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Ideas for Practice



Claus-Dieter Kaul

Montessori concrete

Manual for a holistic way of learning
within elementary education

Volume 3 Exercises in the field
of language

Kindergarten

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Note of Thanks

We would like to thank the many children that we have met in the last 30 years and have given us the opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the statements of Maria and Mario Montessori. In this open and honest dialogue with the children, we could learn to trust them unconditionally, to accompany them with respect and help them and ourselves to develop a sense of self-esteem.

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Foreword

Dear reader!

With this series of books we would like to invite and guide you to get to know Maria Montessori's comprehensive, pioneering pedagogy in concrete terms and to learn to apply it „step by step“. This enables you to create a supportive atmosphere in kindergarten and at home, as well as learning situations in which your children can also develop well and optimally according to new standards.

In recent years, the call for a new culture of education has been growing louder. Last but not least, various studies such as PISA or TIMS make us all aware that there is a lot to change in our education system. Certainly, one conclusion is the appearance of new educational plans for the elementary sector. The requirements here are intended to show educators a way to prepare children for the living conditions of today. In many conversations with course participants, we find again and again that many adults have few concrete ideas about how they can adapt to these challenges. They are still imprisoned with the expectations from their most diverse - in some cases long past - training, as well as with their own, not yet processed „parenting experiences“ from their childhood.

It can be observed that Montessori-Pedagogy - in relation to the present time - offers many of these people great help in reflecting on a new job. Why is Montessori-Pedagogy particularly useful? Certainly, this is because this „pedagogy“ emerged from the child's observation, which was carried out by a doctor. So, Maria Montessori did not develop a method of education, but as a doctor observed how the child learns and drew her own conclusions from it. This justifies its topicality in today's time. When creating the learning environment for children, today great importance is attached to incorporating knowledge from neurophysiology and modern psychology. This is completely in line with Maria Montessori's knowledge, especially with regard to didactic structure. Thus, her method, which is based on the material she developed, has not lost its appeal.

From today's point of view, what has to be examined in particular is the role of the educator. Our experience has shown that the implementation of Montessori-Pedagogy requires a large amount of self-reflection and ultimately results in a genuinely new educational culture which - as Jesper Juul describes - gives us the opportunity to assume responsibility from obedience.

We both had to find out that this was a very intensive process of our own, because even in our training courses on Montessori-Pedagogy we still experienced that in theory there was talk of personal responsibility and self-activity - but the way of dealing with us adults was still predominantly characterized by a culture of obedience.

Thus it is not a surprise for us that in many Montessori facilities where all Montessori materials are to hand, the attitude of the educators however is still strongly characterized by the „old educational culture“.

It is therefore an urgent concern for us to use these manuals¹ to offer educators in the elementary area an opportunity to reflect on their work on a daily basis and to develop the three competencies mentioned by Søs Bayer:

- The competence to enter into relationships with children
- The competence to take an important place in the life of children, even if one is not a parent
- The competence to endure that educational reality is like life²

An important concern of this series is to show a concrete guide to how the thematic focal points of the “Educational Plan for Elementary Pedagogy” (BEP) are specifically reflected in Montessori Pedagogy.

These topics will accompany us in the description of the various activities.

For decades, the prevailing opinion was that learning to read and write was reserved solely for the school’s educational mandate and could not already be offered in kindergartens.

Maria Montessori was originally - like her contemporaries - convinced of the unavoidable, arduous agony of learning to write and read. However, when she was working with the so-called „feeble-minded“ children from 1889 to 1890 and later in the children’s home (from 1907), she recognized that the effort that we considered necessary to learn the alphabet is completely unnatural and not associated with its writing, but related to the methods of teaching it.

She realized that writing is a psycho-physiological process. She became aware that the children perform many important preparatory movements in games, but these have nothing to do with the actual work.

The motor mechanisms are fixed in childhood - in the sensitive period of the muscular sense and the development of the coordinated movement system at the age of about four years. At six to seven years of age, this motor sensibility is no longer as strong.

„It is that of a child of four who strives to touch everything about him in his irresistible and unconscious attempt to stabilise his various movements.“³

When working with children between the ages of three and six it can actually be observed time and again how these young children acquire essential language skills through play activities that already provide them with the essential foundations for later language work (e.g. writing stories; spelling; grammar).

We wish that joy and love are at the centre of your work in fulfilling your educational mandate. Stay curious when you go on a journey of discovery with the children, for which this series of books gives you a holistic basis.

¹ We chose the term „educator“ as the name for the accompanying persons of the children, in order to integrate the gender-specific term on the one hand and on the other hand to make it clear that for us this word contains the professional relationship competence, which is characterized by a personal authority and not by role-related authority.

