A Quest for Words by Julia Volkman

Editor's Note: Montessori schools may reprint this article for their school newsletter with a credit to "Julia Volkman". Short articles like this one can be very help for parents to learn about specific materials that are used in the classroom. Please let us know if you are reprinting by sending an email to info@gomontessori.com.

The young child is on a quest to learn the name of every thing she sees. She is driven to master our language. Dr. Montessori realized this and created classrooms that are ripe with opportunities for children to acquire and work with words. Here is a brief overview of some of the language lessons you may encounter in a Montessori primary (ages 3 to 6) classroom.

Vocabulary. Children learn the names of their classmates, the materials on the shelves, the shapes in the baskets, and the continents on the puzzle map. They also use vocabulary cards with photos or drawing to learn the names of things beyond the classroom. Vocabulary lessons begin with the objects most immediately relevant to the young child (e.g., parts of the body, things in the kitchen) and proceed infinitely following the child's interest.

Sorting & Matching. As children gain vocabulary, they want to figure out how everything fits together. Sorting and matching games let them do just this. They sort objects or photo cards into groups by color, shape, location (outdoors, indoors), etc. As they grow, they can do finer and finer levels of sorting (for example, sorting reptiles from amphibians or mollusks from echinoderms).

Writing. Children trace sandpaper letters and do work with the metal insets to prepare their hand for writing words. Dr. Montessori discovered that children are able to write words (with their hands or with a moveable alphabet) before they can read

them. This makes sense when you realize that creating a code (putting letters together to make a word) is easier than breaking one (reading). Montessori encouraged phonetic writing first. Spelling comes naturally as the child grows.

Reading. Reading is simplified in Montessori classrooms. Children start by matching written word slips to objects or photos (called the phonetic object box or phonetic reading cards). Classrooms have a seemingly endless supply of tiny objects and photos with matching word slips for children to read. These activities provide an essential bridge that helps the child make the transition from reading words to reading books. As always, writing is an essential part of this work as children will joyfully write their own slips to label everything in the classroom.

Grammar. Once children have a solid foundation in reading, they move directly on to learning grammar and sentence analysis through wonderful hands on activities that let them break down the parts of our language.

Julia Volkman is a Montessori teacher (ages 3 to 6+), a mom, and the founder of Maitri Learning, a company that creates Montessori color photo cards. You can find more information and step-by-step instructions on how to use language cards at her website: www.MaitriLearning.com.