Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

A field guide for school leaders,
classroom guides and second language teachers

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Key takeaways

- The Bilingual Montessori Project originated with a mission **to support bilingual education** within the Montessori framework.
- **Developmental education** acknowledges that children progress at varying rates across different areas.
- **Language learning** integrated with Montessori principles fosters learner autonomy and personalised development.
- This field guide's purpose is to provide **structured guidance** for implementing holistic multilingual education.

1. General introduction to the Bilingual Montessori project

The professionals building the Bilingual Montessori Project have all forged bilingual school programs that respect student autonomy in different parts of Europe over the last 15 years. We have faced the challenges you may now face in your bilingual schools and classrooms. We have, at times, felt hopeful and delighted by plans, progress and children using a second language with pride. At other times, we have felt puzzled and frustrated by challenges, setbacks, and a lack of support and information. We have wondered whether it was really possible to offer freedom of choice to children developing literacy skills in a second language environment and, at times, even felt a little envy towards monolingual Montessori programs.

As bilinguals ourselves, we know that the ability to use more than one language requires hard work and courage, and we know that being bilingual is surprisingly transformative, opening our minds and hearts to understanding other cultures profoundly. In times of difficulty, guiding children in their second language acquisition while respecting their autonomy as learners is very complicated. At these times we can remind ourselves that we work to educate children to serve a strong global future. All of you who collaborate to create successful bilingual school programs are making a small but valuable contribution to the quest for global stability and well-being.

Seeing the growing need the decision was made to create a community where practical advice and sound knowledge can be shared. Bilingual Montessori co-founders Marikay McCabe and Mirka Vlčková purchased the domain www.bilingualmontessori.com and had the logo designed in December 2019. Our plans were stalled during the global pandemic but when we returned to our website design and our ideas of how to reach our public in the quickly evolving digital landscape, we asked English Language Specialist Lucie Urbančíková to join our brainstorming and planning.

Then we had a stroke of luck: we became aware of an Erasmus+ Grant that aligned with our objectives.

Erasmus + is a European Union funding program that seeks to support and facilitate:

> "…the transnational and international cooperation between organisations in the fields of education, training, youth and sport … It facilitates the circulation of ideas and the transmission of best practices and expertise and the development of digital capabilities thus

> contributing to a high-quality education while strengthening social cohesion." (Part A: General Information about the Erasmus+ Programme | Erasmus+, n.d.)

When we were awarded the grant titled "Building Bilingual Programs in Elementary Schools" in late 2022 our humble effort to begin to fill a need in the bilingual education world, was given a big push forward with the invaluable financing from an Erasmus+ grant. This allowed us to think BIG and involve other educators with complementary expertise. Two school founders, Lucy Welsted and Maria Smirnova joined our team in addition to university professor and second language acquisition specialist Dr. Aoife Ahern. This permitted us to expand our "Bilingual Montessori project" work, to be in conversation with practitioners and to create resources that, we believe, will be helpful to all educators working in schools with a developmental approach to education and a second language program.

Aware that we have been gifted the valuable resource of time, we gathered the combined knowledge and experience of second language acquisition researchers, language specialists, teachers and school leaders to bring you this Field Guide. We sincerely hope it helps readers improve practices in their schools

2. What is a developmental approach to education?

The core contributors to this Field Guide draw upon their expertise in Montessori education, linguistics and teacher training recognising that many of the insights they offer can benefit educators across various pedagogical frameworks. These include schools with child-led and inquiry-based learning models, such as IB (International Baccalaureate) schools, Reggio Emilia-inspired programs, Waldorf schools, and others. Collectively, these schools can be described as embracing a "developmental approach to education."

This term refers to educational practices that adopt a holistic perspective on children and their learning processes, emphasising individual growth and development. Schools with a developmental approach typically prioritise the following principles.

2.1. Key principles of the developmental approach

Holistic development

These schools aim to foster not only academic growth but also the interconnected development of social skills, physical well-being, and self-respect—foundations for becoming responsible members of society.

Child-centred learning

Students are the protagonists of their own learning. The adult serves the role of "guide" in preparing the learning environment and materials. This comes with the recognition that every student develops at their own pace, and possesses unique strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.

Experiential learning

Students engage in hands-on activities and real-world experiences, allowing them to explore, experiment, and actively participate in their learning.

Freedom and responsibility

Within the boundaries of ground rules and a well-prepared environment, children are granted responsibilities that align with their developmental readiness.

Guided participation

Teachers provide structured support, or scaffolding, to help students tackle tasks slightly beyond their current abilities. This might involve peer learning or offering guidance until students gain confidence and mastery over increasingly complex tasks.

2.2. Constructivist philosophies in education

A developmental approach also aligns with constructivist educational philosophies, which emphasise the role of children in actively constructing their own knowledge. Influential thinkers such as John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Maria Montessori laid the foundation for this approach in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Dewey and Montessori stand out as thinkers who practised their theories of education and human development in schools. They created "living laboratories": Dewey opened the Lab School at the University of Chicago in 1896 and in 1907 Montessori was made responsible for a small centre in Rome

then went on to give training courses and support the opening of schools all over the world.

2.3. Learner autonomy in education

Another facet of the developmental approach is inspired by the Learner Autonomy movement, which originated in language learning in the 1970s. Initially designed for adult learners, this approach has since been adapted for secondary and middle school students. Key principles include:

- that knowledge from the first language (L1) is essential to learning the target language (TL);
- learners need to make choices and engage in evaluative reflection;
- that learners have 3 interdependent roles:
  - communicators continuously using and gradually developing their TL skills;
  - experimenters gradually understanding the cultural conventions of the TL;
  - intentional learners gradually developing an explicit awareness of metacognitive aspects of language learning. (Dam, 1995, Little, Dam, Legenhausen, 2017, p.2).

The synergy between Montessori pedagogy and Learner Autonomy was first explored by Birgitta Berger after meeting language educator Leni Dam in 2016. Berger "realised that learner autonomy and Montessori pedagogy were a perfect match, both striving for the development of motivated, active and independent learners." (Berger, 2019) Both approaches share a common goal: fostering motivated, active, and independent learners. She successfully introduced this approach into her classroom with elementary students and then began sharing the results with other Montessori educators, some of whom wrote their own articles about the marriage of the two approaches. (Winter, 2020)

3. Why a field guide?

- To share expertise and resources
- To build a body of knowledge and document our work
- To develop our community of practice
- To begin to respond to your questions

We created this "Field Guide" with examples and voices "from the field" as a whole school sourcebook with practical information and inspiration regarding classroom strategies and organisational practices based on what practitioners report. We chose this format because we were inspired by similar books published by other educators (Khan, Dubble, Pendleton, 1999, Senge, 1994)

3.1. Your questions & concerns

Since the beginning of our project, teachers and school leaders have responded to our surveys with questions and comments like the examples given here.

- How do I know if my approach of only speaking English is the most effective (I also speak French)?
- How does the shift from English as a second/foreign language (i.e. meeting native speak norms) to English as a lingua franca (i.e. a tool for intercultural communication) reflect in the classroom?
- How to encourage spontaneous L2 production?
- How to encourage a child to choose work and/or speak in their second language when it's easier for them to do it in their first language?
- How will we assess the language learning progress of the children? What assessment tools will we use?
- Montessori language materials are designed for native speakers and are not appropriate for children learning a second language. Please see Section 1.3
- The materials I have seen in a bilingual Montessori environment are not sufficient for introducing the L2 in a fun way that encourages and sparks a desire to learn more.
- …I find that I need to look for images for some presentations for English language learners … these adaptations take a lot of extra preparation time… There isn't any known shared bank of resources with adaptations for non-native speakers (yet).

3.2. Answers on the Bilingual Montessori website

Since our core purpose is to fill a void of information and community, we created a virtual home for resources and invited you, our community, to join and share experiences to begin building our knowledge library of effective practices. The BM Video library, which you can access via our website or our YouTube channel is a great place to begin looking for answers to your questions.

What can be found on our website:

- BM Community Conversations - a series of talks recorded live with an audience with invited practitioners sharing their expertise and receiving feedback and questions from others present;
- BM Webinars - were a series of 10 webinars that were commissioned to cover in more detail or from a different angle;
- Notes from the Field is - our blog where members of our community share their experiences, reflections, and ongoing questions;
- "Building Bilingual Elementary Programs: A field guide for school leaders, classroom guides and second language teachers" or "BM Field Guide" for short - a place for theoretical and practical information produced by experts.

3.3. The field guide is comprised of 3 parts:

- **Part 1**: **Designing a Bilingual Program** – to guide Administrators, School Leaders and Language Coordinators: those responsible for creating and implementing a second language program.
- **Part 2**: **Understanding Language Learning** – An overview of the theory behind language acquisition and learning intended for classroom guides and assistants who do not have a background in language learning.
- **Part 3**: **Preparing the Bilingual Learning Environment** – a look at specific topics relevant to engaging learners, practical setup of bilingual classrooms including materials, assessment, oral and written literacy and grammar.

We undertook a Case Study Research Project, to formally gather information, from bilingual Montessori schools, on effective practices. The information collected also informed the contents of the Field Guide.

The research was designed to gather comprehensive data from schools by examining three key perspectives to:

- **Administrators** - providing insights from the management and organisational level
- **Classroom guides (teachers)** - offering a perspective from direct instructional experience seen through their Montessori training
- **Language specialists** - offering a perspective from direct instructional experience through their expertise in language acquisition and instruction

The study specifically emphasised the local socio-linguistic context - meaning the language environment and cultural factors unique to each location. This focus was included because the researchers recognised that teaching practices that succeed in one environment might not work in another due to different:

- language backgrounds of students;
- community language use patterns;
- cultural factors;
- local educational needs.

The findings from this research were then incorporated into a Field Guide, suggesting this was a practical, application-focused study meant to inform real-world educational practices.

3.4. Use of this Field Guide

We envision that you will be able to use this book as a reference book to consult when you have a specific question in mind or are looking for a sample document on a particular topic. Maybe you will want to refer to the more technical aspects of language acquisition from Part 2 (see section 2.6. Stages in children's additional language acquisition) in preparation for a meeting with parents. Or maybe you will need to come back to Part 3 "Preparing the bilingual learning environment" at some point when the linguistic profile of the students in your class has shifted, requiring new strategies. Or perhaps you are a school leader who will refer regularly to the whole of Part 1 "Designing a Bilingual Program as your program evolves. These are our ideas, but of course, you will find what suits you.

The Pause and Reflect questions throughout are designed to encourage your deeper engagement with the material and to facilitate the practical application of key concepts in your everyday classroom practice. These reflective prompts are strategically placed throughout the guide to help you connect theoretical ideas and research findings to the context of your school. As an L2 teacher or classroom guide in a 6-12 environment, or a school administratoit is important to pause at these moments, reflect on the questions posed, and consider how you can bring the insights discussed in the text to the children in your school. By taking time to reflect, you will gain a more profound understanding of how to support language development, incorporate diverse learning strategies, and foster an inclusive environment. We encourage you to write down your responses, share your thoughts with colleagues, or use the questions as the basis for professional discussion. This reflective process will not only enrich your practice but will also empower you to be more intentional in your pedagogical decisions, ultimately enhancing the learning experiences of your students.

4.   Guideposts for a lonely journey

One of our guiding principles is that schools educating in more than one language are on their own unique journey, which can be lonely. At the heart of multilingual education lies a fundamental understanding: every school teaching in multiple languages embarks on its own distinct journey, and this path can often feel solitary. This book seeks to address that sense of isolation by bringing together practical strategies and experiences from fellow educators across different contexts.

By sharing specific examples of effective practices, each carefully situated within their local environments, we hope to help readers recognise and appreciate the unique characteristics of their own schools and classrooms. These distinct features ultimately shape their educational path forward. While no two journeys are identical, the experiences of others can serve as valuable guideposts, offering inspiration and insight along the way.

Throughout this exploration, it becomes increasingly clear that there cannot be a universal "how-to" manual for multilingual education. Instead, each school must chart its own course, drawing inspiration from others while remaining true to its unique circumstances, student needs, and community context. The richness of these varied experiences creates a tapestry of

approaches, each valuable in its own right and each contributing to our collective understanding of multilingual education.

A friendly feeling towards error …

> *… Cultivate a friendly feeling towards error and treat I as a companion inseparable from our lives, as something having a purpose, which it truly has.*

Maria Montessori
The Absorbent Mind, 225

This advice is intended as an additional guidepost for educators in multilingual schools that prioritise learner autonomy while addressing specific pedagogical challenges. Our growing knowledge library aims to uncover and share the solutions that teachers have developed with their students. To better understand the structure and teaching strategies of these schools, we have conducted case study interviews with teachers, language specialists, and school leaders. Additionally, experienced practitioners have contributed their insights in writing.

While more dynamic approaches like translanguaging have become widely accepted in recent years, this represents a significant shift from practices just 10–15 years ago. Back then, bilingual education largely relied on strict language separation—by subject, teacher, or schedule. So we assume practices will continue to evolve with new insights and ongoing experience.

There are several models for introducing an additional language, such as immersion, dual language, exploration, or exposure, which are explained in Section 1.3. Schools themselves may be described as bilingual, multilingual, or international, but these terms often lack universally agreed-upon definitions. Each school must define what these terms mean for their unique context and how they are implemented in practice.

5. Notes on Language and Location

Our perspective on multilingual education is shaped by our European perspective and experiences. Across Europe, a distinct pattern emerges in language education: even in communities where multiple languages are readily available and actively used, English consistently is one of the

additional languages offered in schools, and quite often the target language. This preference for English as the target language reflects both global trends and local educational priorities.

This focus on English as the additional language exists within a rich tapestry of linguistic diversity. Many students in these schools bring their heritage languages from home, speaking different languages with their families and in their communities. Rather than viewing this linguistic diversity as a challenge, schools can harness it as an asset, using it to foster a more inclusive and open-minded school community. These varied linguistic backgrounds create opportunities for cultural exchange and deeper understanding among students, staff, and families.

Our discussion of bilingual education therefore primarily examines scenarios where English serves as the target or additional language while acknowledging and celebrating the broader multilingual landscape that exists within school communities. This reflects not just an educational choice, but the reality of how many European schools approach language learning today.

5.1. Language, Gender, and Representation

English, compared to many Romance languages, has the advantage of using more gender-neutral nouns (e.g., "child" or "children"), though its pronoun system remains gendered. To ensure a balanced representation of female and male children in readers' minds when discussing examples from early childhood and elementary classrooms, we deliberately alternate between "she" and "he." This choice is not meant to disregard expanded understandings of gender, including "they" and other non-binary categories, but rather to prioritise the visibility of female students in education. The struggle for gender parity in educational and professional spaces is ongoing, and highlighting female students in our writing is a deliberate step toward addressing this imbalance.

5.2. Bilingual and multilingual

We use these terms interchangeably as we understand bilingual to mean two or more languages, just as multilingual does.

5.3. Montessori education and language learning

This diversity is particularly evident in schools following an educational philosophy similar to that of Maria Montessori. Montessori environments foster

learning by sparking curiosity through carefully designed activities that engage children and encourage intrinsic motivation. However, when the language being acquired at school is unfamiliar to the child, the standard sequence of the curriculum may need adaptation. For instance, students may lack the vocabulary needed to engage with certain materials, requiring thoughtful adjustments to their learning journey.

We continue to gather and share experiences that demonstrate how schools can meet these linguistic needs while staying true to the Montessori philosophy. By respecting the underlying principles of Montessori education, educators can create environments that support language acquisition and nurture the holistic development of each child.

6. Concluding thoughts

This work represents a thorough compilation of our current knowledge and experience in second-language education while acknowledging that it remains a work in progress rather than a final statement. We have approached this task with sincere dedication, aiming to share our insights so that others need not start from scratch or "reinvent the wheel."

What we present here is essentially a snapshot in time - a detailed picture of current understanding and best practices in second language learning as we know them today. We fully recognise that this field is dynamic and ever-evolving. As educators and researchers continue to innovate and discover new approaches, our own understanding and methods will naturally grow and adapt alongside the broader educational community.

This acknowledgement of ongoing learning and development reflects a fundamental truth in education: that our understanding of how best to teach and learn languages continues to deepen and expand. We remain students ourselves in this journey, learning alongside our colleagues as we all work to enhance second language education practices.

Our goal is to provide valuable insights from our experience while maintaining humility about the evolving nature of this field. We see this as part of an ongoing dialogue rather than a definitive conclusion to the conversation about best practices in second language learning.

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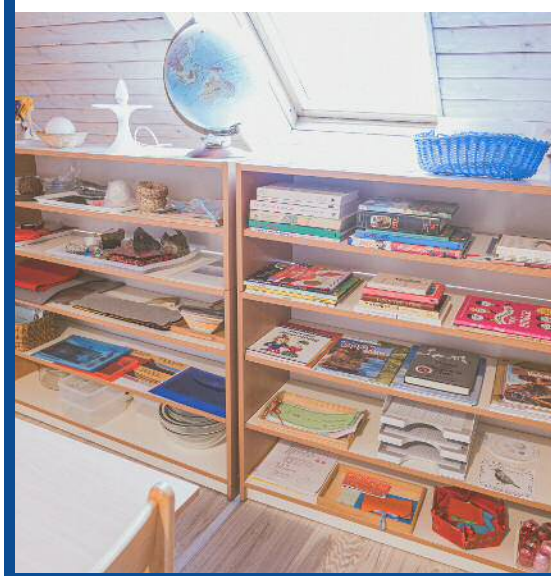# Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

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Part three

Preparing the bilingual learning environment

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Introduction

Part three of the Field Guide: "Preparing the Bilingual Learning Environment" is intended for teachers and language specialists working with children aged 6-12 years. This section incorporates the Montessori perspective that one of the teacher's main responsibilities is preparing a learning environment that responds to and meets children's developmental needs.

This part begins by examining the intangible aspects of a learning environment—specifically, the culture and expectations created around language learning—and how Montessori theory supports this understanding. It takes a comprehensive look at various aspects of this environment, from physical materials to adult communication. Section 3.6 specifically addresses how Language Specialists and Montessori teachers may bring different approaches to language learning, and emphasizes the importance of mutual understanding to best serve the learners' needs.

Two key sections (3.4 and 3.5) explore the fundamental topics of spoken and written communication, providing information about both the process and strategies to support second language learners on their journey. Section 3.7 presents a fresh perspective on grammar, demonstrating that it extends beyond "just rules." It explains how first language patterns are implicitly integrated into a child's knowledge in sequences, while second language learning also follows sequences that cannot be altered by instruction. The section emphasizes that, like many aspects of second language learning, grammar should be presented in meaningful contexts.

Building Bilingual Elementary Programs

Part three | Preparing the bilingual learning environment

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Preparing the bilingual learning environment

3.1. Developing a culture of L2 learning

Contents

Key takeaways

- Establishing a **supportive school culture around L2** learning is crucial for effective bilingual education.
- **A shift** from grammar-focused teaching **to a holistic approach** is key.
- **The tangible and intangible elements** of the classroom should support L2 learning, including materials, labelling and positive attitudes of adults towards L2.
- **Involve all educators** in planning and implementation, supported by ongoing professional development.

Introduction

In Part 3 of our Field Guide, each section considers the practical application of the planning and theory that contribute to positive L2 program outcomes. The reader will find recommendations and inspiration for teaching and learning in bilingual classrooms, and a review of some intangible, or cultural, elements that support learning outcomes that teachers can use to promote communication and language development.

We recognise that each school has unique attributes and not all of the recommendations made in this Field Guide will suit the diverse needs of individual bilingual environments. That said, every program is strengthened by integrating evidence based practices and insights gained through experience that are implemented with thought and care. The recommendations offered here serve as guideposts to help each organisation plan and navigate its own path.

1. What is a culture of L2 learning?

"The limits of my language mean the limits of my world."

- Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (1922)

While cultural elements, specific to the L2, can and should be represented in the environment, the term culture is used here to describe an attitude of curiosity and openness towards the L2 reflected in daily interactions among learners, teachers and other adults in the school community. A school culture that welcomes cultural diversity and language learning is a precondition of creating a supportive environment.

This first section of Part 3 focuses on the advantages, considerations and practicalities of cultivating a supportive bilingual learning environment. A culture of L2 learning allows the aspirations of the adults, laid out in school policy, to become alive and visible in school life.

How L2 learning is delivered and facilitated differs considerably from the grammar-focused approaches of the past. A shift towards a more holistic view of how learners engage with language and the purpose of language in their lives considers the learner as having agency, being member of a community and as a citizen. Attention to how learning environments impact learners' academic and social outcomes and indeed on how learners feel in the classroom is part of the discourse and research in L2 learning. Before moving on to the specifics of establishing a culture of L2 learning, the following points provide a rationale for doing so.

1.1. The benefits of a school culture that embraces L2 learning

- **Provides authentic language use opportunities:** When L2 is integrated into the classroom culture, it creates numerous opportunities for meaningful, contextual language use. This authentic practice is more effective than isolated language drills or exercises.

- **Improves language acquisition & learning:** Consistent exposure to and use of the L2 in various contexts supports more natural language acquisition in the early years and learning and development in the elementary setting, mirroring how we learn our first language. This immersive approach can lead to better fluency and comprehension.

- **Prepares for real-world language use:** Creating a microcosm of L2 use better prepares learners for using the language outside the classroom in real-world situations.

- **Develops metacognitive skills:** In a supportive L2 culture, learners become more aware of their learning processes. They develop strategies for navigating language challenges, which can transfer to other areas of learning.

- **Supports age-appropriate opportunities for repetition:** An integrated L2 culture provides multiple avenues for language input and output, encouraging suitable opportunities for repetition.

- **Enhances motivation:** Seeing the L2 as a natural part of their environment can increase learners' intrinsic motivation. When language use has immediate relevance to their daily activities, learners are more likely to engage actively in the learning process.

- **Reduces anxiety and increases confidence:** A supportive L2 culture normalises the use of the target language, reducing the stress often associated with speaking a new language. This lower-anxiety environment encourages learners to take risks and practice more frequently, which is crucial for language development.

- **Fosters a growth mindset:** A classroom culture that normalises L2 use also normalises the process of making mistakes and learning from them. This can help develop a growth mindset towards language learning and learning in general.

When troubleshooting challenges be sure to keep in mind priorities. Although the school is a bilingual community not all parents will be comfortable using the L2. In contrast, a lead teacher must be able to communicate with her colleagues in the target language since some may not speak the local language.

2. Practicalities of implementation

Creating a culture of L2 learning that best serves learner and program needs requires an iterative cycle of preparation, implementation, observation, reflection and adjustment. This process engages various actors: learners, educators and parents, takes time and may not always be linear.
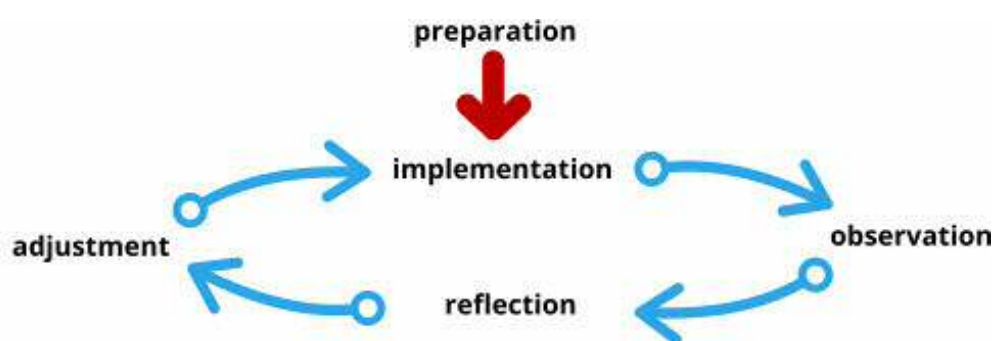
Communicating the idea that 'together, this is how we work and speak here', is the most effective thing a teacher can do to set the stage for successful outcomes. This message is conveyed by modelling and fostering ways of being and creating environments that integrate the L2 into the fabric of classroom and school life. The L2 then becomes an essential element of the school experience rather than just an addition to the curriculum.

As language is a tool of communication, we prioritise the acquisition of functional competence by sparking the learner's interest and appealing to the will. The elementary aged child is motivated to learn and use the L2 when it is made relevant within context of their own lives. While grammar and syntax work will benefit the learner in speaking and writing it is generally most effective after a basic comfort and competence in the new language has been obtained.

2.1. Preparing the adults: Policy and practice influencing L2 learning culture

As discussed in Section 1.4., the active involvement and commitment of all educators, not just L2 teachers and speakers, in comprehensive collaboration and planning at the school-wide level is essential for successful implementation. Open communication between educational levels (e.g. early childhood to elementary) facilitates the transfer of information regarding learners' L2 needs, progress and other relevant details.

To foster more integrated language learning in the classroom, L1 and L2 educators can use regular meetings and shared planning sessions to identify and achieve common goals. These approaches can promote consistency and coherence across all aspects of the educational program.

Educator disposition and learner engagement

Many factors influence the disposition of educators and how they position themselves in relation to learners. An educator's understanding of child development and elementary learner characteristics significantly shapes their approach to teaching. Organisational consensus about these perspectives is fundamental to creating a supportive L2 environment and delivering effective instruction.

In Section 3.2. Developing a culture of L2 learning, we explore Montessori perspectives on the nature of an elementary learner, including the role of the learner agency in L2 acquisition. Kyla Morentz in her webinar underscores the value of engaging with each child as an individual, mindful of the specifics of their language contexts.

Creating an atmosphere of ease in L2 learning

Programs will have unique staffing arrangements - some classrooms have a teacher for each language while others may have a teacher speaking the L1 and an assistant working in the L2. In every scenario the opportunity for adults to model themselves as L2 speakers can positively influence learners' comfort with speaking another language. There are myriad ways adults can create an atmosphere of ease around learning and speaking another language.

The language teachers use to communicate with one another and speak to parents can positively role model L2 language reinforcing its value, making it attractive to learners and removing it from the confines of instruction. Importantly, how adults respond to hesitation, error and confusion, inherent to speaking a second language, influences learners' confidence in speaking the L2. Developing and encouraging comfort with error is covered in more detail later in this section.

Approaches to language use in the classroom

Part 1.3. provides an overview of instructional models. Many programs employ a one person/one-language approach to maintain consistency and encourage learners to respond in the target language. Others may have multilingual teachers who switch between languages, translanguaging and translation are approaches that require each program to determine how teachers should manage situations where using L1 might provide immediate understanding or clarity. This strategy is also dependent on the educator's comfort with the relevant languages and does not tend to be successful if the teacher is not fluent in both languages.

It is generally agreed that it is best to avoid translation except in cases of a new child who is learning the ground rules if safety or distress might be a concern. One effective strategy is for educators to agree on "scripts" for responding to common questions that learners may ask, or for conflict resolution. This ensures that each teacher has a similar response to an emotional need and that children are hearing similar vocabulary in both languages. These guidelines enable educators to act intentionally, avoiding learner confusion and negative outcomes.

Integrating L2 into daily routines

Adult presence plays a vital role; activities without supervision often result in children reverting to L1. Therefore, educators should actively model L2 use, for example in small group activities an adult should join to get things going in L2 then the children are more likely to continue on their own. Additional suggestions are discussed later in this section.

Educator techniques

This Field Guide aims to distil theory and best practices into digestible, easy-to-apply concepts that directly aid teachers in their work. The Community Conversations and Webinars also produced by Bilingual Montessori offer a wealth of information that can augment team and individual professional development,

Links to video recordings of Community Conversations that directly address classroom strategies for 3-6 and 6-12 year olds are listed in the References of this section. Please remember that we offer these examples of strategies that have worked in schools with distinct objectives for second language education. They are intended to inspire and it will be necessary to reflect on learning goals in your school and the needs of the children before adopting them for your classroom.

Professional development

The frameworks, theories and practices we engage with as educators impact and shape our teaching. The study of language learning is expansive, with some research being too niche or abstract to directly influence classroom methods. Incorporating new recommendations and best practices can be demanding and time-consuming,

yet awareness of the 'grey areas' where research continues to seek clarity can strengthen our practice. How we understand learners' needs greatly impacts our ability to respond to them. Continuing professional development offers educators the opportunity to refine this understanding and improve methods to meet learner needs more effectively.

Pause and reflect:

- What strategies have I already employed to create an atmosphere of ease around L2 learning? What other strategies could I try?
- How does the communication between L1 and L2 educators affect the culture of L2 learning in our school / classroom?

2.2. Preparing the Environment - the tangible and intangible elements of culture

Learning environments communicate educators' expectations about how learning should occur, how learners will interact, and what type of learning will take place. The next section, "Frameworks for Effective L2 Learning: A Montessori Perspective" will explore the relevance of Montessori principles to L2 learning. However, it is helpful here to examine the specific potential of the Montessori prepared environment in establishing a culture of L2 learning.

The Montessori elementary classroom is a thoughtfully organised, aesthetically pleasing space designed to support the intellectual, social, emotional, and moral development of children aged 6-12. The physical or tangiable environment can be adapted for L2 learning with the addition of books and materials in the target language. The intangible environment can be better prepared for L2 learning when teachers show curiosity in other cultures and acknowledge their own language learning to model the intercultural aspects of language development. Classrooms are understood to be open, accessible spaces that encourage exploration and cooperation in the L1 and L2, in a particular subject or across the curriculum depending on the language learning objectives of a given school.

General characteristics are:

- A wide range of materials that support abstract thinking
- Resources that foster independence, responsibility, and self-directed work
- Elements connecting children to cultures associated with the target language among others
- Spaces that facilitate both individual work and group projects where L2 use can be encouraged in various contexts

- Materials that integrate L2 across the curriculum, reflecting the interconnectedness of knowledge referred to as the cosmic curriculum
- Tools and technology that support research and creative expression

This setting sparks curiosity, supports critical thinking, and provides opportunities for meaningful work in L2. Vocabulary enrichment is a key part of second language learning so the environment includes ample opportunities for children to practice new vocabulary families with objects and cards, often coordinated with what is being introduced in the L1. A well-organised library of levelled readers in the L2 as well as short, non-fiction books that invite children to explore familiar topics in the L2 and of course a pleasant reading corner is essential. The space encourages the exploration of learners' interests by making a range of reference materials available as well as the equipment and supplies for experimentation, discovery and expression. The elementary classroom is intended to be a dynamic space that can evolve with the children's changing needs, offering new challenges and opportunities for language growth within their expanding world view.

The classroom encompasses physical, practical and intangible elements that significantly influence learning outcomes. Teachers act as guides, facilitating learner interaction with the environment and peers. To effectively expand the conventional Montessori approach and incorporate L2 throughout, educators must consider these interwoven aspects of classroom life. This establishes L2 as a "cultural norm", seamlessly integrating it into daily activities and interactions. (see Laura Cassidy's Webinar Second Language Skills and Subskills in the Elementary Classroom for more)

Physical aspects play a crucial role in this integration. The aesthetic representation of L2, particularly English, requires careful consideration to avoid appearing invasive, superior or even too playful. This involves thoughtful selection of materials, bilingual labelling, signage and a well-stocked library. Cultural aspects further enrich the L2 learning experience. As demonstrated by Licia Arnabaldi, an English Coordinator at Scuola Montessori Como in Como, Italy, the 'intercultural' dimension is vital. Activities can be developed where learners engage meaningfully with other cultures and share aspects of their own, fostering appreciation of linguistic and cultural diversity.

The academic outcomes are met using carefully chosen materials, strategically designed to facilitate independent learning. This approach requires intentionality in the arrangement and sequencing of materials to support specific learning goals. Linking the child to this environment through presentations is key to facilitating independence.

A positive atmosphere creates secure, confident learners, embracing the Montessori principle of viewing errors as part of the learning process. This 'friendliness with error' approach reassures learners that it's acceptable to make mistakes, ask for help, or

not always know the right word - experiences common even in L1 usage. This fosters a safe space for L2 exploration and development, supporting learner autonomy and engagement.

Pause and reflect:

- What changes could I make to my physical classroom space that would serve L2 better?
- What intangible elements affect the L2 learning in my classroom environment?

3. Essential practices: the how

This section has examined the what and why of creating a learning culture that the L2 as a natural part of a classroom, not an 'add-on' feature. We have discussed the disposition of the adult to the learner and the L2 and covered the impact of the environment. The remaining considerations are the how - the means and methods that support the shift away from simply transferring knowledge to creating an environment where a more holistic approach to L2 learning is a priority. The relationships between the what, why and how are reciprocal and themes echo and even overlap.

3.1. Mindset

Extending the discussion on educator dispositions into practice reveals how mindset shapes intentions, which in turn affects the methods used to engage learners in the L2. A shift in educator mindset can open the door to alternative solutions that address persistent issues in language learning. Educators who view language as a tool for communication rather than merely a subject to be taught can create more authentic and engaging learning experiences.

Normalising L2 use in everyday conversation by presenting it as a part of daily life rather than confining it to formal lessons is essential. This approach addresses common obstacles to speaking, such as lack of exposure outside the classroom, limited interaction opportunities, and the absence of 'live' speakers. By integrating L2 into daily activities, learners gain authentic exposure, interaction chances, and real-world language models, fostering a more natural and effective learning environment.

Importantly, classroom culture should prioritise confidence in speaking over correctness, encouraging learners to express themselves in L2 regardless of errors. This

article explores the correlation between Dweck's growth mindset and L2 learning underscoring the value of framing challenges, not as obstacles but as a natural part of learning.

3.2. Day-to-day practices

Consistent Vocabulary Enrichment

> *"The language given becomes the language used."*
>
> *- Denise Fernandes (Bilingual Montessori, Webinar #9, 2024)*

Vocabulary enrichment is a key element of second language learning in schools. The assumption, when working with the L1, is that in school we refine and expand the learners vocabulary. While for L2 teachers are mindful that most children are only exposed to all aspects of the new language in school, so introducing new vocabulary must be conscious, strategic and a consistent part of the school day. This begins with daily routines and the objects in the classroom and continues with specialised vocabulary. Danielle DesLauriers' Community Conversation on supporting spontaneous production of L2 describes the process of creating target vocabulary lists.

Generating these lists can be done by level, while meeting to review them can be a fruitful whole school activity done at the beginning of each school year to engage teaching staff in one important objective of the language learning program.

Observation and reflection

Continuous observation is key to refining methods, their implementation and the environment itself. Educators should regularly observe the distinct elements of the environment to assess the effectiveness of their strategies, learners' progress, and the overall impact of L2 integration. There are many observation techniques and approaches to use. Further information on observation can be found further on in this section.

Reflection allows educators, individually and in teams, to share observations and records to support learners, improve methodology and foster mutual support among colleagues. This reflective practice feeds into the iterative cycle mentioned earlier, informing adjustments and improvements to the approach. As previously mentioned, honing and crafting a culture of L2 learning takes time, but observation and reflection can help identify and avoid potential obstacles.

Assessment, Reflection and Adaptation

In Lucie Urbančíková's webinar, Practical Ideas for Assessment of a Bilingual Program you'll find a wealth of information that expands on the role of assessment in

supporting program outcomes. This webinar covers:

- Different perspectives of all the parties involved in the assessment process and how each party benefits from it
- What are the basic types of assessments for a 6-12 classroom? Please see Assessment Section 3.8. for more details.

Engaging Families and the Community

In addition to the intercultural activities mentioned above, school wide celebrations of selected holidays relevant to the target language culture can be a pleasurable way to engage all members of the school community. For example, American Thanksgiving, St. Patrick's Day or International Day of Peace for a discussion of engaging families and school community in the process.

4. Conclusion and future directions

Being patient but methodical and intentional in your implementation will result in your program developing, over time, into a living representation of what your program's language policy aspires to. The foundation of a program moves from discussion and documentation becoming a culture of learning environments through an iterative process of establishing, maintaining and improving the culture of L2 learning. This evolution relies on various forms of observation, assessment, reflection, collaboration, knowledge sharing and continued discussion, planning and adaptation in service of your learning community.

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Community Conversations for and by teachers of 3-6 year olds:

Florencia Ulgalde: "Specialized langugage activities in a 3-6 classroom"

Danielle DesLauriers: "Research based practices for encouraging spontaneous English L2 production in the 3-6 Montessori Environment"

Romali Rosales: "Progression from L2 classes to an English Corner for Children's House

Denise Fernandes: Empowering Young Readers in Children's House and Denise also did a webinar titled "ESL in the younger years"

Community Conversations for and by teachers of 6-12 year olds:

Joanna Stewart: "Approaches to English Immersion"

Laura Cassidy: "How to Support an Immersive Second Language Experience in a Montessori 6-12 Classroom" "Strategies to Support Writing Skills in the Elementary Montessori Classroom"

Paula Esteve: "Como consegue que mis alumnos amasen la lectura"/ "How I got my students to love reading" (with translation)

Lucie Urbančíková: "Second language learning materials in a Montessori 6-12 classroom: Key features that make children excited to use them on their own"

Jana Winnefeld: "Steps towards language learner autonomy in a 6-12 classroom"

Mariann Manhertz: "Combining Montessori Philosophy and Second Language Enrichment to meet the needs of the children ages 6-12"

Preparing the bilingual learning environment

3.2. A Montessori framework for effective L2 learning outcomes

Contents

Key takeaways

- Recognizing the **developmental traits** of elementary-aged learners enhances L2 instruction.
- Activities should stimulate both **imagination** and **logical thinking**, enabling children to explore abstract ideas while engaging in language development.
- Create opportunities for **self-directed learning** to promote autonomy in language acquisition.
- While **repetition** is vital, it must be **varied** to keep children engaged.
- Children thrive on **peer collaboration** - design group activities that foster authentic communication and cultural exploration.

Introduction

Understanding the characteristics of elementary learners is crucial for fostering effective second language (L2) acquisition. In Montessori education, teachers work with the characteristics of learners using relevant methods and approaches to support stage appropriate developmental outcomes. Children in the 6-12 age range exhibit unique developmental traits that can be leveraged to enhance language learning. By recognising and addressing these characteristics, educators can design engaging, age-appropriate activities that captivate learners' imaginations and intellectual curiosity.

Key traits, such as the growing ability to think abstractly, the need for variety in repetition, and the desire for independence, provide valuable insights for creating a supportive and dynamic learning environment. This approach caters to the children's evolving cognitive and social needs and also ensures that L2 learning is enjoyable and productive. The characteristics and relevant strategies discussed below originate from Montessori's description of the second plane child, referred to in this field guide as the elementary learner.

1. The importance of understanding elementary learner characteristics

Educators can work with the characteristics of the elementary learner to facilitate engaging and effective L2 learning and progression. Each characteristic can be seen as a guidepost orienting the adult to:

- Design age-appropriate language activities that captivate learners' interests *see 3.6. Adaptations that serve learner L2 outcomes
- Leverage children's natural tendencies to enhance language learning
- Consider and address potential challenges in L2 learning specific to this age
- Create a learning environment that supports holistic language development *see 3.1 Developing a culture of L2 learning

The strategies suggested below offer educators inspiration and guidance. The characteristics and principles are keys or resources that offer insight into how to work with learners at this developmental stage. To find the right approach in any setting, educators must consider the unique contexts of their program and its particular aims.

2. Characteristics of the elementary learner

Each of the chosen characteristics is explored in relation to L2 learning and is not a definitive list of the characteristics of the elementary child. Mariann Manhertz's community conversation, 'Combining Montessori Philosophy and Second Language Enrichment' covers a more extensive list, with examples of lessons and methods from her classroom that address learners' needs and tendencies.

