motor activities, oral motor and respiratory activities, the “engine” program (self-regulation), and social/emotional development in an active playgroup setting. More information can be found at: christykennedyot.com

Why We Introducing Cursive Before Print and How Parents Can Support this at Home

by Jeanie Fox, Primary Guide

There are many reasons we introduce cursive writing to young children in the classroom. First, in cursive writing, there is less confusion between the cursive forms ('b,' 'd,' 'p,' 'q') as with manuscript forms. Cursive writing is also a more natural way for your child to write because the pencil will flow along the paper without frequent stopping within and between letters. Circular movements in the young child developmentally correspond to the circular movements in cursive writing, making it easier and more natural for the child to write. Since cursive writing is used primarily throughout one's life, it should be learned first when the interest is

not only their letters through cursive, but they are taught the phonetic letter sounds, as opposed to letter names. This avoids any confusion between the name of a letter versus the sound that letter makes.

Supporting this learning and teaching style at home with your child will be consistent with what we are teaching your child in the classroom, and will be less confusing for them. For example, teaching the letter sounds and not the letter names: *this is the letter that makes the sound 'a'* (as in apple, not the name "ay"). You can play sound games with your child, such as 'I spy,' which focus on letter sounds in words. Try tracing cursive letters (and later words) on your child's back, in the sand or in the air for your child to see or feel, write the letters in cursive on chalkboards or paper. You could even trade off tracing and naming the sound. Supporting how your child learns to read and write in this way is not only developmentally appropriate, but it also reinforces what is learned at school.

Montessori In Town Aids Relief Efforts in Haiti

Our hearts and thoughts have gone out to the hundreds of thousands of people who have been affected by the earthquake in Haiti. Through our affiliation with AMI/USA we received word from Maguy Cléirié, an AMI teacher at the *Boucledart Maison des Enfants* in Haiti. The school itself has incurred serious structural damage. More urgent, however, is the impact that the earthquake has had on the teachers and staff at the school, many of whom have lost not only their employment but also their homes and family members.

On behalf of our children, Montessori In Town has made a donation to the Montessori Haiti Relief Fund established by AMI/USA.

Ms. Cléirié says, "The greatest hope provided by the promise of aid is the ability to help the school faculty, staff and their families rebuild and bring some normalcy back into their lives...Words cannot express how profoundly touched I am by the generosity and support I have received from AMI/USA. I am truly fortunate to be part of such a wonderful community."

If you are able to donate to this cause, please send a check made out to AMI/USA to the Montessori Haiti Relief Fund, c/o AMI/USA, 410 Alexander St., Rochester NY 14607. If you would like to make a donation by credit card, please call their office: 585-461-5920.