² Jesper Juul, „Vom Gehorsam zur Verantwortung“, Page 163

³ Maria Montessori: The Discovery of the Child, Ballantine, New York 1967, Page 204

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."



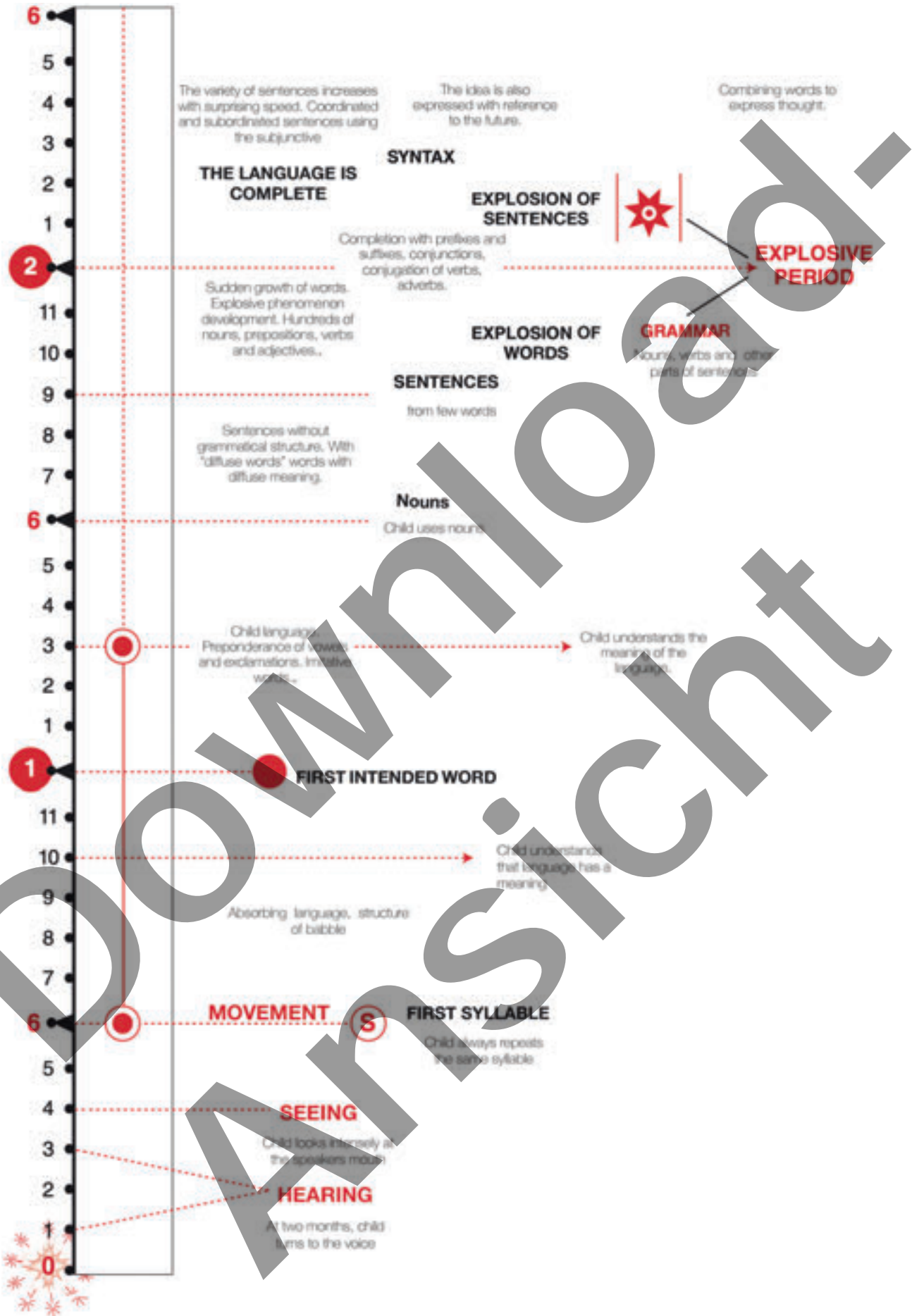
Lotte Ingrisch wrote in her book „The New Butterfly School“: „We have to become children and magicians again, all of us. Teacher and student, and don't both learn from each other? If they don't, an impermeable wall will separate them. You can neither teach nor learn through a wall. One remains untouchable 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

Speech Development according to Maria Montessori⁶



⁶ Maria Montessori: Das kreative Kind, Herder Verlag, Freiburg 1972, Page 103

The child has already learned the language of his surroundings at the age of three. In our Montessori environment, we help him to become aware of what he already has so that he can use it for his further development. We must first be convinced of the spiritual aspect of language, this great gift of communication. This enables us to learn about our past and to get to know the world from all sides, even if we are physically far from the regions, the people or the times from which we read or hear. Therefore, the ability to communicate should make us feel grateful.