2.1. The reasoning mind and imagination

- A mind that seeks to understand the how and the why - cause and effect
- Possesses a growing ability to think abstractly: crucial for language learning
- Able to explore big questions about life and the universe using imagination to envision and consider abstract ideas.
- Is motivated to pursue interests and satisfy curiosity independently and in small groups
- Develops stamina to research, investigate and experiment in pursuit of rationale

Strategies to engage the reasoning mind and imagination

- Design activities to stimulate the child's imaginative thinking while also satisfying their growing capacity for logical reasoning.
- Careful reflection and imagination on the part of the guide to involve children in language learning opportunities that go beyond language-focused activities.
- Providing learners with opportunities to explore their own learning.
- Teachers can use stories from history or other areas of the curriculum as a hook for learners Following these short, engaging presentations learners independently investigate using careful, intentional supports put in place for L2 learners
- Introducing techniques and approaches used in 'big work' for L2 learners so they can engage in exciting topics while advancing their language skills. More information on big work is given below, in subsection 2.5. In addition, examples of big work activities are covered in this section's appendix.

2.2. The will and intellectual independence

- 6-12 year old children are curious about the world that cannot be seen – historical figures, prehistoric life. This way the child can continue to develop

autonomy in their learning as each activity allows them to work independently and with an achievable objective.

- For a more in-depth exploration of Montessori's observations regarding the will see Development of the Will by Molly O'Shaughnessy linked in this section's resources.

Strategies to appeal to the will and engage intellectual independence

- It is crucial that L2 teachers create learning opportunities that avoid forced tasks.
- A growing desire to find things out for themselves can be harnessed for self-directed language exploration.
- The teacher should follow the child's interest while considering what is possible given the child's L2 skillset. For example, in facilitating a child's interest in snakes, the resources available should match the child's language level. If appropriate materials are unavailable the teacher should offer information or work about other reptiles that match the child's level. A teacher's awareness that open outcomes allow the child to work in their zone of proximal development (Vygotsky) aids growth and working with 'just' enough challenge. The difficulty of the materials must offer adequate challenge - appealing to the child's will - but not be so difficult as to become an obstacle.

2.3. The need for variety in repetition

- Montessori observed the need for variety and creativity to satisfy the tendency for repetition.
- Unlike younger children, elementary children bore easily when asked to repeat the same activity. Variety in materials and varied approaches to a concept can re-engage their interest.
- Avoiding repetition can be difficult for teachers as we also know that language learning requires memorisation and repetition to be successful.

Strategies to offer developmentally appropriate repetition

- The teacher's work is, therefore, to engage learners in a wide variety of L2 activities that are different in approach but consolidate the same language skills.
- This requires teacher presentations and a range of activities that appeal to the creative and social needs of the elementary child and focus primarily

on communication skills.

- Practitioners should also use caution or avoid using materials aimed at younger learners even in cases where the elementary L2 learner is a beginner. These materials and their corresponding activities are not designed to engage the characteristics of the elementary child. The repetition used to reinforce concepts when working with younger children may not be suited to the needs of the elementary learner. More on this topic can be found in section 3.6 Adaptations that serve learner L2 outcomes.

2.4. Individualised learning

- Pacing: comfortable yet challenging tempo that builds confidence and removes inhibitions.
- Interest-driven learning: Children can be encouraged to pursue language learning through topics that interest them. For example, a child fascinated by space might learn vocabulary related to the solar system.
- Multiple approaches to content: Children may engage with and understand language in different ways so teachers present language concepts through various means: storytelling, hands-on activities, music, logical puzzles, or social interactions. This variety allows children to encounter language in multiple contexts, reinforcing learning and catering to different strengths and interests.

Strategies for individualised learning

- **Skill level matching**: An array of activities and materials are chosen and organised by the teacher to match the range of ability in the group. Then, in formal and informal lessons the teacher can introduce the child to materials appropriate for language skill level and interests.
- **Choice**: Children are given choices in their learning activities, fostering intrinsic motivation. In L2 learning, this might involve choosing between different types of reading materials in the classroom library or identifying specific objectives for a writing activity with the teacher's support.
- **Personalised feedback**: addressing each child's specific language learning challenges and strengths. See Assessment in L2 Learning
- **Goal setting**: Older elementary children might be involved in setting their own language learning goals, with guidance from the teacher.
- **Diverse resources**: A variety of language learning resources to cater to

different interests and learning needs. Rather than creating new materials based on an individual child's interests, which can change rapidly, teachers can consider adapting current practices and materials to meet learner needs. See section 3.6 Adaptations that serve learner L2 outcomes for additional information on adaptations.

- Children go through different phases of strong interests and often develop sudden and intense excitement about a certain topic, kind of object or activity. Enjoyment and attraction to the use of both or all school languages can be achieved by providing a wide selection of content and resources (including dictionaries) and a variety of tried and tested activities (e.g. making own word cards, creating small books or a board game). By enabling the children to apply a technique such as making a small book to any topic of interest, we allow them to follow their interests.

- **Multi-age classrooms**: The Montessori mixed-age classroom supports individualised learning as children work at their own level regardless of age. See this section's appendix for examples.

2.5   The capacity for sustained, in-depth project work

- "Big work" provides elementary learners the opportunities to take risks and work with peers. Although there are guidelines and ground rules, the group can explore, research and create as needed. These projects do not restrict the physical disorder that ensues when groups engage in big work. Rather, it is understood that these processes facilitate the creation of order (e.g. structure, cataloguing and associations) in their minds at the same time.

- When working with L2 learners, teachers must take care to calibrate their own expectations and those of the children since they may not yet have the skills to do extensive research, particularly in the L2. Interest-based projects, like pen pal letters, can create rich opportunities for second language learning.

2.6.   Social development

- Peer learning and collaboration are aspects of social development that are particularly important for language learning, as they provide opportunities for authentic communication. This video from the Montessori Guide website, Elementary Age Work provides further context and additional examples.

- Cultural Awareness and Interest: Elementary children develop a keen

interest in other cultures, which can be leveraged for language learning.

- While younger children most often work independently, elementary children become much more extroverted, seeking out engagement with others to support social development at this age. They love to work in groups and peers become very important. The children spontaneously form groups, abide by their rules and appointed leaders. The child at this age demonstrates interest in adapting to wider society. Elementary children love to spend time with their friends, incessantly talking to each other. The opinion of their peers becomes extremely important. In these groups, they learn how to collaborate and contribute to agreed upon, common goals.

Strategies for supporting collaborative learning and social development

- The freedom of movement in a Montessori classroom facilitates varied social experiences where children encounter peers with different personalities throughout the day. Not all will be harmonious! The disagreements and conflicts provide fertile ground for children to learn how to handle these situations. In the classroom, the freedom of movement and the possibility to choose your place or a group to join can help spread knowledge among the children. By participating in multiple groupings throughout the day learners can share and debate acquired expertise in a certain field with others.
- This social development of elementary children can be observed through the child's need and desire to go out into wider society. The child is eager to find their role in society as a whole and the classroom environment offers myriad opportunities to experience varied roles within a known community.
- Beyond the classroom, going out can often be conducted in the L2 and optimised for communication skills used in settings that cater to tourists - museum tours, audio guides, and information leaflets.
- L2 learning activities should also be carefully designed to appeal to the desire of the elementary child to socialise and work with others. Teachers or language specialists should carefully create L2 activities that promote working in groups. As we know, the development of communication skills should be the key focus when developing second language acquisition and this can work perfectly with the 6-12 year old's desire to work in a group and communicate their opinion. (For more detail see section "3.4 Building Literacy I: Spoken Communication".)
- Activities relevant to social development are covered in this section's appendix.

2.7. Moral sense and justice

- Elementary children are preoccupied with what is fair and have a deep sense of justice and compassion. Rules that were simply followed in early childhood, are now constantly questioned and subject to the child's scrutiny.
- Children will question everybody's behaviour and will be sensitive to any sort of breach of justice. ''It's not fair'' is one of the most common phrases heard from elementary children as they begin to understand abstract concepts such as morality and justice and apply them to their own lives.

Strategies for incorporating an interest in morality and justice

- The strong sense of injustice felt by the elementary aged child is a rich opportunity for advancing L2 language skills. When children feel strongly about an issue, whether it be in the classroom or an issue for the wider community, the teacher can seize this opportunity and support the learners to take action on an issue either orally or in a written format.
- For example, writing a persuasive letter to the school director or electing a class delegate to meet with the school administration about class issues. This type of activism appeals to their sense of justice while also creating motivation to use their L2 communication skills.

Pause and reflect

- Looking at the L2 activities I use in the classroom, how can I adjust them to be more age-appropriate and better aligned with my students': a) developmental needs, b) language levels, c) interests?
- In what ways can I integrate both imaginative and logical thinking into language activities?
- How can I encourage students to explore abstract ideas through the L2 while staying engaged?
- How can I create more opportunities for my students to take ownership of their language learning, using their natural curiosity?
- How do I ensure that repetition in language learning remains varied and stimulating, keeping my students engaged?
- What strategies can I implement to personalise my students' learning experiences?

- How do I guide them to explore topics of interest in the L2 while fostering intrinsic motivation?
- How can I effectively facilitate group work in my classroom to support social development and authentic language use among my students?

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- An Overview of the Reasoning Mind and Imagination: Collaborative Learning
- Using Stories to Create Interest: The Hook,
- The Role and Value of Peer Learning: Elementary Aged Work,
- Using Environments Outside of the Classroom: Going Out.

4. Appendix 3.2.1.

Engaging L2 learners in big works

Learning principles supported

- Interest, choice, learning from peers, learning in context

Psychological characteristics supported

- Reasoning mind and imagination
- The will and intellectual independence
- Capacity for sustained/in depth work
- Social development

Description

Providing the necessary materials and support for learners so that they can conduct their own investigations in L2. and produce big works related to what they find.

Supports L2 learning by

- Providing a meaningful context for developing L2 reading comprehension skills and learning new vocabulary.
- Creating a motivating opportunity for developing writing skills.
- Providing additional support for L2 learners creates an environment where they feel confident to conduct investigations in L2, whatever their L2 level.

How to

Books or materials for research should be carefully selected at a variety of levels so children can understand the information they discover. This means the guide may choose the information the children use for their research so the children can fully engage with the topic. The child should be able to search for, read and understand the information they are using.

A given structure for investigation may be helpful forL2 learners to support their investigation. Students require presentations on how to effectively find information, take notes and cite sources. In order to facilitate this process children can be provided with small notecards. On each card, they copy

information from one source. This information is then collected in the group

and the completed note cards are laid out in a shared space. They are then read through with an adult, discussed for comprehension and the facts are then copied, or paraphrased, onto the final product. In this process, we focus on quality over quantity.

Use of writing frames supports L2 learners to extract information from a non-fiction text. For example, providing a writing frame for an animal report means the child must read and find the information for the headings 'habitat', 'appearance', and 'diet' from the text. These writing frames should be provided at a variety of levels and eventually removed as the L2 level and literacy levels advance.

Providing key vocabulary can also support learners to access information on their chosen topic. Providing a word mat or key vocabulary cards can promote learner independence in conducting their own research.

Mixed ability/age groups provide a natural opportunity to develop the language skills of all in the group. Less able learners can be supported by more advanced learners. Supporting the others in the group provides students with a higher level with the opportunity to apply their learning in a new way by explaining it to others. It also allows these students to reflect on how they have mastered certain skills while explaining them to others.

Providing children with **_a wide range of creative ways to present their work_** (such as building a model, sewing a picture, or creating a mini book) ensures that they are confident to create a big work around their chosen topic even when they do not yet have strong literacy skills in L2.

5. Appendix 3.2.2.

L2 communication games

Learning principles supported

- learning from peers, interest

Psychological characteristics supported

- Need for variety and repetition
- Social development

Description

- Providing a range of L2 communication games on the language shelf
- Supports L2 learning by providing a motivating opportunity to repeat key vocabulary and grammar structures in a fun and interesting way.
- Providing a structured way for learners to practise communication skills with peers.
- Equipping learners with the communication skills they need so they feel more confident to speak in other contexts.

How to

Communication games provide the opportunity to give children a fun way to practise their communication skills. They can be especially appealing as they often provide a script therefore ensuring that L2 is being practised even when an adult is not present. The script can also provide a structure for the child while speaking therefore allowing them to practise while being secure in the vocabulary and grammar structures they are using. It is important that these games are considered a legitimate work choice in the classroom and can really engage second plane learners in L2 learning.

Sample games

Guess who provides a fun and sociable activity for practising forming questions in L2. Some children will be able to play without prompts while other children may require a list of potential questions to support their L2 use.

Conversational Snakes and Ladders (which can be found online at Twinkl.com for example) takes the classic game Snakes and Ladders and

incorporates the practice of oral skills by talking on a range of topics. This game comes with question cards in three levels so all learners can work at their individualised level.

Bingo is a popular game and can be used for practising a variety of L2 skills. It can be used to practise new vocabulary ranges e.g., clothes. It can also be used as learners advance to practise specific grammar structures such as past tense bingo.

Top tip

Children also love to design their own games for practising L2 skills.

6. Appendix 3.2.3.

Book Club

Learning principles supported

- Executive function, interest, choice, learning from peers, learning in context

Psychological characteristics supported

- Reasoning mind and imagination
- The will and intellectual independence
- Capacity for sustained/in depth work
- Social development

Supports L2 learning by

- Developing reading comprehension and book analysis skills
- Supporting critical thinking skills engagement
- Creating a meaningful context for practising communication skills

How to

Book club provides a meaningful and interesting way for children to develop their comprehension skills which is based on a child- led approach.

- In a group, children look at a variety of books at their level and decide which book they would like to read. They do a five finger self assessment where they read a page from the book and put up a finger every time they do not understand a word. If they reach five fingers the book is too difficult for them at the moment.
- Once the group has agreed on the book they want to read, they agree how much each of them will read individually that week. They know they usually have a month to read the book so they use their maths to divide the book up into readable chunks. Children have the experience of regulating this themselves. Often the first week they will enthusiastically choose to read a lot of the book only for the group to agree in the following session that a smaller amount is more achievable.
- Next, the children agree on which role each child will play in the following session: Jobs include:
- Summariser - creating a summary of the pages read. This can be a written summary but could also be a comic book.

- Game maker - creating a board game based on what has happened in the book so far.
- Artist - creating a piece of art based on what you have read. This should not be a copy of an illustration but an original creative work!
- Question writer - Using Bloom's taxonomy to create interesting questions that usually ask why!
- Children come to book club each week with their jobs completed. The leader of the group welcomes everyone and ensures each person has a chance to present their work and ideas.
- After the meeting, the group agrees on how much they will read the next week and rotate the jobs.

Preparing the bilingual learning environment

3.3. L2 learning across the integrated curriculum

Contents

Key takeaways

- An **integrated curriculum** connects subjects to promote both content knowledge and language development.
- Effective **planning and language support** are crucial for L2 learners.
- The **Great Lessons** unify academic disciplines and engage L2 learners through interactive, visually stimulating presentations.
- **Language choice** for the Great Lessons depends on the program's goals.
- **Errors** are a natural part of language development - focusing on specific areas for improvement rather than over-correcting helps to keep L2 learners motivated and progressing.

Introduction

The integrated curriculum approach, particularly in bilingual Montessori classrooms, emphasises the interconnectedness of subjects, fostering a holistic and interdisciplinary learning experience. By drawing connections across different content areas, this approach not only supports content knowledge acquisition but also enhances second language (L2) development. The Great Lessons, a core element of the Montessori curriculum, serve as a foundation for this integration, offering engaging and adaptable lessons that motivate students to explore academic concepts while using the target language in meaningful contexts. This text explores the benefits and challenges of implementing an integrated curriculum for L2 learners, focusing on how various strategies, such as the use of thematic organisation, collaborative teaching, and language adaptation, contribute to effective second language acquisition and academic success. Additionally, it addresses the importance of fostering disciplinary literacy and making intentional language adaptations to support students' evolving language skills.

1. An overview of the integrated curriculum approach

An integrated curriculum approach is an educational strategy that deliberately draws connections between different subjects or disciplines, providing holistic, interconnected learning experiences rather than isolated, subject-specific units. This approach aims to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of knowledge and real-world experiences. Using observation to understand the characteristics and needs of the second plane, Dr. Maria Montessori designed an educational approach to learning that supports and meets the developmental needs of children, aged 6-12.

An integrated curriculum approach can be particularly beneficial in the context of second language learning. It provides authentic contexts for language use across various subject areas, supporting simultaneous content knowledge acquisition and language development. This approach aligns well with theories of second language acquisition that emphasise the importance of meaningful, contextualised language use for effective learning.

Other pedagogical approaches utilise integrated curricula to underscore the interrelated nature of life, employing various methods of content delivery and

knowledge acquisition. Some pedagogies are more participatory than others, encouraging student engagement through project-based work and self-directed study versus more conventional, transmission of knowledge, frontal instruction. The International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum, particularly the Primary Years Program for learners of 3 to 11 years, uses a transdisciplinary approach integrating subject areas around central themes. The STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) approach integrates these disciplines, often through hands-on, project-based learning experiences.

While Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), is not a curriculum in itself, it incorporates learning of content and language simultaneously and provides a meaningful context for language acquisition. Other approaches, similar to CLIL in that they are not curricula per se, offer students the opportunity to consider the complexity of and relationships between subject areas. Project-Based Learning and Inquiry-Based Learning are relevant examples.

CLIL is particularly suited to L2 learning in an integrated curriculum. It provides a dual-focused educational approach in which an L2 is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language. This makes it especially valuable in bilingual education settings and for supporting second language acquisition in content-area classrooms.

2. Benefits of the integrated curriculum for L2 learners

Interweaving language work throughout the curriculum, in both the L1 and L2, provides experience of their real-life, relevant application. In turn, the child's growing knowledge and expanding abilities sustain and increase their motivation, supporting deeper learning and more authentic self-expression. Children become more able to participate in and feel successful in community life.

Making connections between areas of knowledge is explicitly woven into the scope of learning in Montessori classrooms. The learning structure, from the organisation of the daily work cycle to the assessment instruments used, all support the development of integrated knowledge. The development of language skills aids many other areas of a child's development and builds

confidence; our capacity to use language and employ strong communication skills contributes to growth and progress in numerous aspects of our lives.

These aspects of an integrated curriculum approach are particularly beneficial to L2 learners:

Cross-disciplinary connections:

- Provide multiple contexts for language use, reinforcing vocabulary and structures across subjects
- Help L2 learners see language as a tool for learning rather than just a subject to be studied

Thematic organisation:

- Allows for repeated exposure to key vocabulary and language structures within meaningful contexts
- Supports comprehension by providing a broader context for language use

Authentic learning experiences:

- Offer real-world language use scenarios, preparing L2 learners for practical communication
- Increase motivation by demonstrating the immediate relevance of language skills

Skill transfer:

- Encourages L2 learners to apply language skills across different subjects, reinforcing learning
- Develops cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) alongside basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) (Cummins 1979)

Flexible scheduling:

- Allows for extended language exposure and practice within content areas
- Provides time for in-depth language development activities integrated with content learning

Project-based learning:

- Offers opportunities for extended language production (verbal and written)

in meaningful contexts

- Encourages collaboration and peer learning, providing diverse language models

Collaborative teaching:

- Allows for specialised language support within content areas
- Exposes L2 learners to diverse language models and registers (providing more inclusive examples of how a language may be spoken)

Holistic assessment:

- Evaluates language skills in context, providing a more accurate picture of L2 learners' abilities
- Reduces anxiety associated with isolated language testing

These components create a stimulating, supportive environment where students can authentically engage in language and content learning. This approach aligns with key second language acquisition theory principles, such as the need for comprehensible input, opportunities for output, and meaningful interaction in the target language. See section 2.4. Modes of communication in elementary L2 development to read more about these principles.

2.1. Disciplinary Literacy

It can be helpful to think of language as the primary medium through which people think and learn, in addition to allowing us to communicate in myriad ways. Learners develop specific and appropriate language to help them understand and express ideas about each discipline while acquiring concepts from each curriculum area, whether music, geography, mathematics, biology or history.

