Neena Massey  
June 16, 2002  
Language Rationale

I, along with my classmates, have been given the incredible task of writing a rationale paper on language. Language is so vast and limitless. It is also fundamental in every culture. In the Advanced Montessori Method I, Maria says, "Imagination is the seed that germinates children to learn." I believe this imagination is best exemplified in a Montessori classroom. By using their imaginations, will and eagerness to learn, children must undoubtedly find the language curriculum a joy to learn. I feel that making the workday exciting promotes hard work. Setting children up for success instead of failure further permits them to think better and be more confident about themselves. This is the preparation they will need to learn language.

It is best to discuss the history of the spoken word first to children so that they realize that speaking came before writing, and that sounds led to words. The need for communication led directly to speaking. The ideas that children get in their heads about how things began always fascinate me. My personal theory is that the first words were taken directly from the natural sounds of human infants when trying to communicate to their mothers and families. I am eager to hear what the students’ theories are. This discussion, along with many others, can lead to some interesting research for the students.

The reason that we present the history of writing to Montessori elementary students is so that they understand the evolution of writing. We introduce the time line of writing and how it sprouted all over the globe to give the children an overall picture of different writing styles and how these styles evolved over time and through different cultural influences.
Children in the lower elementary classroom are in the sensitive period for social interaction, which can be further developed through writing. There are some excellent examples of Montessori materials that are used in helping children write. Sandpaper letters are key to use in teaching writing and reading in the classroom. This is because it gives the students a very concrete version of a letter before taking it to abstraction. The sensory appeal of the sandpaper adds to the stimulation and interest of the child.

Also, the moveable alphabet helps children express and prepare themselves for writing, and helps develop fine motor skills for precise handwriting. This is especially evident for cursive. The beauty of the moveable alphabet is that it is so versatile. It is possible to do almost any type of word assignment, sentence building, or grammar study using the moveable alphabet. The vowels highlighted are an added benefit to this material. It is also another example of taking a concrete object to abstraction.

One of the most popular materials the children use to help set the foundation for writing is the metal inset. Using the metal inset, students develop the hand-eye coordination, timing and precision it takes to be able to eventually write letters. Their fine motor skills, hand control and muscle development in the hand are all addressed using the metal inset. They can also learn various names of shapes and make beautiful designs, which adds to the appeal.

While the students are learning to write, they will, will the guidance and patience of parents, teachers and other students, explode into reading! I really liked the use of that term because that's most likely what it feels like for children. How exciting it must be to be able to decipher the code of English after hard and diligent work of phonetically sounding things out and piecing it all together. A big key to learning reading is practice.
I myself have observed the children and feel that they really benefit from the consistency reading gives them. Telling the children the Introduction to Reading story will excite them and spark their imagination even further. There is some really high quality literature available for children, so going to the library or bookstore is hardly ever a boring task for a child. That also makes reading more exciting. After the student has learned to read, reading analysis leads to word functions and grammar studies. It opens the door for students to explore the richness of language.

Some other works used to teach reading are the object boxes and secret booklets. The object boxes are a series of boxes with miniature phonetic objects all having a similar theme. For instance, everything in object box I may have a same phonetic sound but be spelled differently and the students discover these ideas on their own. The object boxes get more abstract, and introduce more phonemes as time goes by. The children become very familiar with the words and objects and learn a lot in the process of doing the work. Secret booklets are another technique used to teach children phonograms while the idea of the booklet being something only that student can see makes the student feel special. These activities give the students an exciting work, while also taking them from the concrete to the abstract, in complete steps.

Activities that show whether a child comprehends reading are the command cards, research reports, and any work that the child loves. They are given various activities that require them to recall, interpret, apply, analyze, synthesize and evaluate what they have read. In other words, if a child is able to recreate through analysis or action what he/she has read, then comprehension has taken place. Also children that are able to retell a story that they hear is evidence of comprehension. As Maria Montessori says in Advanced
Montessori Method II. "In telling a story there is a successive unfolding of very complex mental activities which are based on and added to the primal activity of having understood...Thus, the child who succeeds in expressing, even in an imperfect way, what he has understood of the passage he has read, is in a more advanced state of development than other children who are unable to tell the story." (Pp 177-178)

Students in a Montessori class benefit from a series of lessons called the Function of Words. I find this to be one of the most exciting and symbolic ideas in the Montessori language curriculum. Students place different symbols above words in a sentence and therefore learn what each word's function is. They also learn comprehensively what each word does, why some words name things, why some words are actions and why some words are connectors between other words and ideas. This is a wonderfully creative way to teach children grammar. It reminds me of how uneventful my grammar studies were growing up, and I am very excited to be able to recreate this a more colorful and clarifying sense for the students that I am teaching.

Students in the lower elementary classroom are in a sensitive period for word study and voraciously thirst for knowledge of words. This is why it is important and conducive to teach word study. Grammar boxes help in this sense along with the function of words. The grammar boxes are nice, neat containers introducing different sentence phrases and teach the students what each phrase means. Children learn more in depth about the relationships between words and sentences and how they are formed. This is one of the key works in addition to function of words, of teaching grammar to children.
The most exciting aspect of the curriculum is the idea that everything is interrelated. I can envision the language section of teaching to be very effective as it overlaps and intersects other content areas of study, such as the Universe, Living World, and virtually all other subjects. It is obviously important to teach cultural studies for this reason. It gives the children a chance to integrate the curriculum, get excited about what they are learning, and most importantly to realize everything really does overlap in life.

Language is obviously a very important part of the Montessori curriculum. This conclusion can be drawn because it is one of the 5 Great Lessons. In the Great Lesson discussion with children, language can be used to illustrate the path traced by language through travel, trade, commerce, war, etc., how humans have named everything, and most importantly that language is an expression of the creative force of humanity.

The goal of the Montessori curriculum is to expose children to a vast array of rich and diverse activities to help stimulate their interest and fascination with language. My goal in teaching the language program is to enlighten students to the magic of learning and becoming more confident about using their language abilities in speaking, writing, listening and hearing. I want them to discover that cultural studies engages so much language and to become familiar the cultural diversities of all people. I also plan to teach students that there are many ways to communicate, and many languages in which to do so. I am fortunate enough to work in a bilingual school so my students get plenty of language richness all the time.

I personally have been very fascinated with language since I was very young. I grew up in a multilingual home and my pursuits in language study, travel and love of culture have led me down the road I am now on. I am excited about becoming a
Montessori teacher and hope that I can transfer my excitement and enthusiasm to the children I am sharing time with.

Bibliography

