

Homework for Montessori Directress/Director Training -- Language

I believe that the language aspect of the Montessori methods is quite a strong and effective program. The reason I can say this is that I've used most of the methods with my daughter while she was growing up and she has a very strong foundation in her language skills – especially English. In fact, this school year, she finished Form 1 at the top of her batch, not just her class, mainly because of her strong English language foundation. This is despite being one of the youngest – she entered Form 1 at age 10, when most would be 11 or 12 already (as she skipped Primary 4), and being in her first year of studying in HK, at a local DSS bilingual school which means she also had to cope with new friends and change in lifestyle adjustments, particularly having to learn Cantonese, the local dialect of most of her schoolmates. She also speaks fluent Mandarin and Fookienese and is at conversational level in the Filipino language. She topped all but one of the English subjects, besting even the native English speaking students in her batch. This is despite the fact that she has been studying in local Chinese schools in China throughout her primary school years (which offers very basic English lessons only) and not in international schools.

She loves to read books – we have our own mini-library at home. She started writing short stories at the age of 8 years old which we compiled into a small home-made book and distributed copies to our immediate families and close relatives. Ever since she started school, she was always in the advanced group of readers and mastered her phonics at age four. This allowed her to start reading independently at such a young age.

We used almost all the language methods of Montessori without really knowing it. At a very young age, we read to her, sing to her, allowed her to express herself freely through show and tell and through involving her in family discussions, played puzzles with her and let her freely use the pen to dribble and draw to her heart's content. We bought her books which are appropriate for her age but included a wide range of topics. We encourage her to re-tell and act out stories she has read and she loves. She did this for both English and Chinese stories too. We exposed her to music and singing. At the age of 3, she could sing 'adult' songs in entirety – at least two long verses with a chorus or refrain, both English and Chinese songs. She would sing these songs during various solo singing performances when she was as young as three years old.

Having said all these, I believe we did the right things with our daughter as far as language is concerned. And having learned the Montessori methods of teaching language, what we did was all consistent with it.

The one key concept that was new to me was that writing goes before reading. This was quite a surprising concept since I've always thought that reading comes first and is easier than writing. If I think back to my daughter's pre-school years, I cannot really say for certain that this was true in

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her case. Neither can I say with certainty that she started reading first before writing. I just did not observe this closely enough to know for sure. Certainly, it was almost like the reading and writing part for her came almost at the same time, that is, she started writing at the same time that she started reading independently too. Although this is not to say that maybe, indeed her being able to write speeded up her ability to read also.

As I think about it now, it certainly would make sense that writing skills help improve reading skills. I think this would be something that I would need to be more observant of with regards to my 2.5 year old son now. Certainly, with my daughter, I focused more on the reading part. Having encountered this concept with Montessori, I will also make sure that my son has as much exposure to writing as possible.

The other important realization I had with this training is the advantages and disadvantages of the use of flash cards. I do believe that very young children have very good photographic memory – I've seen it in a lot of situations both with my own children and with others. I almost enrolled my son to a flash card program in a HK learning center and also almost entered that business too. I, then, realized through the Montessori training as well as after thinking through my own experiences while in school as well as seeing my daughter's development, that a long-term flash card program is not good and can actually be detrimental to a child's development. In fact even a short-term focused flash card program is questionable due to the passiveness of the learning method as well as the child's lack of understanding of meanings of words: that flashcards is about sounds and voices only, and not about meanings and communications.

Hence, overall, for my son, I will continue to use the methods I've used with my daughter as far as developing language is concerned plus, obviously, a few more which I've learned through the Montessori training.