Some educational systems refer to this interdependent process as disciplinary literacy or content area literacy.

To help develop learners' competence in handling both subject-specific tasks and interdisciplinary work, teachers should present language learning within meaningful contexts rather than teaching language rules and vocabulary in isolation. Learners benefit from understanding that language varies depending on the context in which it is situated.

For example:

- The language of mathematics differs from the language of history
- The language we use when talking to close friends differs from giving oral presentations to strangers
- Spoken language differs from written language
- We choose different forms of language to write a narrative than a scientific explanation. (Derewianka, 2012, p. 129)

Children need exposure to a wide range of quality language examples to learn how to select the appropriate language for different purposes. Teachers and programs must plan for this exposure, ensuring skills are built up gradually across the elementary years to strengthen disciplinary literacy and support readiness for middle school / secondary education. This careful planning is crucial in a second language context where children need additional guidance in choosing which language fits and is most appropriate for different situations and purposes.

Pause and reflect

- List at least three ways you can incorporate real-world language use into your classroom to enhance both content learning and L2 development.
- How can you create authentic learning experiences that connect language use with other subject areas?
- In what ways can you help L2 learners to view language as a tool for deeper understanding?
- How do you ensure that language instruction in your classroom is context-driven?

3. Planning and incorporating support for L2 use and learning

3.1. Setting language expectations and planning to support language work in any area of the curriculum

In bilingual classrooms, teachers must thoughtfully approach language use across all aspects of instruction. This requires considering how, where, when and why language is used in lessons when planning, preparing and delivering

lessons, as well as adapting expectations when learners are working in the L2. When teachers incorporate the suggestions listed below, they can better engage learners and help them feel secure about their efforts in their learning environment.

Some areas of consideration when planning a lesson or presentation in any curriculum area:

- Are the children familiar with the vocabulary?
- Do the children/ some children need scaffolding or to attend a previous presentation before successfully accessing this presentation?
- Which language will the adult and the children use during the lesson?
- Will translation be offered and in what manner (teacher, peers, dictionaries, etc.)?
- Do particular children need personalised adaptations? Who and what?
- How will language expectations be communicated?
- In which language will children complete follow-up or project work?

3.2. Making language adaptations across curriculum areas

In some circumstances, language use and language learning adaptations are applicable across all curriculum areas. Adaptations that affect a whole classroom or level should be available in the school language policy or a similar whole school document. It is a good idea for all stakeholders to be aware of these adaptations.

Here is an example of a language adaptation that spans all curriculum areas applied to a whole level:

In the first year of our bilingual program implementation, our Upper Elementary students can produce follow-up work in their first or second language. We will review this adaptation at the end of our first year. (from Whole School Language Policy)

Child-specific adaptations

Other language adaptations span all curriculum areas but apply to an individual child. When learners have specific language needs because they have enrolled in the bilingual classroom later than their peers or have a particular language challenge a support plan is beneficial. The teacher should outline specific adaptations on an individual learning/education plan,

a language profile document or another system the school uses for documenting individual student needs. The teacher can share the plan with children, where appropriate, and their families. Teachers should review and adapt the plan regularly based on their observations of progress.

Situational adaptations

Teachers may apply additional support or adaptations to all relevant lessons across the curriculum. For example, Pepe can write his follow-up work using bullet points instead of complete sentences when this is the expectation.

Besides implementing adaptations for the entirety of the school year or term, we can apply adaptations in specific ways, like adapting an activity in a lesson. For example, Pepe and Carla can use a writing frame to complete this task.

3.3. Planning for language enrichment across the integrated curriculum

Teachers with extensive experience, working with children whose first language is not the language of instruction, and experienced language specialists are often skilled at identifying opportunities for language enrichment. They also have or develop a good understanding of the various stages of language development, know different ways language is used and can quickly identify errors and their likely origins.

Every professional goes through the stage of being new to the process. During this stage, it is important to plan a professional support system and create routines and techniques to ensure that the learning needs of all children in their class are met. Teachers and administrators must acknowledge that learning to do this efficiently will take additional effort and time beyond their regular workload.

Identifying opportunities for language enrichment is a positive step forward. Here are some helpful ideas that can assist teachers in recognising opportunities for language enrichment in any area of study:

- Keep a chart or a record-keeping system to track target vocabulary and phrases.
- When planning a lesson, refer to the chart or record-keeping system to help you identify opportunities for incorporating language enrichment work.
- You can mark the areas already covered and easily see which areas still

need attention.

- This way, you can plan follow-up activities to include areas that need to be covered or require extra work based on ongoing assessment.

3.4. Adapting the delivery of a lesson for second language learners

When children are offered a lesson from an area other than language, for example, science, history or geography, an L2 teacher should give advance thought to:

- Existing learner knowledge
- Potential challenges or advantages of offering the lesson to a mixed-age group
- Potential challenges or advantages of offering the lesson to a mixed-ability group
- What vocabulary or language structures may be new to the children,
  - in any written materials
  - in the language the teacher will need to use to deliver the lesson

This planning helps the teacher decide whether extra language scaffolding should be provided before or during the lesson. Of course, while introducing new vocabulary before a lesson may have certain advantages it can be more meaningful to introduce it within the context of the lesson.

The teacher may see a need to limit the range of vocabulary and structures used according to the language proficiency level of the children receiving the lesson. Keeping in mind recent language lessons across the curriculum can also help teachers plan lessons while maintaining a flow in the exposure children get to recently integrated language.

When teaching lessons that involve language scaffolding or support, teachers should consider how it will affect the flow and length of the lesson. In a bilingual environment, teachers may need to divide a presentation into two separate presentations, preventing it from becoming long and tiresome. This can also simplify the presentation of more complex concepts. Consider a teacher who, when planning a lesson about prehistoric animals, knows their student has recently learned how to use interesting adjectives. With this knowledge, the teacher can set criteria that incorporate opportunities to practise these skills in the new lesson. Giving special emphasis when using new

vocabulary, controlling the speed and intonation of spoken language and encouraging children to take notice of new structures (for example, question formation, comparative sentences, or conditional phrases) used in a lesson are all techniques which help develop second language learners' awareness of the L2.

Educators can use several effective strategies to support children's learning.

- Including L2 objectives in your lesson planning can help you stay focused on your goals and ensure children progress toward their language learning objectives.
- Revising previous knowledge can help to reinforce key concepts and ensure that students are well-prepared for the new material.
- Realia, using real objects to help illustrate learning, can be particularly effective for visual or hands-on learners.
- Using images or 3-part cards can be a great way to support understanding and help students remember new vocabulary.
- Writing key vocabulary and structures on a board or similar can also be useful, as it can help children see the words and phrases in context and reinforce their learning.
- Offering an example of written work as a model or control can help children understand what is expected of them regarding quality and content.
- Isolating new words and structures in speech allows children to focus on the new material without being distracted by other elements of the language.
- If grammar points come up during the lesson, you can offer on-the-spot mini-lessons to help clarify any confusion and ensure that children understand the topic. See section 3.7 Learning and Teaching L2 Grammar - Focus on form: from unobtrusive to obtrusive. Using gestures to visualise meaning and as reminders, such as the thumb backwards when indicating the past tense of a verb, can also be a helpful strategy.

Example: How to differentiate a presentation for different language levels in your group

The origins of the English language days of the week is a presentation which covers the fascinating history of how the days of the week got their names in English. It includes interesting stories about celestial bodies and Norse gods, with 3-part cards to help illustrate them. The language on the cards can be adjusted based on the learners' language level. The illustrations used in the presentation can be a great source of inspiration for learners to do follow-up work. For advanced learners, follow-up work could involve exploring days of the week in other languages or investigating Norse gods. For learners with a lower English language proficiency level, the presentation can be adapted to focus on learning the days of the week in English. Children who complete follow-up work in their first language can also learn the days of the week in English, and later investigate the history of how days were named in their first language.

3.5. Supporting follow-up, individual or project work in a bilingual environment

When children undertake follow-up or project work related to a specific lesson teachers should provide tools and techniques that enable learner success. It is recommended to have generic language support materials readily available in the classroom, e.g. vocabulary lists or writing frames. Children should receive regular presentations demonstrating how to use them and where to find them. These materials should be designed for independent learner use. It is advisable to remind children regularly about the availability of these resources. You can find several language enrichment and generic language support materials in the "Sample Second Language Materials" section, which includes lists of common words for spelling, personal dictionaries, and interesting words, among others. You can find these resources online or create them for your group.

The broad areas of language development

It is helpful for educators to bear in mind for planning, observing and evaluating language development that there are three ways that we use language (Halliday, 1973):

The Ideational Function

- to talk about 'what's going on', our experiences of the world, things we do and things that happen.

The Interpersonal Function

- for interacting with others and establishing and maintaining relationships while we take on different roles and operate in our environment. For example, asking for information, giving offers, taking turns, or cooperating. Similarly, the interpersonal function of language allows us to show our attitudes, feelings, opinions or judgements.

The Textual Function

- to show how the ideas that we express are related to each other, or to highlight certain ideas as more relevant than others, show contrast, manage the flow of information to present something new or draw conclusions about the ideas as we speak or write.

3.6. A continuous cycle of observation, evaluation, reflection and implementation

Using observation and reviewing work to support L2 development

In a bilingual environment, consistent observation and awareness of how learners use language provide teachers with key information. Teachers should consider the stage of language development, the current language focus for each child, and patterns that show the challenges that the child is confronting. Does the learner, for example, remember everyday words quickly enough, put words in the correct order in questions or appropriately use past tenses of verbs? This continuous cycle of observation, evaluation, reflection and implementation aids teachers in planning for and supporting individual learner progress.

To effectively observe and review children's spoken language and written work, teachers and assistants should develop a system to help them notice and record each child's language needs. Having a record-keeping or observation note system that enables educators to record and review these observations with ease will ensure that children's language development needs are at the forefront of the teacher's and assistant's minds when

reviewing, planning, preparing, and supporting the children in their day-to-day work across the curriculum.

Example of developing and supporting language needs through observation

In our Elementary II classroom, the community book addresses ethical concerns within the group. A child had noted a request for a class discussion about a recurring conflict in the garden regarding the playhouse. The guide facilitated a whole class community discussion. During the discussion, each child could express their views and explain what they thought was unfair and why. The role of the guide in this scenario is to ensure that all community members have the opportunity to convey their opinions and that they do so in a way that is respectful to the rest of the group.

However, the guide noticed that many children lacked the vocabulary to deal with interruptions or interrupting politely, and they reverted to complaining about this in their first language as the discussion became more animated. The guide noted common errors such as, "I no agree", in the observation notebook.

The guide created support material for community debates in a second language (there are online resources that can be adapted or used for the same purpose, for example, those from the University of Cambridge Thinking Together website). The guide organised the material by levels. The first level included prompt cards with simple phrases like, "I think..." or "I agree." The mid-level included weak and strong agreement or disagreement alternatives, such as, "I suppose so..." or "You're absolutely right!". Higher-level prompt cards included idioms and fixed expressions like, "You took the words right out of my mouth", and vocabulary for reaching compromises such as, "I can accept that if you could..." or "In exchange for..., would you...". The guide also created some cards with topics for discussion that inspired children to have mini-debates in pairs or small groups.

The guide introduced the new material to the children, and the assistant encouraged the use of this material and involved themselves in some mini-discussions to help set the tone. In this case, the assistant was also learning to speak English, so they also participated as a language

learner. The children loved the mini-debate material in the language area.

The next time a community discussion arose, there was a noticeable improvement in the children's English and debating skills. The enrichment activity quickly influenced the rest of the group. Even the children who were not very interested in the debate topics but were passionate about other community issues wanted their opinions heard. As a result, the children's vocabulary improved, and they started using phrases like, "You're absolutely right!" and "I beg to differ", with humour and enthusiasm.

Using work journals and conference meetings to reflect on progress in L2 and identify areas for support or enrichment

In the Elementary environment, children have access to two valuable tools that empower them to track and reflect on their own progress in learning a second language. The first tool is their work journals, where they can document their progress and reflect on their strengths and weaknesses. The second tool is conference meetings with their teacher to discuss their progress and needs. By reflecting on their progress and considering what they must focus on next, second language learners can feel positive about their learning and see their progress more clearly. This approach helps students take ownership of their learning and feel more confident in their abilities.

It can be helpful to include notes about agreed second language objectives in the work journal, as it can keep the current areas of learning at the forefront of the child's mind. These objectives can be reviewed in the following week's meeting. The weekly conference meeting is also an excellent opportunity to review written work together. Correcting it together and making notes in a work journal or personal dictionary is a meaningful way to correct written work. The teacher can make notes for themselves about mini-lessons they may want to give the child. It is an excellent opportunity to remind the child about useful second language support materials on the shelves. For example, the teacher and child reflect together on their use of adjectives in a piece of creative writing if they notice that certain adjectives are often repeated and could be more precise. The teacher can remind the child about the adjective word bank on the shelves or suggest using a thesaurus to find alternatives. Then together, they can reread the text and discuss more varied and

interesting adjectives the child has at their disposal. More information about this type of ongoing assessment for learning is in section 3.8 Assessment in L2 learning.

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Pause and reflect

- How do you ensure that language expectations are clearly communicated to your students?
- In what ways can you incorporate scaffolding and personalised adaptations for individual students?
- How do you support their language development across various curriculum areas?
- How do you plan for language enrichment opportunities within the integrated curriculum, ensuring that vocabulary and language structures are reinforced in meaningful contexts?
- How do you differentiate lesson delivery for students with varying levels of language proficiency, particularly when introducing new vocabulary and language structures?

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4. The Great Lessons in a Bilingual Environment

The Great Lessons are a unique aspect of Montessori Elementary classrooms and form the building blocks of the integrated curriculum. Each of these lessons consists of an impactful story, such as the start of the universe, the evolution of life forms or the development of the written alphabet, and each lesson serves as a path leading learners into specific areas of knowledge they will study (Biology, History, Ancient Life, Discovery and Invention, Language and its Origins, etc.) . Thus, they demonstrate how different classroom learning areas are interconnected. This perspective helps to unify the development of various academic disciplines. The Great Lessons inspire and motivate children to initiate investigations and research projects. (See this website for more information).

The Great Lessons are visually engaging, which serves as great support for L2 learners. Capitalising on this impressive aspect of Montessori's lesson design is important. When presenting a long lesson, such as a Great Lesson in the L2, it's important to remember that children will be more likely to stay focused with a

strong, theatrical delivery using plenty of visual and movement stimuli. Changing the delivery of Great Lessons from year to year can also be beneficial in keeping children engaged over time. Some ideas include using different props, delivering the presentations in various areas of the school, having children assist with the presentation, or even having them be responsible for presenting parts of it. Lessons can also include variations on the teacher's usual repertoire, such as doing a dance of the elements or using a balloon with glitter to illustrate the big bang.

When presenting the Great Lessons, teachers often wonder which language to use in bilingual Montessori classrooms. On the one hand, they must ensure that children understand the content and feel inspired, and on the other hand, they know that the language choice will impact children's language development and the classroom's language culture.

It is up to each school to decide in which language the great lessons will be delivered based on their language objectives and the language skills of their students. For schools that aim to use English as an additional language of instruction and to develop basic interpersonal skills, it is more likely that the Great Lessons will be delivered in the children's first language. In such cases, follow-up work may include elements to enrich English learning. For example, older elementary students may be encouraged to translate or present a great lesson in English as a follow-up project. However, schools that aim to achieve academic proficiency in English may choose to deliver the Great Lessons in English. If the language culture of the classroom requires students to complete follow-up work in English, then the Great Lessons should be presented in that language.

> **Here are some ideas for adaptations that can be made in some different school contexts:**
>
> In a new or transforming bilingual elementary program with the objective of reaching academic fluency in English
>
> During the first few years, the Great Lessons are delivered in the local language to ensure the children understand them. For the next few years, the lessons can be delivered in both languages simultaneously in different spaces or at staggered times so the children can choose which language they want to participate in. Alternatively, the lessons can be delivered in English with simultaneous translation or summary in the local

language, which an assistant or a confident child can do. After these initial years, the English-speaking culture of the new or transforming program should be sufficiently developed to allow for delivery in English without the need for translation. Here are some ideas for language adaptations for different programs or unique stages of program development.

For programs with Elementary I and Elementary II environments

The decision could be taken to deliver the Great Lessons in the local language in Elementary I and English in Elementary II.

For programs with varied levels of English amongst the students

The Great Lessons may be delivered in both languages simultaneously as described above, and children can choose where to participate, or delivered in English with a local language simultaneous translation or summary.

For well-established bilingual programs

The Great Lessons may be delivered directly in English using language support materials for the youngest students. Assistants or language specialists can organise or offer this support, before, during and after the Great Lesson, so the guide can focus on delivering an engaging lesson.

5. Dealing with errors in language use

Educators in the classroom need to understand that errors are part of children's natural stages in language development (see 3.7 Learning and Teaching L2 Grammar for more information). Depending on where a child is in their L2 development, educators can identify areas for improvement as they progress and talk to the children about these expectations to focus them on a particular area of their language development. Rather than trying to correct any or every kind of mistake, agreeing on specific areas for improvement and helping children work on them is a manageable way for language learners to focus on progress rather than the skills they lack. These recommendations should, importantly, consider the learner's next stage of language acquisition in identifying a particular focus. This guidance helps keep learners motivated

and have a better orientation in their language development. Over-correction, on the other hand, is demotivating and confusing for most language learners.

Practical ideas for focusing learners on a particular area of language development include a visual with a reminder in their work journals as discussed above, making a checklist for them to revise their writing, or introducing a game for practising specific structures or a bank of expressions.

Pause and reflect

- In what ways can you adapt the delivery of the Great Lessons each year to ensure that both content and language objectives are met, particularly in a bilingual classroom?
- When dealing with language errors, how can you identify specific areas for improvement without over-correcting?
- How might you use visual and movement stimuli to support both engagement and language development in a bilingual context?
- How do you keep learners active particularly during long lessons such as the Great Lessons?
- How does your approach to language support in the Montessori classroom evolve as students progress through different stages of language acquisition?

6. References and resources

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7. Appendix 3.3.1.

Strategies to engage elementary L2 learners using the integrated curriculum

The cross-curricular approach of the Montessori classroom lends itself to L2 engagement across learning. Learners are motivated by following their own interests and working in a group with peers. However, the guide must adapt the materials available to the children so they feel they can be successful in each activity they do. The following section will consider ways that the Montessori cultural curriculum can be optimised to develop L2 learning in a way that is engaging for elementary learners. These simple adaptations ensure that literacy is achieved across learning.

The key strategies suggested include emphasising:

- Vocabulary development
- Sentence structure
- Grammar development
- Oral presentations

Vocabulary development

Each cultural presentation is an opportunity to present new vocabulary. Nomenclature cards, impressionistic charts and great lessons all create rich opportunities to present new vocabulary for L2 learners. The use of visuals while presenting new vocabulary is crucial for understanding. It also ensures that translation is not relied upon to describe new words. This creates a more immersive approach and ensures learners are listening, and eventually, thinking in L2 during presentations. Using a personal dictionary in these presentations further supports this L2 development. Learners can make their dictionary at the start of the year and then bring it to each presentation, carefully noting words they learn. This supports the use of new vocabulary during follow-up works, strengthening spelling skills in a context where accuracy is relevant and important.

Sentence structure

Each cultural presentation also creates opportunities for literacy skills. The

guide can carefully choose activities as follow-up work to achieve a literacy objective while creating a stimulating cultural presentation. For example, science experiments create a rich opportunity to present to younger learners how to write a simple sentence by writing their hypotheses and observations. The guide should model the writing process while also providing a writing frame and word bank when required to support students to have autonomy in achieving their success during follow-up work. The cultural curriculum offers endless opportunities to incorporate such literacy objectives, creating extra language practice that is engaging and relevant for the learner.

