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Reading and communication

What this issue is all about



BY **SARA SUCHMAN**

My plan was to introduce this important issue of MontessoriPublic with a "truth" that we can all agree on: the primacy of reading in a child's development and education. But during the recent Diverse Perspectives in Montessori webinar from Loyola University, Trisha Moquino, Co-Founder/Education Director at the Keres Children's Learning Center, pushed back on my "truth": in indigenous cultures from millennia-old oral traditions, the spoken word and the skill of listening—not reading—are primary.

When I dig a bit and ask "why"—why do we care, why do we teach what we teach, why does it really matter?—what comes to the fore is the primacy of communication.

Recognized by Montessori as a fundamental human tendency, communication—being able to share our ideas and understand others'—is essential to our very being, survival, and flourishing, as humans, as cultures, and as civilizations. Are we willing and able to take the risk of truly understanding different perspectives? Can we infer meaning from others' stories? Can we deduce meaning from information? Are we curious about origins, sources, intentions, and interpretations? This does not demote reading but, rather, stands it side-by-side with speaking, signing, writing, listening, creating, and viewing. It refocuses us from the act to the reason for the act.

While holding and raising the importance of all forms of communication, we see new legislation in several states requiring schools to choose supplemental reading programs from state-approved lists, lists that may not, at the moment, include Montessori. We see other schools considering such adoption not in response to legislation, but to internal data. This topic matters. Any time there is a pressure to move Montessori away from its program (and there is always at least one, right?), it matters. And NCMPS's approach, each time, is to face the pressure head on, to meet the need or satisfy the requirement without disrupting the Montessori, all the while working with our partners at MPPI and throughout the Montessori community for a better long term solution. To that end, while the Montessori community works together on the teacher preparation, materials, and research that advance Montessori, your school may be one that is considering a supplemental curriculum.

If you are considering such a program, top of mind will be that not all programs are created equal when it comes to implementation in a Montessori classroom. Which programs can best be integrated into a self-paced work period? Offer students choice? Work in mixed age groups? Honor the developmental planes? Center diversity and belonging? Minimize competition and comparison? Preserve wonder? As we venture down this road together, let's be creative, share what we discover, and learn how to meet this requirement while holding sacred each child's sense of self as an enthusiastic, independent, and capable learner.

So, yes, this issue is about reading. And it matters because reading is one way of communicating, and communication moves and motivates the human spirit in health, harmony, and peace. I hope the articles in this issue offer both mirrors and windows into your work, and wish for us all, through the stressors and pressures, to remember that at core what we are doing is nurturing children in meeting their essential human drive for communication.

Why do we teach what we teach, and why does it really matter?

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