

Speech Development

The child's most receptive period to learn language is up until the age of six.



Maria Montessori describes language as a psychic organ, indeed it can even be seen as an organ of the human brain. However, no child is born with a language. The respective language is something learned, so the child has to learn it himself. "This is not work in the real sense, because the child joyfully absorbs and incarnates language without tiring. This ensures that the child adapts to its surroundings and harmonises with its immediate surroundings."⁴

For the first two and a half years of life, Maria Montessori schematically illustrated language development (see page 9).

In this phase, learning the language becomes a joyful experience for the child. It follows an inner urge and therefore the effort is a pleasure. The child takes us by the hand and we let the child's willingness guide us. We are guided by it, when it shows interest and how long it is ready to receive.

Maria Montessori describes the teacher's attitude as follows: "If we don't want to reduce language work to teaching and lessons, we adults have to prepare in a special way. We have to be in love with the language ourselves, then our own attitude will also give the children the necessary appreciation."



Lotte Ingrisch wrote in her book „The New Butterfly School“: „We have to become children and magicians again, all of us. Teacher and student, and don't both learn from each other? If they don't, an impermeable wall will separate them. You can neither teach nor learn through a wall. One remains untouchable for one another. And don't you just discover that teaching is only good if a common rhythm of breathing connects teacher and student? It's like in music. Conductor, orchestra and singer - if you breathe together, art is created."⁵

Children develop their language skills by listening to adults as they speak, or by encouraging them to speak up and play along if they enjoy playing with sounds and words.

⁴ Baiba Krumins Grazzini: Das Lied des Lebens. In: Das Kind. Zeitschrift für Montessori-pädagogik. Heft 46, 2. Halbj. 2009, S. 54 ff. Hrsg. Deutsche Montessori Gesellschaft e. V. Wiesbaden

⁵ Lotte Ingrisch: Die Neue Schmetterlingsschule, Langen/Müller, München 2006, S. 67/68

Children develop their language skills by listening to and watching adults speak. The language model of the educator is important (articulation, terms, sentence structure, communication style).

How could a language-stimulating environment be experienced by children? In her book „Promoting young children with Maria Montessori“⁹, Claudia Schäfer emphasizes the following six aspects:

- The teacher enjoys the language and is a role model for the children.
- The teacher pays attention to good pronunciation and does not speak too quickly.
- The teacher takes into account that some children understand more than they actively speak and therefore does not underestimate them.

Small requests such as: „Will you help me prepare the snack? Did you get the knives?“ Promote understanding of language and the feeling of being important to the community.

- The educator clearly formulates a request: „The stick on the climbing frame is too dangerous. Please give it to me. You'll get it back later.“
- Actions are accompanied with simple words: „Come on, we're going to the carpet.“



Language is a living thing. Childlike language only develops in oral communication and in lively speaking situations:

- Every child is given time to speak, everyone is listened to carefully (so it doesn't have to be loud to be heard).
- Talking in small groups
- Joint viewing of pictures in which the children are encouraged to speak about themselves; e.g. „A Whole World“ by Couprie and Louchar.
- Children love reading books in which they can experience the meaning of writing.



⁹ Claudia Schäfer: Kleinkinder fördern mit Maria Montessori, Herder Verlag, Freiburg, 2006

Learning to write

Writing as a way to language



Maria Montessori recognized at the beginning of her pedagogical work around 1900 that the usual effort in learning to write is caused by the approach of adults. She discovered that it is a great pleasure for children to study letters, that the only thing that matters is the right time. She noticed that learning to read and write does not start when they start school.

At the age of two to three years, the child observes that writing is of great importance to adults. The child tries to imitate this by scribbling on paper and then reading it out. Soon afterwards the child discovers that it is not enough to simply “scribble”, but that it is probably a question of certain characters that have to be put together, so they can be written and read.



To get to know these characters, the child is provided with the sandpaper letters. It is especially fun for little children to hear a sound and to see and feel a mysterious sign.

Writing precedes reading because the child's own thoughts are already known. Writing doesn't just start with real writing. Each step builds on a previous step in development.

Exercise with tactile boards

The educator brings the touch boards to the sand box and smooths the sand.

The educator shows the child a tactile board and uses it to trace the figure with a finger. Then the educator traces this shape into the sand box.

The child, in turn, feels the shape by tracing the figure with a finger and then traces it into the sand with a finger or stylus.

The child then repeats this exercise with the various tactile boards.



Symmetry exercise with mirror

The educator fetches a mirror and coloured paper (complementary colours, e.g. red-green). The educator places the papers under each half and places the mirror vertically in the middle of the sand box as an axis of symmetry.

The educator draws a shape on one side of the mirror and together they look at how the mirror doubles this shape symmetrically. After removing the mirror, the educator completes the missing drawing on the other side.



Making letters from plasticine

Designing letters out of plasticine is an intensive process. When preparing, the hands are immediately woken up and fine motor skills and kinesthetic sense are trained. The visual memory and the imagination of length and position are intensively promoted when producing individual letters from plasticine. The child can deal with each letter extensively, can perceive it plastically and compare it again and again with the flat alphabet.

Together with the child, the educator brings a dirt-resistant smooth work surface and the plasticine to a table. In addition, sandpaper letters are laid out as an example above the work space.