Grammar development

Cultural presentations aid L2 learners in recognising and using new grammar structures as their knowledge of the language develops. For example, following great lessons or history presentations children can focus on using verbs in the past tense. When agreeing with learners on the success criteria for the final product, teachers can suggest ensuring all verbs used are in the past tense. Involving older students in identifying criteria for self-assessment facilitates learner autonomy and recognition of the interconnectedness of language learning between curricular areas.

Oral presentation

Providing opportunities for groups of learners to present what they have learned to their peers creates an excellent opportunity for learners to enhance their speaking and listening skills. Learners may read information from their final product but encouraging children to share with the group "two interesting things they learned" or "something that surprised you" encourages learners to integrate language and paraphrase what they have read. For less confident speakers, creating a PowerPoint, for example, as a final product can create a more structured approach to oral presentation that students enjoy. Each session should conclude with questions and answers which also develops the oral language skills of all present.

8. Appendix 3.3.2.

Big works

Dr Montessori claimed that big works provide second plane learners with the opportunities to take risks, work with peers and be autonomous. They allow them to cause disorder in a big space while creating order in their minds. While Montessori did not specifically consider L2 learners in proposing big works, they naturally provide rich opportunities for L2 learning. However, for big works to be truly effective for L2 learners the guide must observe and assess the needs of each child ànd scaffold the way they create their big works. This again ensures language progression and satisfies the needs of the learners to feel secure in their language learning.

Ways to scaffold big works for L2 learners include:

- Books or materials
- An investigation structure
- Use of writing frames
- Mixed ability/age groups

Books or materials available for research should be carefully selected at a variety of levels so children can understand the information they discover. This means the guide may choose the information the children use for their research so the children can fully engage with the topic. The child should be able to search for, read and understand the information they are using. Extra care should be taken when students look for information online. Students need presentations on how and where they can find reliable information explained in a way they can understand. A list of recommended websites should be available and made easily accessible on the favourites tab.

An investigation structure may be required by L2 learners to scaffold their investigation of a chosen topic. Without support in place, they will copy information without full comprehension of the text. Students require presentations on how to effectively find information, take notes and cite sources. In order to facilitate this process children can be provided with small notecards. On each card, they copy information from one source. They should have a presentation on the use of speech marks to copy a quote onto

the card while also learning how to correctly record the source of information on the back. For a book, this would include the title, year and page number while for a website would include the name of the website and the date of recording to show this information was considered true at this time. This information is then collected together as a group and the completed note cards are laid out in a shared space. They are then read through with an adult, discussed for comprehension and the facts are then copied onto the final product. For more advanced learners this final step can include paraphrasing the information recorded in their own words. In this process, we use quality over quantity. It is better to include one sentence from each source and understand it than to have lots of information that the group doesn´t understand.

Use of writing frames supports L2 learners to extract information from a non-fiction text. For example, providing a writing frame for an animal report means the child must read and find the information for the headings 'habitat', 'appearance', 'diet' from the text. These writing frames should be provided at a variety of levels and eventually removed as the L2 level and literacy levels advance and the scaffolding is no longer required.

Mixed ability/age groups provide a natural opportunity to develop the language skills of all in the group. Less able learners can be supported by more advanced learners. Supporting the others in the group provides higher-level students with opportunities to apply their learning in a new way - by explaining it to others. It also allows these students to reflect on how they have mastered certain skills by explaining or demonstrating them to others. Using the L2 to share their knowledge and know-how benefits learners by furthering their language skills and confidence.

These strategies create an L2 learning environment which engages elementary students at their interest level, while at the same time improving their language level. It is important, even when learners have a low level, to engage them with materials appropriate to their level rather than excusing them from producing big works in L2. A motivational context where they can work with peers, engage with the topic and consolidate literacy skills without repetition provides an environment where L2 language learning can flourish.

Preparing the bilingual learning environment

Contents

Key takeaways

- Both Montessori and the CEFR prioritize **language as a tool for communication**, not just skill mastery.
- Language development in Montessori classrooms should be cross-curricular, involving **all modes of communication**.
- Montessori aligns with the CEFR by promoting the use of learners' **full language repertoire** and fostering cultural understanding.
- Montessori classrooms **use all four communication modes** across daily activities to support natural language development.

Introduction

This section explores how the integration of the four modes of communication—receptive, productive, interaction, and mediation—supports second language (L2) learning in a Montessori elementary classroom. Drawing on the Common European Framework (CEFR) and Montessori's emphasis on language as a tool for communication, the text highlights the importance of creating an immersive learning environment where language is used naturally across diverse activities. Through community meetings, daily routines, work journals, and collaborative projects, students engage with language in dynamic, real-world contexts, fostering both linguistic skills and social interaction. The section offers practical insights into how educators can harness these modes to enhance L2 acquisition, while also sustaining a culture of language learning that encourages students to communicate confidently and meaningfully.

1. Aligning Montessori language education with the CEFR framework

Pedagogical discussion around second language learning now concurs that developing communication skills should be the focus of student learning. This change has now been more formally acknowledged by the Common European Framework (CEFR) which has redefined the skills required for language learning to reflect this important shift in approach. The first part of this section elaborates on these skills and how CEFR has redefined them.

Montessori understood communication as a human tendency, valuing language in all facets of education as a tool that aids our understanding of others, enables work within groups and as a tool of self-expression. Montessori saw language as an essential element of human existence that allowed cultures to be founded, thrive, evolve and be shared.

> *Another tendency of man from his first beginnings is communication. The child at the first plane creates his language, his mother tongue, and learns to speak it and to read and write it, if he is lucky, in the Casa dei Bambini his parents chose. At the second plane of development, since this is the stage where the child works through reason, language, the tool of reason's expression, is significant. Language is the thread that ties together all the elements of cosmic education.*

The redefinition of the skills required for language learning by CEFR aligns perfectly with the immersive and cross-curricular approach of the Montessori elementary classroom and acknowledges the cultural diversity evident in our classrooms. The second part of this chapter will give practical suggestions on how to enhance the communication skills of L2 learners in the Montessori elementary environment.

2. What are the skills required for language learning?

Until recently, the classical idea persisted that language education has to cover speaking, listening, reading and writing, which have traditionally been known as the four skills. A skill can be understood as an ability that develops when people train until mastery is attained. However, from a development-focused educational perspective, language is learnt to communicate and is, above all, a socialisation process. In other words, it makes sense for the teacher to see the overall purpose of language teaching as a process that triggers the expansion of children's communicative abilities in the context of social and personal development. Furthermore, the social need of the second plane child means that socialisation is an important motivator in learning for the 6-12 child.

So the idea of teaching the four language skills can be seen, in some ways, as inadequate for language education nowadays in bilingual /multilingual settings. This is because it suggests a separation firstly, of language from other content the child is learning (for example, working on "listening" or "writing" in an isolated way), even though we think and learn using language as a medium, as Lev Vygotsky highlighted (Vygotsky, 1978).

Secondly, the traditional concept of skills is limiting because it suggests the use of language as separate from communication, as if, for instance, writing or speaking were things that we train to be able to do correctly as ends in themselves. Brian North, one of the authors of the Common European Framework, explains that language is not an abstract thing learnt because you may one day use it, or something for training our minds (2021, p.9) Actually, we use all the modes available to communicate, as essential elements of a fulfilling life, for our relationships, creative expression and intellectual activity at all of our life stages.

Experts in language education and assessment have, over the last decades, advocated for revisiting the idea that these four skills remain the main focus in the classroom. As learners become proficient in a language, they will use listening, speaking, reading and writing as needed, not just one at a time, forall kinds of communication purposes. To help children reach the point where they can do this, they have to be able to access language learning activities and materials that they can use and build on, even if their knowledge is not developed enough to spontaneously engage in using the L2.

Pause and reflect

- How can you shift your focus from the traditional four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) to a more integrated, communication-based approach in your L2 teaching, in line with the CEFR framework?
- In what ways can you ensure that language learning in your classroom is not isolated from other academic content, but rather a natural part of the child's holistic development and socialisation process?
- Considering the socialisation needs of children in the second plane of development, how can you create opportunities for meaningful communication that motivates children to use the L2 in real-life contexts?
- How can you incorporate Montessori's understanding of language as a tool for self-expression and communication into your L2 curriculum, particularly in a bilingual or multilingual classroom?

3. Modes of communication

In the 2020 update of the CEFR, published in the CEFR Companion Volume, the authors took a more contextualised view of language learning proposing that language education consider the modes of communication in creating plans for learning objectives, lessons and assessment.

RECEPTION

INTERACTION   MEDIATION

PRODUCTION
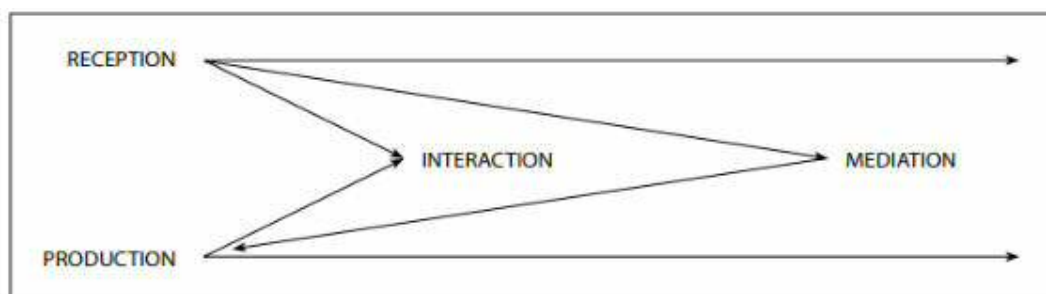
(From Council of Europe, 2020, p. 34)

3.1. Reception

The receptive mode includes reading and listening, where learners receive messages in the target language. Working on reception is when the children hear or read a continuous stream of language - when children listen to a story (group listening), a presentation by a teacher, their peers or oral instructions to complete a task.

Within the receptive mode of communication learners also use subskills:

Receptive Mode - Subskills

- use their understanding of certain words and the situation to help them build an idea of the message;
- notice words that they do not understand, retain them in memory and take the initiative to ask about them;
- use different resources like gestures, actions and verbal to show when they do or do not understand.

3.2. Production

Speaking and writing make up the productive mode, where learners express messages. This can include speaking up in circle time to share an anecdote - something that happened, explain information they have discovered, an opinion, join in singing, chanting or even reciting a poem. Some children may deliver a presentation or give a set of instructions to their classmates - following the language patterns they have listened to teachers use for these tasks over the previous weeks. Children can also use the L2 production in their

learning logs or diaries and later, in cases where educators have meetings and talk about the learner's diary entries, they can use interaction.

Productive Mode - Subskills

The subskills associated with the productive mode include:

- as learners progress, they can integrate helpful strategies in speaking, e.g. to check if the hearer understands, to retain the reader's attention, to highlight what is important (repetition, intonation, speech speed and volume),
- pronunciation, gesture (iconic / beat gestures); in written production, subskills include going from phonetic spelling to moving closer to and achieving conventional spelling; gradually improving tidiness and intelligibility, register, vocab. etc.

3.3. Interaction

In the mode of interaction, children partake in conversation and brief exchanges. Interaction requires the ability to respond to what we hear (or read) relatively quickly, using our language repertoire, which might be given by mixing languages, responding in the L1, and combining words or phrases with gestures.

Conversation in its simplest form is giving appropriate answers by saying words and possibly using gestures; as we grow in our communication abilities, and develop conversation skills, we show that we are listening as others speak through gestures.

Interaction - Sub-skills:

- listening for gist
- nodding, using eye contact, and "fillers" like "ok / mhhm / oh"
- using gestures or substituting words to get the message across.
- They also involve building on what others say, adding to their ideas with similar ones, agreeing or disagreeing and saying why.

We also use writing in interaction more and more today. In the classroom, this can be developed by writing notes to one another. Children enjoy interaction in the form of role-play, when they use their imagination to pretend to be a specific character, or "role-enactment", where they try to say appropriate phrases in a given realistic situation, without pretending to be someone in particular.

Interaction is more than just speaking and listening / reading & writing

combined; because it develops by participants' joint creation of what is said, as when we respond or add something new to an interaction, we take into account what was said before, and negotiate meaning to ensure we are understanding and being understood correctly.

3.4. Mediation

Mediation is a mode where all the other modes are integrated. When a person mediates, they rebuild messages in a new form. This means taking a message (or text), said or written, by someone else or in a previously different form, and delivering it in a new form for the hearer while maintaining its intention.

For example, a child, fluent in two languages can help others understand what was said by summing it up in the other children's L1 at the end of a class meeting. Mediation involves reception and then production, but also interaction, for instance in summing up and presenting to somebody else what was said before, there may be questions and answers to clarify the messages. Mediation can also be used to transform a representation, like turning a description we hear into a drawing, an instruction into an action; or putting a jumbled set of pictures in order, illustrating what is happening while listening to a story.

Mediation is also closely related to plurilingual competence. This concept, plurilingual competence, acknowledges that a person's entire language repertoire is valid knowledge that can and should be used to communicate effectively. Mediation is a mode of communication that allows us to exploit any knowledge a speaker may have, however little, to transmit messages that may not be understandable to others in their original form.

Pause and reflect

- How can you incorporate the different modes of communication (reception, production, interaction, mediation) into your lessons to create a more holistic and immersive language learning experience for your children?
- How can you foster an environment where children feel comfortable mediating messages between languages, helping their peers understand and engage with content in both their L1 and L2?
- Given the importance of interaction for language development, how can you structure classroom activities to promote meaningful, real-time

4. Incorporating the four modes of communication into an elementary setting

The following section will consider how the four modes of communication can support L2 learning in a Montessori elementary classroom. This shift in viewpoint towards communication modes ensures that language learning is focused on free communication. Creating an immersive experience supports the children to develop and use all four modes of communication interchangeably and in a natural context.

The key to free communication in the Montessori elementary environment is developing a culture of language learning. This is discussed in detail in Section 3.1, Developing a culture of L2 learning.

The essential ingredients of a culture of language learning are:

- Positive learning environment
- Cultural norm around language "This is what we do here"
- Natural flow of language

Once this foundation is established there are many rich opportunities in Montessori elementary classrooms where all four modes of communication can be used simultaneously and in a meaningful context. The next section will detail how the particular elements of the Montessori elementary classroom can be used to enhance the use of the communication modes.

4.1. Community meeting/Gathering

Community meeting (or gathering) time is an excellent opportunity to use various modes of communication simultaneously. For group meeting times to be an effective opportunity for children to use the different modes of communication it must be open for all children to speak and not adult dominated.

Children need the opportunity to use receptive modes of communication as it is a chance for extended listening. This is when the children have the opportunity to experience listening in context. They develop the skill of listening for keywords. They can also experience the flow of perhaps not understanding one sentence, then understanding a word in a subsequent sentence which helps unlock the meaning of the previous sentence. This is an important experience for children as they learn to be comfortable with not understanding everything and recognise this as a natural part of the language learning process. A supportive and trusting environment is key to allowing this process to occur.

Productive modes of communication are practised during the interaction in the meeting. This is especially true with second plane learners, keen to defend their view. This means it also provides a rich opportunity for extended speaking in L2 and responding to others.

Interaction mode (a combination of production and reception modes) occurs intrinsically in an elementary class meeting, especially if there is an opportunity to discuss classroom issues. One way to use interaction mode learners may find motivating is to hold a weekly community meeting, where problematic issues can be discussed. The community meeting is a common tool in Montessori classrooms as it allows the children to learn to function as a mini-society and consider and discuss changes that may need to be made in the environment. It is an important chance for the children to be listened to, to make positive changes and feel empowered.

During the week children can use their production modes to write their points or concerns for the meeting in the community book. Then during the meeting, the production mode is used again as the child verbally elaborates on the idea they have written in the book. During this part of the meeting, the other children use the receptive mode while listening and considering the idea. Finally, the other children have the chance to use their productive skills again when they respond to a suggestion and defend their point of view. Ideally, this meeting should be chaired by an older student therefore requiring mediation on their part as well. In addition to ensuring each child has a chance to speak, the chair reframes the ideas put forward and paraphrases to help arrive at a decision or solution.

Please note that translation should be avoided during meetings to ensure learners use the receptive modes of communication. If translation is done during a gathering, children may 'switch off' from listening to the L2 and wait

for the translation. In contrast, children translating at the end of the circle means those who have not fully understood feel included. This also allows children to translate and switch naturally between languages. This paraphrasing of what has occurred when translating is another example of mediation skills and is an excellent opportunity for children to challenge themselves while helping their classmates.

4.2. Daily routines

Daily routines provide important opportunities for interaction and repetition of vocabulary. They are also moments to use languages in a real meaningful context where the children can feel secure.

Lunchtime creates many opportunities for receptive skills to be used. Receptive skills are used when listening for instructions and keywords. Learners can hear new vocabulary for foods and routines around lunch. Adults can support this by using consistent language in this context employing fixed phrases regularly, like "Would you like some more", etc.

Over time, children grow comfortable with vocabulary and grammar structures used during lunchtime and start to use their productive skills as they learn to respond with phrases such as "More please". The repetition and routine of lunchtime allow L2 learners to feel secure in producing appropriate language and using suitable vocabulary and structures. Lunchtime also provides time for casual interaction and encourages children to have conversations in smaller groups. Mediation can also naturally occur during lunch as children solve problems such as who sits where or how much food is available for second helpings.

Other daily routines that provide rich opportunities for natural interaction include, welcoming the children in the morning, reading the date on the board and planning for the day. Giving instructions initially allows for the use of receptive skills. It is good practice to give instructions in groups of three while showing it on your fingers, as children then learn what to listen for and expect(e.g. tidy up, work journals, responsibilities). Over time the children learn to recognise these words and often begin to use them in their production skills.

4.3. Work journals and weekly meetings

Productive skills are used every day when children record entries in their work journals. Work journals are a typical tool in Montessori elementary classrooms, used to record each subject and activity learnt and how much time was spent doing each one. They provide a rich opportunity to develop the use of

L2 vocabulary as well as writing skills. Learners are expected to write in L2 in their work journals and in the beginning often need support to ensure their spelling and vocabulary are correct. The work journal provides the focus for a weekly meeting with the guide about his or her progress that week.

Mediation skills can then be used in the weekly meeting between each guide and student. Children use their production mode to complete a reflection on how their week has gone before the meeting. It provides an opportunity for the production of writing in context but also develops thinking skills in English, and paraphrasing. This, in turn, provides the child with a script to support them during their one-on-one meeting with the guide about their week in L2. The child has the work journal and reflection as a written prompt for their conversation. As they talk with their guide their receptive skills are enhanced by understanding the words they have already used in their reflection and work guides.

4.4. Group reading

Allowing dedicated time for reading, of course, creates the opportunity to develop reading skills. Creating a system for group reading, importantly, facilitates the use of all four modes of communication.

Reading in a group, with an adult present, allows children to develop their receptive skills during the act of reading but also while listening to others in the group read. The adult in this setting plays an important role as they ensure that children interact with each other in L2. This supports the use of the interactive and mediation modes of communication. If a teacher chooses to frame discussion questions using Bloom's taxonomy, for example, they create the opportunity for learners to think and paraphrase in L2. This can encourage learners to share an extended response improving their productive skills. The key is to ask a range of questions rather than only checking for understanding. Examples might include, "How do you think the character is feeling? Can you explain why? Is there a time when you have ever felt that way?". This is a rich opportunity to develop mediation skills in L2 and simultaneously use all four modes of communication.

4.5. Big works

Dr Montessori proposed that big works provide second plane learners with the opportunities they need to take risks, work with peers and be autonomous. They allow them to cause disorder in a big space while at the same time creating order in their minds. While Montessori did not specifically consider L2

learners while advocating for big works, they do naturally create rich opportunities for second language learning. However, for big works to be truly effective for L2 learners the guide must observe and assess the needs of each child ànd scaffold the way they create their big works. This again ensures language progression and satisfies the needs of the learners to feel secure in their language learning.