Lise Eliot writes: “Learning to speak is possibly the greatest intellectual leap in an individual’s life. It opens up a whole new universe of questions, thoughts, social communication and opinions (...) These ultimately allow the child to mature into a fully developed personality. (...) Language is also the crucial basis for much of what we call intelligent behaviour. The more we understand how the linguistic organ of the brain develops, the better we can promote the most important basis for the intellectual development of our children.”⁷

The teacher has the task of optimally preparing the environment for this. All aspects of language such as vocabulary enrichment, writing and reading must come to life in the child’s environment. Maria Montessori speaks of the power and magic of language that the teacher should remember while helping the children to expand their language.⁸

Seen in this light, language is not a study of an object, but help and preparation for real life.



⁷ Lise Eliot: What’s going on in There? Zitiert nach Baiba Krumins Grazzini. See Note 1

⁸ Compare with Note 1.

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

Games to promote language skills

Language skills are linked to the development of many skills that require a favourable environment and a lot of support.

In many cultures there are children's songs, rhymes and movement games that are passed on in families. These enable the young child to acquire and develop their language skills with joy and in a relationship. Since families are getting smaller, older siblings, grandma and grandpa are often missing, then this task is taken-up by the child's pre-school. Some suggestions from this rich treasure are given here.

With the help of the games presented below, the mobility of the palate and tongue, lips and cheeks are strengthened and the vocal cords are practiced. The development of voice and language is a process that can be tailored to children with special needs as required.

Imitate animal sounds

The imitation of animal voices gives great joy to the vast majority of children. They are very happy to imitate animals that they know (pets, farms, zoo animals) in motion and sounds for example "Old MacDonald had a Farm" is much loved by children.

Blowing game

The educator sits with the children around a table that is not too big and places a cotton ball or other light object in front of them. The educator shows how to take a breath with closed mouth and lips pursed in order to blow the object as far away as possible across the table. The children try to prevent this by blowing in the opposite direction and indeed blow it as far as possible across the table so that it falls off the edge.

Phonetic rhymes

To the hissing sound "Sh":

She sells sea-shells on the sea-shore.

The shells she sells are sea-shells, I'm sure.

For if she sells sea-shells on the sea-shore

Then I'm sure she sells sea-shore shells.



“Difficult” sounds and tongue twisters

A big bug bit the little beetle but the little beetle bit the bug back.

Fred fed Ted bread, and Ted fed Fred bread.

Any noise annoys an oyster, but a noisy noise annoys an oyster more.

Swan swam over the sea,

Swim, swan, swim!

Swan swam back again

Well swum, swan!

Finding your own rhymes

The cat sat on the mat.

A mouse is in the house.

A frog sat on a log.

Counting rhymes

One, two, three, four, five,

Once I caught a fish alive.

Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,

Then I let it go again.

Why did you let it go?

Because it bit my finger so.

Which finger did it bite?

This little finger on the right.

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe,

Catch a tiger by the toe.

If he hollers, let him go,

Eeny, meeny, miny, moe.

Syllable clapping

The children sit or stand in a circle. A child says their name. Then everyone repeats this name clearly and rhythmically, clapping their hands with each syllable. Or you can choose longer and more difficult words and small sentences, e.g.

“Tho – mas” or

“Al – ex – an – der” or

“Po – ta – to – sa – lad.”

The syllables can also be accentuated with taps on a drum.

Games to increase vocabulary



The more words and sentences are linked to emotions, the more intensely they are received and internalized, because „emotions“ move the whole person. This happens in daily interaction, in circle-time, in which events and worries are recognised together, when telling fairy tales and stories, when speaking rhymes or singing. In all cultural circles, the transmission and practice of language also takes place with playful movements. Here, play could be described as dedicated work with a pleasurable experience. It is no wonder that children never tire of repeating the games for their development over and over again, alone or with others. Maria Montessori describes her experiences as follows: „If you look carefully at a child, it is evident that his mind develops with the help of movement ... the movement supports psychological development, and this development in turn finds expression in further movements and actions.



So it is a cycle, since psyche and movement belong to the same unit. The senses also help, because if the child has no opportunity for sensory activities, there is less development of the mind ... the child who has used his own hands has a stronger character.“¹⁰

¹⁰ Maria Montedssori : Das kreative Kind, Herder Verlag, Freiburg Pages 129 and 137