A portion of plasticine is taken and kneaded gently. It is then rolled out with the palms into one or more even sausage shapes. A letter is taken from the alphabet and the required estimated length is taken from one of the kneaded sausages.

The letters are formed with the plasticine letter on the work surface. Letters or short words can be designed.

Now the child can repeat the process. Thus, with this work, the reading and writing processes are combined. Maria Montessori speaks of embryonically fused reading and writing.



Secretary game for phonetic reading

The educator prepares a tray, attractively set-out with a pencil and crayons, strips of paper, scissors and a stapler.

In the first step, the educator fetches objects or animals with a phonetic - literal - description from the farm, for example a cow, a chicken, a pig, a dog.



The educator shows the child an object. The child names it and the educator writes the name on a piece of paper. This is clearly visible in front of the child, who sits on the left side of the educator.



The educator „paints“ letter by letter with their most beautiful writing, so that each letter can be easily perceived or read by the child. The educator does the same with the other objects.



In the next step, the educator mixes the paper strips and asks the child to re-assign them to the animals. If this does not work properly, the educator does not correct the child, but observes or perceives what the child can do.

Some children also copy the words or trace over the words that the educator personally wrote for them.

Now the educator asks the children to get something that has no name. The children immediately notice that they cannot bring anything if they do not know the name of the objects.



Article game

As with the secretary game, the educator writes for the child the name of an animal from the farm on a piece of paper - this time, however, the educator writes the article in front of the name with a light blue pen.



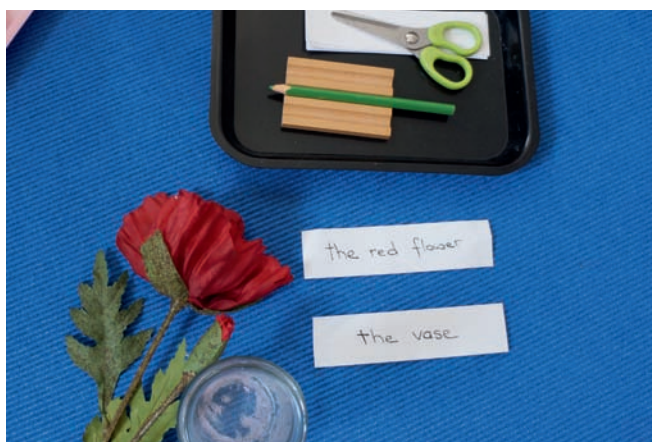
The children notice that they can put a “the” in front of the animal names.



Preposition game

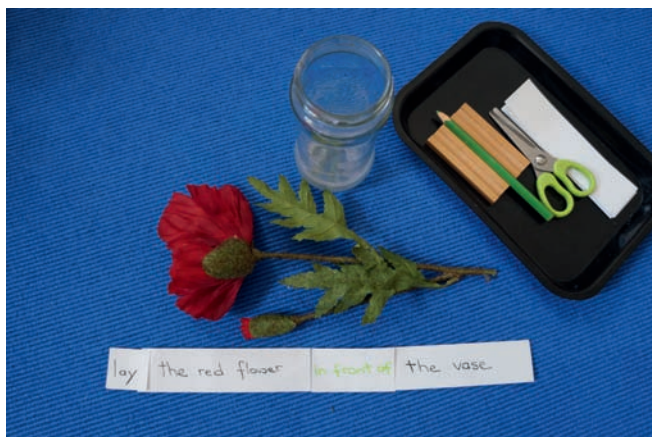


Once again, the educator takes the flower vase with the silk flowers to a table or a carpet and writes „the red flower“ on a piece of paper for a child. The child reads and places the red flower next to the paper strips.

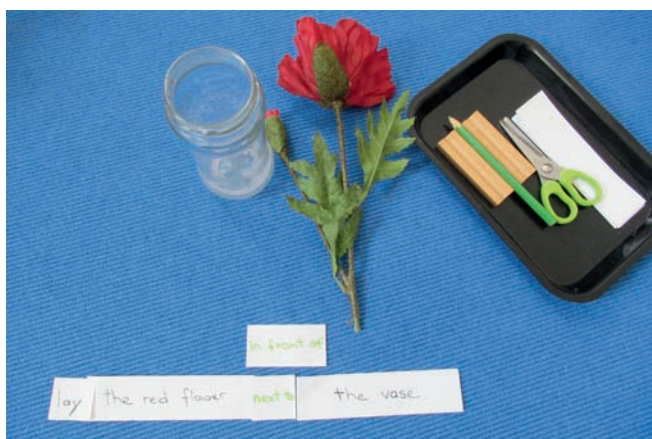


The educator now writes „the vase“ on another piece of paper and the child places this piece of paper on the vase.

Now the educator writes „lay“ on a paper strip and places it in front of the paper strip with „the red flower“. The child reads the task and puts the flower down again. Now the educator places the word „lay“ in front of the paper strips with „the vase“ and the child also carries out this task. (Thank goodness there is no water in the vase).



The educator now takes a green pen, writes „in front of“ on a piece of paper and places it so that the following reading order lies on the table or carpet in front of the child: „put the red flower in front of the vase“. The child carries out the task.



The educator now writes “next to” on a new piece of paper and exchanges it for the “before” piece of paper.

The child also reads this task and carries it out.