During the initial presentations such as great stories and key lessons, children use their receptive skills during the presentations where they use prolonged listening skills and new vocabulary. Using visuals through nomenclature materials and impressionistic charts ensures that learners do not rely too heavily on translation when acquiring new vocabulary.

Productive skills are used while children are writing across the curriculum. Guides can use dynamic lessons such as science experiments to incorporate a language objective such as developing sentence structure. Big works also provide an engaging context for writing skills. Big works take up space and are creative in design but require reading and writing skills to be executed.

The final stage of a big work is the oral presentation. Providing opportunities for groups of learners to present what they have learnt to their peers creates an excellent opportunity for learners to enhance their receptive and productive skills. The presentation means learners may read information from their final product but encouraging children to share with the group "two interesting things they learnt" or "something that surprised you" encourages learners to mediate and paraphrase what they have read and learnt.

For less confident speakers, creating a PowerPoint as a final product can create a more structured approach to oral presentations that students enjoy. Each session should conclude with questions and answers which also develops the oral language skills of all present.

4.6. L2 specific communication activities

In addition to incorporating the four modes of communication into the typical Montessori classroom practice, specific L2 communication activities are also motivational and useful. Language-based board games and other conversational materials are helpful in engaging elementary students in fun activities that appeal to their social nature. These types of activities are crucial for reinforcing key language skills in a way that is engaging and autonomous. Games encourage the children's productive skills by offering structured opportunities to speak in the L2 and also with the objective of winning a

game! They also allow children to follow a script and take turns using the mode of interaction in a structured and predictable way. These games can also reinforce a particular grammar point or structure. While playing the games the children use receptive skills but later we observe these grammar skills or vocabulary in the productive skills of talking or writing in other contexts.

Examples can include Scrabble, Guess Who or conversational Snakes and Ladders.

4.7. Discourse - Expressing complex thoughts in an integrated education

The communication mode of Mediation is part of the natural flow of language in a Montessori elementary classroom and is relied upon heavily as learners are introduced to the interconnectedness of curriculum areas and invited to share their impressions and work in groups. As children work together to explore, debate, research and come to common understandings of themes presented in the integrated Montessori elementary curriculum, they use mediation to synthesise new information with existing ideas then articulate their ideas within groups and work with the ideas of others that may not correspond with or can challenge their own interpretations.

Learners may have been previously introduced to isolated concepts or ideas in their L1 but are now invited to engage with them as interconnected or related and in an L2. This asks a learner to use existing knowledge as a springboard for further learning and to do so with new language.

The learner internalises the ideas, considers them and then expresses their understanding within a group discussion, project work, artistic expression or myriad other ways. Mediation is used to synthesise and manipulate information and also to support classmates who may not understand what is being communicated in the L2. While learners may feel competent and may be able to rely on internalised knowledge the communication of complex or nuanced ideas in the L2 may be challenging.

A powerful tool in these situations is the use of recasts as a form of mediation where the child uses L1 to explain and the adult reframes or repeats what they have said in L2. This ensures that the child feels heard and also creates a positive experience of L2. This can be enhanced even further by all adults using consistent questions and scripts to resolve differences in the understanding of concepts or to guide student expression if needed. Paul Dix in his book "When the Adults Change, Everything Changes." advocates for the use of scripts to create a consistent approach to behaviour. This

consistency in adults nurtures clear boundaries and consistency for children in how they are treated. For L2 learners these scripts also nurture confidence in using L2 in challenging situations. Children learn from the consistency of the repeated language in the scripts and this supports them to use mediation and interaction modes in these situations. This creates a positive experience for the child as they learn to understand the consistent questions in L2 but also they recognise that each adult in their environment is listening to them and supporting them to accurately express their own ideas and to work respectfully with the ideas of others.

In all the examples given, it is possible to see that each of them gives opportunities for all the modes of communication to be used almost simultaneously. Just as the children recognise the interconnectedness of the Montessori curriculum, we can observe the interconnected nature of these four modes of communication in what we do every day. Moving away from the traditional view of four skills of communication fits perfectly with the Montessori perspective of how everything is interconnected. The beauty of it all is that while the examples given are useful and specific, each day in the Montessori environment you will find further opportunities to integrate these skills if you trust and follow the child.

Pause and reflect

- In what ways can you use community meetings to create opportunities for children to practice all four modes of communication?
- How do you foster learners' social and language development in L2?
- How can you support your students' ability to mediate complex ideas in the L2, particularly during group work or project discussions?
- How do you encourage them to draw on their existing knowledge in their L1?
- How can daily routines, such as lunchtime or welcoming activities, be used to strengthen both receptive and productive language skills, while creating a comfortable environment for children to practise language naturally?

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Contents

Key takeaways

- A comprehensive **school language policy** ensures consistent language learning objectives and supports both L1 and L2 literacy development.
- Learners **transfer skills** from their L1 to L2, enhancing language learning when these connections are explicitly recognised.
- **Phonics-based instruction** in both L1 and L2 provides a solid foundation for reading and writing skills.
- Montessori's **'total reading' approach** integrates decoding, inferential, and evaluative processes for meaningful engagement.

Introduction

This section explores some helpful concepts to consider when teaching and observing children as they develop reading and writing skills. These suggestions from the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education help teachers identify children's abilities and needs, and provide constructive ways to support children's progress.

Literacy, which refers to the ability to read and write, is a key focus of learning from ages 6-12. Developing and using these skills provides access to written communication allowing learners to read, understand, work with and benefit from texts' meaning. A sense of how written language is used in different contexts and formats, along with awareness of the structure of language emerges by seeing it in various forms and through targeted lessons and classroom work. Exposure to a wide variety of literature can engender a love of language and inspire creative, artistic academic and personal endeavours. Importantly, literacy is a gateway to one's own culture and the cultures of others.

It is widely acknowledged that literacy in any language, whether it is the L1 or a second language, does not develop without intervention and support. Reading and writing and the abilities that facilitate these skills require the encouragement and guidance of knowledgeable practitioners. Also, children need to be in an environment offering abundant exposure and access to appropriate materials; all these factors have to combine to produce fruitful outcomes: children who enjoy reading, and who are confident and engaged readers and writers. As reading competence consolidates, the child's world expands through increased access to knowledge and the power of using written language across every area of the curriculum and beyond.

1. The importance of a whole school language policy

Throughout this Field Guide, we refer to two common models of second language learning in contemporary European Montessori schools: English immersion programs and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs. Both have English as the target language; in ESL there is a focus on practical, social language competence, but the immersion programs have English as the academic language. The presence of the local language is limited in

immersion schools, to ensure enough exposure for children to develop the competence they need to continue their studies in English. In schools with English as a second language, the local language is the academic language and objectives for English may range from a basic spoken proficiency (BICS), or include basic literacy and numeracy skills with the objective the learners reach an A2 level in the CERF by the time they are 12 years old.

These objectives, the instructional model and expectations around language use should be incorporated into the School Language Policy (see more details in Section 1.2 Defining Language Learning Outcomes: the What) and should clearly outline the path to literacy in the L1 and the L2. Introducing both languages can be done simultaneously but weighing the advantages against potential challenges and difficulties for teachers and students is integral to policy planning. Alternately, literacy in each language can be developed sequentially, where reading and writing in one language is well established before shifting to or emphasising literacy in the other school language. Certain conditions can make it appropriate to teach literacy first in the children's second language, for example, if they have been immersed in it from infancy or very early childhood and have reached oral and aural fluency and comprehension. Regional or national curricular requirements and expectations may influence which language is given priority.

2. Literacy skills transferred across languages

Whichever language the child first develops literacy in, they naturally transfer a range of abilities to any additional languages they may learn. Although an understanding of what we now refer to as cross-lingual transfer (Cummins, 2007) has been documented and researched since the early 1970s (Lambert & Tucker, 1972) many programs continue to enforce strict one adult one language policies. While each program is unique, it is crucial to consider the potential benefit of educators' understanding some important concepts: cross-lingual transfer, the interdependence hypothesis (Cummins, 1981) and the role of the L1 and heritage languages in learners' experiences and success.

Language transfer means learners accessing their abilities acquired in one language (often in but not exclusively, their L1) and applying them to new languages. Learners transfer in different ways (Cummins, 2007, p. 233)

- Transfer of conceptual knowledge (e.g. the concept of number or the concept of life cycle).
- Transfer of specific elements of language (knowing the meaning of tele- as in television, in several languages).
- Transfer of phonological awareness, recognition that words are made up of smaller units and individual sounds, is necessary for decoding skills in reading.
- Transfer of metalinguistic and metacognitive strategies like using context in addition to decoding for reading comprehension, strategies for self-regulation and memorising, repetition to develop mastery and graphic organisers for summing up or planning texts.
- Transfer of pragmatic aspects of language use (such as, for instance, gestures that add meaning to an exchange, recognising formal situations as opposed to informal ones, and that we must adjust the way we behave and communicate accordingly).

Teachers can leverage cross-lingual transfer using methods that inform the learner of the potential of their knowledge and abilities. When educators dedicate time to talking about these connections, directing awareness to the commonalities and parallels between language concepts, the learner can become an agent of their learning. In the example shown in this link, a teacher working in a Spanish/English dual language program shares how they empower learners by highlighting their existing phonemic awareness of letters common to both languages and differentiating the sounds distinct to each language. This approach helps learners become aware of their implicit knowledge about phonics across two languages, making it explicit and available for immediate use. It potentially reduces how daunting a new alphabet might be to some learners.

The opportunity to engage learners in conceptualising their learning and progress engages Montessori's reasoning mind concept, appealing to the will of the elementary learner which can develop and sustain their interest and motivation. This increased interest encourages greater practice with, use and exploration of the L2, drawing on the learner's awareness as a catalyst for positive outcomes.

3. Acknowledging learners' existing knowledge, lived and diverse experiences

Teachers' implementation of techniques for promoting cross-lingual transfer and translanguaging are effective because they honour the inner lives of learners as integral to the process of learning. These approaches incorporate an understanding of what learners potentially bring to the environment through their first language(s). Children in our programs may be part of the majority culture or be members of a national minority. They may be immigrants, refugees, or locally born to immigrant / expatriate parents. The possibilities are diverse and each child may to varying, unique degrees, speak and or be literate in languages present in their homes or communities. They may know the songs, rhymes, stories and games of their family's particular cultures or heritage, bringing different funds of knowledge.

Research in linguistics, neurology and sociology has yielded knowledge that has advanced educators' practice and understanding of language learning; but the learning of a language remains an individual process. The requirements of curricula, programs and national outcomes and the influence of parental expectations can drive educators to use homogenous or blanket approaches and even perpetuate the dominance or validity of one language over another. Translanguaging and helping learners take advantage of cross-lingual transfer can help them to be a more whole version of themselves while learning a new language since it works with their existing skills instead of dismissing or overwriting them. Acknowledging the learner's existing framework and working with it meaningfully contributes to the learning experience, builds confidence and minimises potential damage to a learner's sense of self or identity.

Pause and reflect

- How can you incorporate the principles of cross-lingual transfer into your classroom practices to support students' language development in both their L1 and L2?
- In what ways does your school's language policy influence your teaching approach?
- How do you adapt the school's language policy to suit the individual needs

- Reflecting on the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of your students, how can you create a classroom environment that honours and builds upon their existing knowledge and experiences?
- How do you balance the need for immersion in a second language with the potential benefits of maintaining the local or heritage language for cognitive and social development?
- In what ways can you involve students in recognising and exploring the connections between their L1 and L2?

4.   The first stages of literacy in English: from decoding to comprehension

Montessori education is focused on providing a developmentally appropriate environment where children will have the resources and guidance that enable them to follow their instincts and inclinations to learn and grow. The approach used in the Children's House, a mixed-age classroom for 3-6-year-olds, harnesses the child's innate fascination with language at this age, or sensitive period for language, to create a foundation that supports the advancement of L1 literacy skills as the child's intellect develops. Introducing literacy concepts at a young age often produces early readers. Children who attend more play-based early childhood education may have a different starting point at the elementary level.

L1 Phonics in the Children's House

An enduring debate about literacy in English-speaking countries pits the benefits of phonics instruction against the approach of leaving phonics learning, to some degree, to be gradually acquired through exposure to the spoken and written language. In a Montessori Children's House, the path to L1 literacy begins with a phonics-based approach in all relevant languages. Sufficient exposure to rich, accurate and engaging oral language is key to phonics instruction. Vocabulary expansion in the L1 and vocabulary development in the L2 is supported by activities such as listening to and joining in the recitation of rhymes, chants, songs and finger games.

Rhymes, songs and chants in bilingual environments

When very young children are developing literacy in a second language, they need more support than when literacy is being encouraged in their native language. Abundant use of action rhymes, songs, finger games and chants will spark children's natural interest in language and strengthen their awareness of the sounds of a new language: an essential basis for literacy. These types of language also increase the learner's exposure to the culture of the L2 and encourage the child to playfully engage with the music, movements, characters and images that complement the rhymes and games.

Early years Montessori programs utilise language games to spark the development of phonological awareness, through the playing of "I Spy" for example, to build a bank of phonemes. Children are encouraged to identify the individual sounds in the words they speak and hear. This work is done in the L1 well ahead of the introduction of any written symbols and is, to some degree, diagnostic: before introducing symbols and attaching them to sounds we must be sure a child can accurately and consistently identify a particular phoneme in different parts of a word. The ability to hear or identify a sound supports later attachment to the written symbol, that is, a character or letter. Subsequently, explicit phonics instruction is deliberately sequential and begins with introducing phonograms, consisting of single sounds that correspond with single letters, then moving on to digraphs (sounds corresponding to two letters, like ck, ch, th) and trigraphs, like tch and ght.

In this way, the scope of the Children's House curriculum for 3 to 6 year olds establishes a strong foundation for phonemic and phonological awareness and phonics in children's L1. The activities and learning that follow this introductory stage lead the child through further vocabulary enrichment and gradually more complex language activities over the course of three years. The child is guided from building awareness, through a range of concepts that develop reading skills, a love for literature and the fine motor skills needed for writing. Initially "writing" is done with the moveable alphabet. This is a key stage in literacy where the child begins to build words that they can say even before they can write the letters with a pencil and paper. In addition, grammar concepts are introduced and creative writing may be explored. It is important to note that the individualised approach of Montessori education means that not all children will master these more 'advanced' skills or even

experience the full scope of the language curriculum. They will, however, have been given developmentally appropriate presentations and observed peers doing a wide variety of work, creating an awareness of what lies ahead.

Once a child has developed phonemic awareness in any language, they automatically transfer this awareness to the additional languages that they learn. This means that for phonemic awareness in an L2, learners only need to discriminate sounds that are different from the ones in the L1, so instruction must focus on these differences.

L2 Phonics considerations in early childhood or lower elementary classrooms

Reaching the early stages of L2 literacy in the English language presents particular challenges for children. A fundamental principle that educators and families need to know is that children will not develop good comprehension or literacy skills if their oral language proficiency is below the level of the texts that they are expected to read or write. This is why a wide variety of intensive oral language development activities has to be combined with literacy instruction.

Here we mention some of the major and most widespread hurdles, alongside strategies that teachers can deploy and ideas for resources that children can use to overcome them.

Challenge: Learners have limited or no exposure to English outside of school

Strategies: Teachers adopt a systematic approach to introducing and consistently recycling vocabulary with narration of classroom routines, songs and stories in English

Resources: Children create image picture dictionaries, class picture dictionaries

Challenge: Basic understanding of the symbol-sound (grapheme-phoneme) correlation in the English alphabet: Single phonemes in English can correspond to more than one letter or letter combinations, and vice-versa (see here for examples). It can be difficult to know how a written word is pronounced when we read it for the first time because letters do not have uniform or singular correspondence with sounds in English

Strategies: Select phonics materials that are closely adjusted to the children's active vocabulary. Observe children's progress in detail and continuously update the materials to match their current knowledge and current challenges. Present the materials and engage children in activities that they enjoy for practising and progressing in both spoken and written language.

Resources: Children create phonetic dictionaries; they can use "invented spelling" as a learning tool until their oral fluency increases. Eventually, once children have a command of basic spoken English phrases, Montessori materials, designed for L1 English speakers that address this challenge can be introduced (reading folders and phoneme dictionaries) to help develop spelling.

Challenge: English has sets of words that are exceptions to the rule and are loan words from other languages.

Strategies: High-frequency sight word reading and writing

Resources: Games and learning resources that children can independently use to practice word recognitionv(especially high-frequency words). Games for matching cognates and loan words across languages (developing metalinguistic awareness)

Challenge: The differences between sounds/phonemes in the L1 and L2 make certain sounds difficult for the learner to hear or pronounce.

Strategies: Teacher and learners analyse sounds together that are challenging in the L2 and which contrast with the L1 sounds.

Resources: Bilingual alphabets, word recognition games based on texts that children already know orally (rhymes, chants, refrains from stories).

Fluency and comprehension development are long-term, continuous processes that go on throughout our life span. Moving on from the initial stages of reading words and phrases, learners' reading comprehension involves developing the ability to integrate a complex variety of abilities. Phonemic awareness, reading words automatically with understanding, fluency, making sense of text, knowing meanings of individual vocabulary words, and applying this knowledge and these skills in both reading and writing all form part of what children should be developing.

The whole school language policy should include a literacy plan for the languages that children learn and work in, including a shared approach that is updated as the school context and community evolve. The policy must give consideration to how phonics are introduced and developed, as this will affect learner confidence and outcomes, teacher cooperation, and record keeping. Arriving at best practices is an iterative process that takes time and coordinated, informed efforts.

Pause and reflect

- How do you ensure that the phonemic awareness and phonics activities in your classroom cater to both L1 and L2 learners?
- What support are you providing to students who have limited exposure to L2 outside of the classroom?
- How do you balance phonics instruction with other forms of oral language development to ensure students' overall language proficiency?
- In what ways can you incorporate metalinguistic awareness into your teaching, helping students recognise similarities and differences between their L1 and L2 to enhance their language learning experience?

5. Working with diverse L2 levels in elementary

The elementary school may be the children's first contact with the L2, although often children have had prior exposure, and some children have already been immersed in it, through an early years program. Often there will be a mixture of previous experience with the L2 in any group of schoolchildren, ranging along a continuum between native speakers to complete beginners.

For children with lower experience of L2 exposure, a more intensive program of explicit work on the oral language is necessary alongside literacy instruction. Through oral activities, these children will be acquiring the L2 grammar, meaning of words and phrases, and sounds, and all of this knowledge will be necessary when they move on to developing literacy.

In Montessori programs, the attractive, tangible learning resources from

Children's House (early years) may be adapted for children to use in elementary for L2 learning: for instance, the farm, or phonetic object boxes for learning meanings, sound and spelling of words. These materials have specific instructional activities for early years children, designed specifically to their developmental needs. If we use them in lower elementary and for L2 instruction, they need to be adapted; for instance, extra oral activities where the words that form part of the farm or phonetic objects resources will be needed so that children can recognise the sounds of the words and know their meanings. Stories, chants, songs or action rhymes, reinforced with pictures, can create the basis.

The components of literacy

So far, the information provided here has focused on the connection between oral language and literacy, phonemic awareness and phonics. These form part of a set of areas that make up competence in literacy, highlighted in research on literacy instruction in the USA: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension. Even though researchers study these components separately, instruction must bring them together to be efficient: phonological awareness in the context of phonics, and vocabulary learning in the context of comprehending texts. Fluency can only advance adequately when learners use the other components and, by integrating them, can comprehend what they read.

The basis for L2 learning of literacy, and what differentiates it especially from the needs for literacy development in L1, is consistent, systematic, intensive vocabulary instruction: everything elementary school L2 teachers do "should revolve around vocabulary acquisition-explaining, demonstrating, drawing, repeating, reading, writing, and playing with words throughout every aspect of instruction." (Irujo, n.d.).

