

LISTENING AND SPEAKING IN THE MONTESSORI CLASSROOM

I. Introduction

Spoken language in the Montessori classroom is distinguished for its clarity and intimacy.

Each curriculum area contains particular language components which are designed to enrich vocabulary while sharpening the powers of observation, of skill development, and of concept development.

At least one of the following listening/speaking activities are conducted each day at large group lessons, small group lessons, and individual lessons.

These activities develop:

1. Attention
2. Self-control
3. Auditory memory
4. Indirect preparation for written commands
5. Self-confidence (Increased vocabulary and concept development builds self-confidence.)

Conversation in the classroom is encouraged by:

1. Special interest table
2. Holidays and birthdays
3. Pictures on the wall and on the top of cabinets
4. Cultural subjects, projects, and pictures Language is always embedded in an atmosphere of personal involvement. The children are spoken to on their eye level.

The child's name is used as one of the most important words to the ears of the child.

II. Clues to Speech and Language Problems

A. Generally, you should be concerned about the child's speech when any one or more of the following conditions exist:

1. The child is not talking at all by the age of two.
2. Speech is largely unintelligible after the age of three.
3. There are many omissions of initial consonants after the age of three.
4. There are no sentences by the age of three.
5. Sounds are more than a year late in appearing, according to development sequence.
6. There are many substitutions of easy sounds in his speech.
7. The child uses mostly vowel sounds in his speech.
8. Word endings are consistently dropped after age five.
9. Sentence structure is noticeably faulty after age five.
10. The child is noticeably nonfluent after age five.
11. The child is embarrassed and disturbed by his speech at any age.
12. The child is distorting, omitting, or substituting any sound after age seven.
13. The voice is a monotone, extremely loud, extremely soft, largely inaudible, or of poor quality.
14. The pitch is not appropriate to the child's age.
15. There is a noticeable hyper nasality or lack of nasal resonance.
16. There are unusual confusions, reversals, or telescoping in connected speech.
17. There is abnormal rhythm, rate, or inflection after age five.

B. Developmental Sequence:

DEVELOPMENTAL SEQUENCE CHART

AGE	SOUND	AGE	SOUND
3-1/2	p, b, m, h, w	6-1/2	sh, zh, v, th, l
4-1/2	t, d, n, k, g, ng, y	7-1/2	s, ch, z, j, th, r, hw
5-1/2	f		

VISUAL CONTACT: CHILD/ADULT

The convention in the Montessori classroom is to speak to a child only after establishing intimate eye contact. Specifically, this requires that the teacher bend at the knees and lower the whole body so that the eyes of the adult are on the same level as the child's eyes. In order for a child to learn to listen, the child must be attending to what is being said. There is not a more effective way to encourage in the child is attention to spoken language than to establish intimate eye contact as described above.

Intimate eye contact is not established by merely getting the adult eye level to the child's eye level. This can be achieved by the adult bending at the waist. This type of eye contact is intimidating. Intimate eye contact requires that the whole body establish a respectful relationship with the child's body. To do this, bending at the knees is required.

Once intimate eye contact is established, the child is in a readiness state to listen.

TONE OF VOICE

The convention in the Montessori classroom is to speak with a quiet, respectful voice. The child is more likely to listen to a tone of voice that sounds as though it has something rather nice to say. The tone of the voice is important, as it communicates the sincere wish we have in genuine communicating with the child in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, though sometimes with non-negotiable expectations.

The volume of the voice is equally important. There are many reasons for speaking in a low-volume voice (limit the noise level of the classroom, not disturb other children that are concentrating, etc.) but in terms of achieving our goal of encouraging children to develop listening skills the argument is persuasive. Children are quite accustomed to being spoken to in a loud voice. The use of a quiet voice actually is so out of the ordinary as to get a child's attention just for the novelty of it! Once the child becomes accustomed to the low voice the novelty is no longer there, but the knowledge that the communication is most probably warm and supportive, though sometimes firm, is enough to retain the child's responsiveness to the teacher's low voice.

The low voice encourages the child to listen.

THE TONE OF VOICE

It's not so much what you say
As the manner in which you say it.
It's not so much the language you use.
As the tone in which you convey it.
"Come here!" I sharply said,
And the child cowered and wept.
"Come here," I said,
And he looked and smiled
And straight to my lap he crept.
Words may be mild and fair
And the tone may pierce like a dart.
Words may be soft as the summer air
but the tone may break my heart.
For words come from the mind
Grow by study and art,
but tone leaps from the inner self
Revealing the state of the heart.
Whether you know it or not.
Whether you are mean or care,
Gentleness, kindness, love, and hate,
Envy, anger are there.
Then, would quarrels you avoid?
And peace and love rejoice?
Keep anger not only out of your words
Keep it out of your voice.

PRECISION OF LANGUAGE

The convention in the Montessori classroom is to speak with precision of language and clear enunciation. Fewer words are sometimes spoken, but they are spoken slowly and distinctly so that the child can comprehend them. Further, precise language is used.

Ground Rules:

1. Please, push in your chair.
2. Please, return your material to the shelf.
3. Please, walk in the classroom.
- 3a. Please, go back to the _____ and walk.
- 3b. Please, sit in this chair and watch the children walk.
4. Please, keep all your materials on the rug.
5. Please, keep all your materials on the table top.
6. Please, carry the material with two hands.
7. Please, walk around the rug.
- 7a. Please, go back and walk around the rug.
- 7b. Please, sit in this chair and watch the children walk around the rug.

Names of the Materials:

1. Practical Life Exercises
2. Sensorial Exercises
3. Mathematics Exercises
4. Language Exercises
 - Metal Insets
 - Moveable Alphabet
 - Initial Sounds

NOTE: The teacher names the materials:

1. Do you wish to work with the _____.
2. This is the _____.
3. May I help you with the _____.

The Sensorial materials are particularly important in the enrichment of the adjectives in the child's vocabulary.