The importance of oral language development in supporting literacy skills

Language development begins with oral communication and children absorb and become fluent in their L1 by joyfully and enthusiastically communicating with others. Oral language skills must remain prominent in the learners' continually developing language foundation. The ability to speak the language being read is essential for children learning a second language. Research in psycholinguistics supports the idea that production—the ability to speak and use expressions—is as important as comprehension in developing a

fundamental understanding of an L2 (MacDonald, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, the oral basis of language as fundamental to reading and writing has been widely developed, for example, in Pie Corbett's "Talk for Writing" approach and Ros Wilson's Big Writing program. Wilson's program is widely used in the UK and she is known for her statement "If they can't say it, they can't write it." Participating in the storytelling in shared book reading, therefore, will provide crucial groundwork for helping children notice that they know more words in the L2 than they realise and can begin writing words, sentences and eventually, short stories with their own phonetic spelling

For instance, within Corbett's Talk for Writing, one strategy proposed is called "Imitate, innovate, invent". Teachers begin with a model text that they select, based on the children's interest and language competence, to read and discuss on multiple occasions, leading to children's active participation as they become able to recite many phrases from the text. Eventually, this story becomes the basis for innovation and leads to fully independent creative writing. This approach is grounded in the proposition that storytelling needs to be learnt, that children need to have heard and to know both the patterns and the language of stories, as well as be able to pronounce the words and phrases, before they can begin telling, and later writing, their own. This is in alignment with what has been explained in the previous sections of our Field Guide and plentiful information, example activities and proposals for model stories, are available on the Talk for Writing website.

Pause and reflect

- How do you currently integrate oral language development into your daily classroom activities?
- What adjustments could you make to better support your students' L2 literacy skills?
- In what ways could you adapt Montessori resources, like phonetic object boxes or farm materials, to better support the specific oral and literacy needs of your elementary L2 students?
- Considering the principles of the "Imitate, Innovate, Invent" approach, how can you incorporate storytelling into your L2 lessons to enhance students' fluency, creativity, and writing skills?

6. Focus on reading: Developing reading comprehension

6.1. Reading for different purposes

The development of reading comprehension includes awareness of the different ways we read and understand text, depending on the author's purpose and the reader's purpose. International reading assessments (e.g. the PIRLS - Progress in International Reading Literacy Study- by the IEA) contemplate two broad purposes of reading: for literary experience, or for acquiring and using information. Similarly, an author's purpose can also be to engage the reader in a literary experience, to inform and to produce content that is evaluative in persuasive and argumentative texts.

Readers fully comprehend when they activate processes that include:

- Literal comprehension, accessing and retrieving explicitly expressed information;
- Inferential comprehension, reading between the lines and using clues to reach a conclusion about what the author intends to convey;
- Evaluative or interpretive comprehension, involving reflection about the message expressed in the text and its implications, the theme and the author's intentions, in addition to making judgements on the quality of the text and the reliability of the message.

As readers, we get an idea of what the author intends to convey by different kinds of clues. For example, if the cover of the book has illustrations suggesting the book tells a story, we tend to recognise straight away that the author's intention is, above all, to entertain readers. But if we see a photograph on the cover of a book, for instance showing a bicycle or a bird,- we may assume the book is informative. As readers, we engage with what we read using those initial assumptions. In addition, we will read differently; for the story, we will most likely read from the beginning and read every word on a page. If the book is non-fiction, normally we scan the pages to look for useful information and skip parts. We give focus to what we think will be relevant or what we want to find out.

6.2 Total reading - A Montessori framework

In the Montessori approach, reading with the full range of comprehension processes in action is called total reading. In Maria Montessori's framework, the comprehension processes that are evaluated in current assessment

frameworks, referred to above, were described as mechanical, interpretive and appreciative reading. That is, Montessori recognised that full engagement with texts requires the child to develop decoding, inferential comprehension and evaluative comprehension.

6.3. Mechanical reading in the Children's house

Montessori proposed that children build up these skills through the specific learning sequence that they follow with materials, designed for purpose, in the Children's House. A carefully designed scheme of work leads the child to understand writing as a tool with which an idea can be shared. Simultaneously the children are working to grasp the alphabetic principle and building phonetic skills in the L1. The child uses sounds represented by letters to build a word they have in mind. They "write" using the moveable alphabet. This leads to a variety of word-reading activities and games played individually and in small groups. The reading accomplished at this stage is mechanical in the sense that it is the functional joining of sounds to create a word - phonograph recognition, physical actions to put the letters in the same order as the sounds in the word, and for the vocalisation of a word. Comprehension and understanding are not the immediate goal but are on the horizon. This same progression of work can be accomplished in the L2 in the Children's House as outlined in the school's language policy. At this level, all reading is limited to the phonographs previously introduced by the sandpaper letters.

For children who have done the mechanical reading scheme in their L1, the applicability to the L2 literacy development process may be limited. These children are aware that writing is a tool, that letters represent sounds and sounds combine to form words. They do not need to follow the scheme again for the L2 because they can directly apply the same knowledge. Instead, children will need help to notice new sounds in the L2 that are not part of the L1, and learn about the differences in spelling and phonics between their L1(s) and L2.

6.4. Interpretive reading

Interpretive reading in the children's house Reading for total comprehension develops after the child works extensively with activities leading to their increasingly fluent reading of words with the understanding of their meaning. This level of comprehension is developed through a sequence of activities

that begin simply and become increasingly complex. For example, the teacher writes a word, the child reads it and places it next to a corresponding, familiar object. Then premade labels are read and matched to corresponding familiar objects. A progression in difficulty involves action cards and requires the child to read a word and then do the action written on the card. Here the child has no visual reinforcement and relies solely on their comprehension. A scope of reading materials guides the learner from reading words to phrases to the complexity of working with the definition stages materials. As with mechanical reading, this same progression of work can be accomplished in Children's House in the L2 with adequate planning.

L2 Interpretive reading in the children's house

Particularly close attention should be given to the presentation of and work with the puzzle words, reading booklets and the phonogram or digraph dictionary when English is the L2. The learner enjoys reading simple stories that incrementally build comprehension skills and offer, with the use of the phonogram dictionary, independent interaction with the materials. The learner can advance at their own pace and is motivated to move ahead.

These materials and their corresponding series of activities support mechanical reading mastery of the wide variety of phonogram spelling variations in the English language outside of the subset offered by the sandpaper letters. This allows the child to read a wider variety of words and text supporting additional vocabulary enrichment including comprehension. This is vital to reading a broader selection of English texts. The learner can attempt reading any of the level-appropriate L2 texts, supported as they move along the path to total reading.

L2 Interpretive reading at the elementary Level

Around the middle of elementary, when children typically become mature enough in their foundational literacy skills to read with increasing fluency, they begin to intentionally learn through reading both nonfiction and fiction genres. In the second language, the fact that their vocabulary will be more limited than in their L1 means that they need guidance from educators to ensure they consistently and consciously make efforts to expand and consolidate it. Children can learn to record keywords from their readings in a personal dictionary, vocabulary notebook or learning log. Multiple copies of the same reading book can lead to collaborative learning and mutual help

as children read and learn about a book in a group.

Vocabulary learning in the L2 can also rely on the strong basis that the Montessori curriculum provides in etymology and word study. Learning word morphology (prefixes, suffixes, roots, inflexion) helps children access different kinds of clues to understand, spell and use new vocabulary. This basis prepares children to use metacognitive strategies for expanding their second language learning when they read.

Also, Montessori learning resources have the potential to tap into all the comprehension processes and they can lead children to use their understanding of what they read in engaging and collaborative ways. For instance, the interpretive reading cards involve the child in reading literary passages and representing the situation they read about through drawing or acting it out. This is a resource that can stimulate deep processing of the language in the passage, as the child transforms its meaning to another form of representation. This kind of work with literary texts, such as narrative picture books, will require the educator's careful selection of the texts so that they are within reach of the child in terms of their knowledge of the L2, and to ensure the vocabulary is already familiar. If there are a lot of new words, children will need to be provided with a sequence of activities that prepares them to read the passages in the reading cards, and specific expressions that they are acquiring should be presented throughout the sequence to consolidate understanding and practice with the terms and expressions for a range of purposes and in a variety of contexts.

6.5. L2 reading appreciation at the elementary level - instilling a love of reading

In the Montessorian view of reading, the third and most upheld reading is appreciative. This term alludes to competence in understanding beyond literal meanings, inferencing and evaluating the quality of texts. L2 learners can develop appreciative reading in different ways, beginning with establishing and nurturing their interest and desire to read and write for many different purposes.

A major goal for literacy education is to provide children with enjoyable reading experiences that lead them to seek out reading for pleasure. The following guidelines spark children's love of reading.

- Give children access to books that they can read independently or with

minor help from a more experienced reader;

- Allow free reading choice, providing a range of genres and kinds of publications;
- Include daily reading time at school and time for children to discuss what they read;
- Provide comfortable spaces where children can read during the school day;
- Educators involve children in discussion about books modelling words, phrases, conversational skills and kinds of questions for discussion.

Perhaps the most effective way to stimulate children's desire to read is for the adult to share the fun and pleasure. In Paula Esteve's Community Conversation "Como consegui que mi mis alumnos amasen la lectura/How I got my students to love reading" she explains how she selected and read every book that she put in her library, often reading new books at the lending library that she created in her lower elementary classroom. Paula that way she could have spontaneous conversations about the books as a child was reading it. She also created a system where the children can select books at their level and keep a record of what they have read

Class libraries are a standard feature in Montessori schools; although not always made up of books in the children's L2. Providing quality books in the second language can be a key element in promoting development and expanding the children's repertoire in this language to enable them to achieve literacy across the curriculum, also known as "subject-specific" or "disciplinary literacy".

Subject-specific or disciplinary literacy can lead to a deeper understanding of how the grammatical forms, style, register and vocabulary that we read or use in writing is linked to the communicative purpose. For instance, in providing an explanation of the water cycle in science, or a description of an animal in biology, the present tense is used because generalisations and facts are being asserted. Objective terms and the passive voice are also frequent. However, in recounting historical events, the past tense is used; the subjects of sentences are often collective nouns or noun groups, and circumstances are often expressed with temporal and spatial prepositional or adverbial phrases.

Classroom lending libraries can be an important resource in stimulating early readers'' motivation to continue to practise their newly emerging skills. In two

BM Community Conversations, Denise Fernandes for 3-6 and Paula Esteve for 6-9 describe their respective system for giving children books at their level to take home to continue to practise which provides multiple sources of inspiration and pride.

Collections of levelled readers, specifically designed for beginners, can be used with second language learners and should be considered essential material in building literacy during the Elementary years. There are fiction and non-fiction options and the latter can be great for children in Upper Elementary.

Bilingual books and copies in both L1 and L2 of children's classics allow for children's reading with the two languages side by side. Reading these materials can be enjoyable and promote metalinguistic awareness, among other potential advantages.

Any kind of text or reading material can become a focus of interest: for example, labels in the classroom, recipes, game instructions or other texts that are not specifically designed for second language learners or early readers may invite children to independently and to engage in meaningful work involving reading and writing.

6.6. Exploring genres

Written texts belong to different genres and as such, authors write with different intentions and styles and organise their texts based on those purposes. A few genres can be introduced in the L2 from the lower elementary years. Children will be familiar with narrative stories from early on and also understand some instructions in the L2, so these two genres can be among the first texts they learn to read and then write.

The multi-age grouping of children offers younger children plenty of opportunities to watch and listen to older children reading stories and factual books. Older children also benefit because sharing their literacy activities helps them to value and reflect on their own abilities. As they gain reading fluency and transition into upper elementary, children move from the stage of learning to read and begin to use reading as a medium for learning.

At this stage, the children enjoy accessing informative texts, which are abundantly available in English for all reading levels. Reading in English becomes part of the children's projects allowing them to consult reference

texts about a topic of their interest. By guiding their experiences in a variety of genres, we help children notice links between the author's purpose, choice of grammar and other written language elements (style, word choice, terminology, rhetorical figures).

As children progress from functional uses of reading and writing labels, noting individual words and phrases to reinforce new vocabulary, transcribing simple creative texts like short poems or rhymes and sharing personal messages, they will become ready to read more complex texts and books and a wider selection of genres. There is more information about developing the understanding of genres in the creative writing section. At this link, extensive information is available about how to use model texts, within the meaningful context of tasks, to teach reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary through oral interaction based on the genre approach.

Pause and reflect

- How do you currently support students in distinguishing between reading for literary experience and reading for acquiring information in both L1 and L2?
- How could you adjust your approach to better align with their developmental needs?
- Reflecting on Montessori's concept of "total reading," how do you encourage L2 students to engage with texts in a way that includes decoding, inferential understanding, and evaluative comprehension?
- Considering the varying genres and styles of texts children encounter in the elementary years, how do you ensure that your students are exposed to a diverse range of reading materials?

7. L2 writing in the elementary years

Literacy goals for writing in an L2 will, like those for reading, depend on established program outcomes and should consider plans for children's subsequent education. If a school establishes social language use as a program outcome, the development of subject-specific literacy will receive less focus and will likely be less complete. Literacy for general life skills, like writing an email request for information or proposal of activities, personal notes, or filling in forms with personal information, may be enough for these learners.

If the school's language policy requires academic literacy, children will develop writing in both fiction and nonfiction genres. Anecdotes and recounts or stories (literary texts), procedures (instructions) or protocols, book or art reviews (persuasive texts) and realistic or imaginary descriptions and explanations (factual texts) will all be included in their learning repertoire. In sum, over the elementary years, children's development of understanding and writing literary, factual and persuasive texts should be a focus in both of the languages of a bilingual program.

7.1. Strategies for developing L2 writing skills

In keeping with the Montessori elementary approach, the use of writing offers many practical and collaborative learning possibilities. Second language learners can be guided from simple techniques that include writing as part of everyday routines, helping to build and maintain fluency, to more intensive, guided work on identifying keywords and learning to take notes from informative texts. Following on, exploration of literary language devices (alliteration, repetition, metaphor, word choice, etc.) in texts allows learners to use them in their own writing.

This kind of writing development can be promoted by providing a teaching-learning cycle to scaffold the children and lead them from strongly guided joint construction of texts, using information or language resources from a model text to writing texts more independently, linking their language choices to the communicative purpose.

Using model texts

"The Important Book" (by Margaret Wise Brown, first published in 1949) is a classic picture book for children which has been cherished by generations of readers. The book presents descriptions of different everyday objects and phenomena (such as apple, rain or a spoon) following a consistent pattern. The author introduces each description with the statement "The important thing about…is that…" Then a list of characteristics is presented, to end the description with "But…" and reiterating the first line:

"The important thing about rain is that it is wet. It falls out of the sky, and it sounds like rain, and it makes things shiny, and it does not taste like anything, and is the colour of air. But the important thing about rain is that it is wet."

Each double-page spread includes a descriptive text following this pattern and an illustration, The Important Book can be a helpful model for children's writing, as well as enjoyable to read.

As children become familiar with the book, they can deepen their understanding of the vocabulary and grammar structures thanks to the repetition. Children benefit from the teacher helping them to notice how the text is put together. Then, for example, a teacher can work with the book as a model text by talking to their students about how the first and last sentence always end with a subordinate clause with a descriptive adjective (that it is…); the last sentence of each description begins with "But…" and reinforces the initial statement by repeating it. Teachers can discuss the textual organisation of each description: how it begins, the set of statements made, and the concluding reiteration.

For younger learners, a very popular choice that would be amenable for working in a parallel way is Brown Bear by Bill Martin Jr, illustrated by Eric Carle. In this story, each double-page spread shows an animal, while the written words represent what someone is asking the animal: "What do you see?" and the animal's reply "I see a(n)…(colour+animal) looking at me." This rhyming refrain is repeated over the pages and can be a basis for work on question forms with "do", noun group word order with the colour adjective before the noun, in an enjoyable context with imaginative coloured animals. The vocabulary is ideal for very young beginner learners, but the grammar and creativity offered by this picture book can make it appealing to lower elementary children.

Teachers can then write new text, using "joint construction":

- they help children decide as a group on a new description
- show them how to apply the same pattern to describe something else they agree on
- helping with new words they need
- writing what they decide together on a large sheet or whiteboard.

Finally, in pairs or small groups, the children use "sentence stems" to follow the same pattern for describing something that they agree on choosing to write about.

After following a process like this, children will have plenty of vocabulary and patterns in mind when they go to write independently. They can agree on a checklist with the teacher for writing a new text, where they can have the goal of using some of the words and structures they have practised together in their descriptions, for instance, when writing a description of a location in the setting or of a character.

A range of programs exist to help children develop writing. Author Andrew Wright, in his teacher's resource book Creating Stories with Children, offers a wealth of proposals for educators to guide children through a range of preparation and creation tasks around stories in their second language. Other resources are also available online, such as the WordGen scheme, developed by experts in bilingual and second language education at Harvard University. It offers free resources consisting of units of work that promote the acquisition of academic vocabulary through a variety of interactive reading, viewing, interaction and writing activities for children from 4th of elementary. Over a school year, children can alternate between more academic work on reading, note-taking and writing, and creative storytelling and social interaction through writing.

7.2. The finer details of writing: punctuation and spelling

Within the Montessori curriculum, young children learn writing before reading, by using the special materials designed specifically for the sensitive period when they naturally hone their fine-motor and perceptual abilities around age 5. As they do so, they are also presented with basic punctuation including capital letters, commas, full stops and question marks with materials like the moveable alphabet and punctuation cards.

However, once children enter elementary education it is no longer appropriate to expect writing before reading as it no longer fits second plane characteristics. They no longer learn through the absorbent mind but through their own "will" and have greater motivation to learn to read at this stage. Materials such as sandpaper letters are no longer developmentally appropriate. It is important for Montessori teachers and guides to be aware that just because an L2 learner has a lower level does not mean they should continue the scheme of work that Montessori devised for early years.

In line with today's knowledge about second/additional language acquisition, instruction needs to be compatible with the acquisition process, where all kinds of language abilities develop better and more naturally when instruction and practice are contextualised. This is relevant to punctuation and spelling: these technical areas of literacy can be taken on meaningfully when they are discussed as we observe how they are used in written communication. When we try to explain punctuation in isolation, it becomes difficult and complex. Therefore, helping children notice punctuation during shared reading, and providing them with follow-up work materials for applying what we show them in a lesson, is a recommended approach.

Punctuation learning in a bilingual program might follow a plan like the one shown in the table below, where the specific punctuation marks are worked on in order. The order may not necessarily be as shown in this curriculum, but identifying firstly the full stop, comma and question mark, as basic and with the highest frequency of use, and focussing on these before other punctuation is a logical step. Also, identifying specific punctuation marks to work on during shared reading and plans for children to apply the learning in follow-up work is an adequate way to help learners build up their mastery in this area. The punctuation marks that are relevant in any specific text that the educator chooses to work with during a shared reading session will vary depending on the genre, so varying the text types that we work with will give us a contextually-based progression in punctuation work over a school year.

| Writing: Punctuation | Understand the purpose and use of punctuation marks:
- full stop
- comma
- question mark
- exclamation mark
- colon and semi-colon
- quotation marks
- hyphen and dash

Understand the purpose and use of capitalisation

Develop use of correct punctuation in written work

Proofread and edit written texts, using feedback to improve written work | Activities include:
- introductory games to establish function of punctuation e.g. reading a paragraph without taking a breath
- introductory games to learn formation of punctuation marks e.g. modelling punctuation marks in a variety of media including body sculpture, clay and artwork
- guided individual and small group games and exercises
- looking for punctuation marks in a variety of texts
- guided exercises in drafting, editing and proofreading
- conferencing with peers and teacher
- stories and research projects to explore the history of individual punctuation marks.

Resources include:
- card material
- *capitalization* charts
- noun classification charts (proper/common)
- student's own texts
- texts matched to interest displaying a variety of punctuation use
- research materials (paper-based, digital, web-based). |

(From The Australian Montessori National Curriculum for the Second Plane of Development from Six to Twelve years)

Like punctuation and other areas of language, spelling can be very difficult in English, especially if learning is mainly based on rote memorisation and abstract phonics rules. When we add the factor of English being an additional language for the children, the complexity gets exponentially greater, especially in the context of a Montessori classroom where the spontaneity of writing is very important to keep the motivation and concentration of the child at work. But the Montessori approach offers some important advantages, because from the beginning of their language work, children access multisensory materials that deepen their perception of parts of words (syllables and morphemes) and spelling patterns through word study, phonics materials for learning blends, phonograms, etymology and so on. Children in a Montessori classroom have the opportunity to create their own personalised dictionary where the teacher would write down the specific words that the child wants to know how to write.

Part of the process of learning to write in English is to use unconventional spelling, also called inventive spelling. Learners use logic and the knowledge

that they have so far, even if it is incomplete, to write, for example, they may use a single letter to write a word, like "u" for you or "com" for come. Research by experts on the development of literacy in English have highlighted that using invented spelling is very important for children's eventual mastery of the written language. Invented spelling shows that the child's phonemic awareness is growing and that the child uses this awareness in a logical way when they write. Educators will find that it is very helpful to speak to the families about the importance of invented spelling for children's full literacy development. This can help avoid unnecessary pressure and tension for the children and the educators, not to mention the family members.

The Montessori L2 expert Birgitta Berger (p.c.) advocates for using invented spelling, but notes that parents often need a lot of help and convincing to recognise the acceptability and even importance of invented spelling. Its value cannot be stressed enough!

As explained by Gormandy White (2021)

- *"Invented spelling can help build a sense of confidence, pride and control over the learning process.*
- *It allows students to express themselves creatively through writing without worrying about the spelling of unfamiliar words.*
- *Writing using invented spelling techniques allows for extensive practice of phonics because students are using letters to represent the sounds they hear.*
- *Teachers can discover important information about a student's growing knowledge of phonemes by reading a composition that the student created using invented spelling techniques."*

Children's steps forward from invented to conventional spelling should be supervised by periodical assessments of each child's writing. Through focus on specific spelling words that are relevant to the texts that the children read and write, attention should gradually progress towards accurate spelling of words that share a spelling pattern or that contribute key meanings in texts about the topics children are learning about. This entails that taking materials like pink, blue and green word card series, used in some Montessori environments and originally designed for early years, is not adequate unless the teacher is rigorous about only using them with continuous revision and selection for

adequacy and relevance. In addition, it is important to be aware that spelling tests are not commonly used in Montessori environments, because they are not child-led and create unnecessary pressure.

Spelling and punctuation learning goals need to be agreed on; they should be specific for the particular task at hand, and if we involve children in deciding on their goals, they can write and apply their own correction checklist before the teacher checks and helps them notice any corrections from the list that need to be made. When the children have information beforehand about some specific areas for taking care of on a checklist, they can feel in control of the learning process, be strategic and accept any external help with a lower risk of feeling humiliated or discouraged about writing as there are too many words they would not know how to spell. The educator can check after the child has revised their own work for any errors from the agreed-on areas, without needing to discuss other kinds of mistakes, but privately take note of any recurring errors to use them as the focus of teaching-learning opportunities in future writing tasks. In sum, providing children with a brief checklist to remind them of specific goals for their writing, based on the focus that they have had in discussions about readings and about language learning they have been involved in, such as word study, is a recommended practice. It is helpful for strengthening children's short-term memory, executive function and metacognition, while they use writing purposefully.

Pause and reflect

- How do you balance the need for academic writing skills with the development of social language in your L2 classroom?
- In what ways do you currently use model texts in your classroom to support L2 learners' writing development?
- Reflecting on the importance of punctuation and spelling, how do you integrate these elements meaningfully into your L2 students' writing activities?
- How do you support your students in moving from invented spelling to conventional spelling?
- What strategies do you use to ensure they maintain confidence in their writing during the transition from invented spelling to conventional spelling?

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The complete Montessori Australia Curriculum Learning Plane Two: Ages Six to Twelve Years Montessori Australia Group, 2011, Page 105

https://www.talk4writing.com/resources/overview/

https://www.serpinstitute.org/wordgen-elementary/components

Resources

Boosting Metalinguistic Awareness for Multilingual Students

Building Intercultural Competency in the Language Immersion Montessori Classroom https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1090889.pdf

Content Area and Disciplinary Literacy Strategies and Frameworks 2017
https://www.literacyworldwide.org/docs/default-source/where-we-stand/ila-content-area-disciplinary-literacy-strategies-frameworks.pdf

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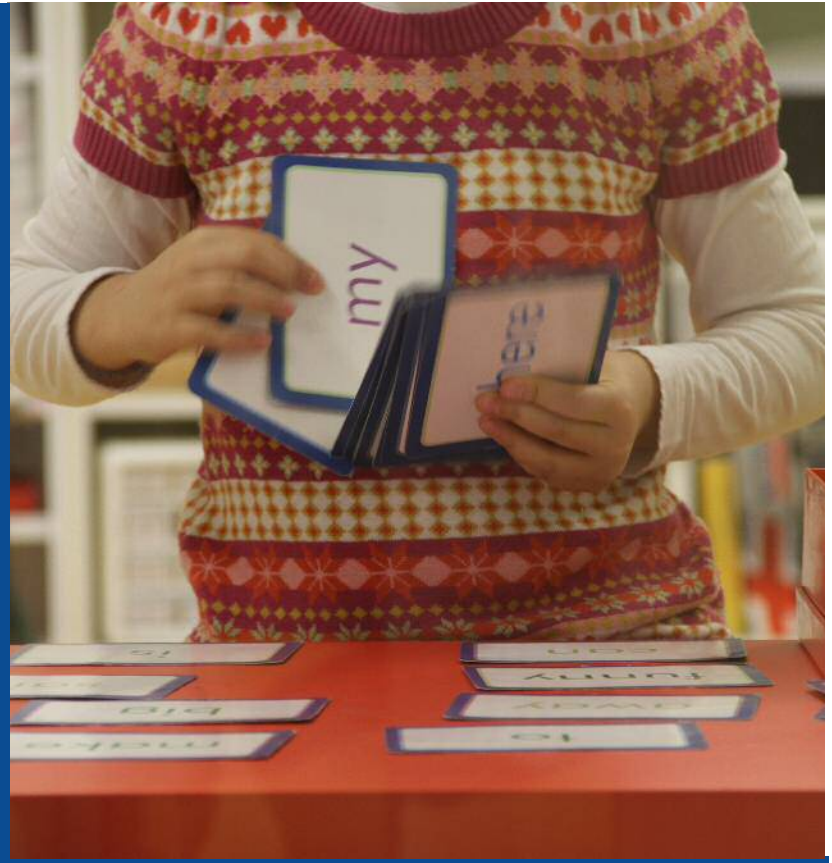
Toward a Definition of Metalinguistic Skill

What is Translanguaging and How Can It Be Used in the Classroom?

Contents

Key takeaways

- *Montessori-trained teachers must **adapt materials for L2 learners**, ensuring they are developmentally appropriate.*
- *ESL teachers in Montessori settings need support to **align their language expertise** with Montessori's child-centred approach and unique classroom environment.*
- *Effective **communication and collaboration between L2 teachers and Montessori guides are essential** for aligning teaching strategies and language goals.*
- *Creating or modifying Montessori **materials for L2** learners requires thoughtful planning and encourage independent communication.*

Introduction

Creating materials that meet the needs of second language learners requires careful consideration and planning on the part of the L2 teacher in cooperation with the Montessori guide. The process is best served when teachers approach the task with an open mind, a willingness to adapt while sharing their know-how and creativity.

After years of hard work and training, Montessori teachers can find themselves in a classroom of L2 learners overwhelmed by the realisation that their Montessori training did not prepare them for this context. This is an experience felt by many, which in part led to the fruition of this project. Guides often do not have the training and skills to support L2 learners.

On the other hand, teachers who have trained and worked as ESL teachers find themselves working in Montessori schools, often with only a superficial introduction to how these classrooms are different from the conventional environments they have previously worked in. Here, we give our attention to classrooms because often, their organisation, ground rules and materials can be disorienting to the language specialist. After all, children's developmental needs are the same and hopefully, the school has clearly defined learning objectives for the L2.

1. Montessori teachers in L2 classrooms

Teachers in this situation may feel a responsibility to present materials they have been trained to work with, following the exact methodology they were shown. They may feel obliged to use materials that were designed for native speakers. This disregards differences in L1 and L2 acquisition and ignores many skills and competencies a child may have acquired, for example, via L1 instruction. This can result in several situations which do not best meet the needs of the L2 learner.

The guide may:

- persevere with materials that are too challenging for the child. For example, following the grammar box sequence when a child does not have sufficient ability can lead to the teacher delivering a long double lesson where they first have to teach all the vocabulary before the child can even begin to apply the grammar. For more information on the place of

grammar in second-language learning see section 3.7.

- decide to repeat exactly the same lesson in L1 and L2. This can also be boring for learners as it does not appeal to the desire for novelty, it also overlooks the ways that L1 learning compliments L2.
- offer language input based on the curriculum that does not serve their language needs. We know that effective second language learning requires a focus on developing different communication modes (see BM webinar with Laura Casidy and Aoife Ahern for more information).
- mistakenly introduce them to materials from the classroom for 3-6 olds. Those materials are carefully designed to appeal to their desire for order, repetition and individual work. As a result, older children find them boring and it can also affect their self-esteem to work on materials intended for younger children.

There are, however, instances where it might be advisable to use Children's House materials in the L2 classroom. Materials such as the movable alphabet lend themselves to linguistic activities relevant to the L2, such as focussing on "silent e", as do some objects (from "the Farm") or nomenclature cards. In combination, these can be used with a child in Lower Elementary to help to build phonetic awareness or to begin to build their first words with the moveable alphabet.

2. L2 teachers in Montessori classroom

When L2 teachers enter a Montessori classroom, they are stepping into a unique educational environment. Many make this transition because they are intrigued by the child-centred approach that Montessori education offers. While they bring with them expertise in language acquisition and a deep understanding of how to meet the language needs of children, integrating that knowledge into the existing Montessori classrooms is, at its best, a challenging learning experience and, at its worst, the source of a huge amount of frustration.

Often, their formal introduction to Montessori education begins with training designed for Montessori assistants. This training provides valuable insights into Montessori principles and the broader framework for working with elementary children. However, it is essential that L2 teachers also receive continuous guidance from experienced Montessori guides to fully integrate these principles into their teaching practice.

A key factor in becoming a successful L2 teacher within the Montessori setting is the willingness to ask questions. Newcomers should feel encouraged to seek clarification and deepen their understanding without hesitation. Just as every Montessori classroom fosters an environment of curiosity and inquiry for children, so too should L2 teachers be empowered to explore and embrace the Montessori philosophy fully.

Equally important is the role of Montessori guides in this process. Guides must be prepared to offer the necessary support, providing clear and consistent guidance to help L2 teachers integrate into the Montessori environment effectively. Additionally, guides should maintain an open-minded approach, allowing flexibility for L2 learning processes to be thoughtfully incorporated into the Montessori setting.

3. Montessori guides and L2 teachers working together

The significance of open communication, close cooperation, and mutual support between L2 teachers and Montessori guides has been emphasised in the previous section. These three elements are essential for creating a classroom environment where all the language needs of the children are effectively met.

This collaboration requires ongoing teamwork between L2 teachers and Montessori guides. It's important to recognise that the focus of discussions will evolve. Initial conversations between L2 teachers, Montessori guides, and possibly school leaders will differ in focus from the ongoing dialogue that takes place throughout the school year.

The following sets of questions have been compiled as a starting point for these discussions, drawing on experiences from various schools. It is helpful to remember the words of Dylan Wiliam, a British professor of educational assessment: "Everything works somewhere, nothing works everywhere." Let these questions inspire you, but do not feel obligated to address every one of them. The unique educational context of your school should guide your selection of the key questions.

3.1. Initial discussion

The following questions can serve two purposes. Firstly, they can be used by the head of a Montessori school during the interview process when considering an L2 teacher candidate or as an inspiration for an L2 teacher candidate to ask during a job interview. Secondly, they provide an excellent foundation for initial conversations between a new L2 teacher and the Montessori guide. Establishing this common ground early on is crucial for fostering effective collaboration throughout the school year.

These questions not only help clarify and refine terminology but also contribute to the development of a shared language between the L2 teacher and the Montessori guide, minimising potential misunderstandings that may arise from differing interpretations of key terms.

While these questions are a valuable starting point, it is not necessary to address every item on the list. Select those most relevant to your specific context.

- What L1 curriculum does the school follow?
- Will the L2 teacher have access to a copy of the L1 curriculum?
- Is the school required to follow a state-mandated L2 curriculum, or does it have the flexibility to design its own?
- Has the school developed an L2 curriculum?
- If the school has its own L2 curriculum, what are its main features?
- What is the point of reference for teaching L2 (e.g., CEFR, ACTFL, or another framework)? Is this reference set by the state, or does the school have the autonomy to choose?
- What is the L2 language proficiency level of children entering elementary school?
- What language proficiency level is expected (required) by the time children leave elementary school?
- Is there any testing for benchmarks or other checkpoints along the way?
- Are these checkpoints administered by external authorities or by the school?
- What other types of assessments does the school implement?
- If there are multiple L2 teachers at the school, how much opportunity do they have to collaborate and learn from each other? Is this collaboration actively supported by the school?

3.2. Regular meetings

The following questions serve as conversation starters for weekly or bi-weekly meetings between L2 teachers and Montessori guides. The primary purpose of these meetings is to share observations and address questions which are better discussed in person rather than through written communication.

Questions from the L2 teacher to the Montessori guide:

- When I am not in the classroom, how frequently do the children work with the language materials on the shelves?
- Have you noticed if certain materials are being used more often than others?
- How many children typically work together at the same time?
- Are the children using the materials appropriately (e.g., cooperating quietly, supporting each other, etc.)?
- Are there specific situations during the day when the children should use the L2 for a particular purpose? (This will help me prepare them for these situations.)
- Which L1 grammar topics have you covered, or are you planning to cover, this month with each age group?

Questions from the Montessori guide to the L2 teacher:

- Do you have any suggestions on how I could support the children in practicing L2?
- I have observed that when the children use the L2 materials, they (specific observation). Why do you think this might be?
- I am planning to have the children work on project XY. Do you have any ideas on how we could incorporate L2 elements into this project?
- How would you like to communicate the children's L2 progress to the parents?

Pause and reflect

- How do I ensure that the materials I use in the L2 classroom are aligned with the developmental needs of my students, considering their L1 skills and language proficiency?
- How can I create opportunities for L2 learners to engage with novelty and variety in their lessons, rather than repeating the same content in both L1 and L2?
- How can I assess whether my language input is meeting the specific needs

of my L2 students? What adjustments might I consider to make it more effective?

- In what ways can I actively seek guidance and support from Montessori guides to enhance the integration of Montessori principles into my L2 teaching practice?
- How can I collaborate more effectively with Montessori guides to ensure we address the diverse language needs of our students throughout the school year?
- What strategies can I use in regular meetings with Montessori guides to ensure effective communication and shared understanding of L2 learners' progress and needs?

4. What is "developmentally appropriate"?

When selecting materials for second plane L2 learners, many factors must be considered. Balancing adherence to Montessori values with the need to address children's developmental stages can be challenging. Children require materials that are not only age-appropriate but also aligned with their L2 language level to foster a sense of success and ensure they can use the materials effectively.

Recognising this, the Bilingual Montessori team outlined core principles during the first transnational project meeting of the Erasmus+ project on Bilingual Education in Elementary Schools in June 2022. These principles were developed from both the Montessori and L2 perspectives, serving as a foundational guide for creating developmentally appropriate materials.

4.1. From the Montessori perspective

- An understanding of language acquisition principles must be rooted in human development and aligned with the specific characteristics of the child at each developmental stage.
- Adult preparation is key, requiring deep knowledge of human development, self-reflection, strong observation skills, and the ability to connect children with their environment in a Montessori-specific way.
- The prepared environment must meet the child's developmental needs and sensitivities.
- The prepared environment should provide opportunities for children to choose purposeful work appropriate to their developmental stage, encouraging activities that promote communication and collaboration.

- Scaffolding and isolating difficulty, such as introducing vocabulary step by step, helps children master complex tasks.
- Uninterrupted work time is essential and should be viewed from the child's perspective.
- The environment should support "big work" that involves extended time, space, and collaboration, adapting to the children's growing abilities.
- The administration must establish a school culture that reflects Montessori values and supports the classroom environment.
- Teachers should be responsive rather than reactive, prioritising tasks and allowing children to handle non-emergencies independently. Similarly, the administration should maintain consistent priorities without yielding to external pressures.
- Parent education is essential to reinforce the Montessori approach.

4.2. From the L2 perspective

- Make the language tangible and accessible to children.
- Materials should reflect the language needs of the children and be culturally relevant.
- Provide comprehensible input that is appropriate for the children's language level.
- Encourage repetition through diverse activities that connect to real-life purposes.
- The L2 teacher should be willing and able to transform traditional L2 materials (e.g., worksheets) into meaningful, purposeful activities.
- Recognise that the L2 teacher serves as the model for language use in the classroom.
- Ensure that teacher-created materials supporting L2 acquisition remain available on the shelves for independent use.
- Collaboration between the L2 teacher and Montessori guides must be built on professional trust, with a shared awareness of the school's developmental goals.
- The L2 should be integrated into the school community, helping children understand its relevance to their lives.
- Consider the school's language profile and objectives when planning lessons and activities.
- Agree on a language reference framework (e.g., CEFR, ACTFL, or another) that will guide the L2 curriculum at the school.
- Establish a clear method for measuring individual language development,

based on a framework that defines standards for different stages.

- Parent education is crucial, including clearly communicating the school's definition of bilingualism.

4.3. Learner autonomy as an approach to independent L2 practice

In the Montessori classroom, we strive to facilitate the independent use and practice of L2, as this combines is a vital component of language education with Montessori principles. Three authors—David Little, Leni Dam, and Leinhard Legenhausen—emphasise the importance of fostering learner autonomy in their book Language Learner Autonomy: Theory, Practice and Research. They argue that autonomy empowers students to take responsibility for their own learning, leading to greater motivation and engagement. This autonomy encompasses several key dimensions, including the ability to set personal learning goals, select appropriate strategies, and evaluate one's progress. By encouraging learners to make choices and reflect on their experiences, teachers can help them develop critical thinking skills and a sense of ownership over their language-learning journey.

The most important aspect, that facilitates learner autonomy in the classroom, is creating a supportive environment where students feel safe to express their needs and preferences. At the same time, mistakes and errors must be perceived as an integral part of the learning process rather than failures to be feared. Embracing errors as opportunities for growth encourages learners to take risks, fosters resilience, and enhances their overall understanding of the language.

There are two main strategies for promoting autonomy in the classroom. The first involves integrating activities that allow for self-directed learning, such as project-based tasks and peer collaboration. Before a project or peer collaboration is assigned, it is essential for the teacher and the students to agree on the criteria that define successful completion of the task. This ensures that both the teacher and students are fully aware of the focus of the activity. Such discussions about criteria should also take place when students approach the teacher with their own ideas for a project. The second strategy focuses on the autonomous use of L2 learning materials. The primary purpose of these materials is to help children practise specific language aspects, such as vocabulary, spelling, grammar, and reading comprehension. These learning materials are designed with a built-in isolation of difficulty, respecting the children's language levels and any special educational needs they may have. Children use these materials after being shown how to work with them

by the teacher as part of the language presentation (lesson).

Incorporating the principles of learner autonomy into the classroom guides students in developing metacognitive skills, enabling them to plan, monitor, and assess their own learning processes. Cultivating these skills helps learners become more effective and independent language users, ultimately enhancing their overall educational experience.

5. How to know if a material is "developmentally appropriate"?

As has been advocated many times in this field guide, the mindset of the teacher is key in ensuring children work with the materials they need. Before working with any material a teacher should ask the following questions to determine if it is developmentally appropriate:

- What is the child learning with this material?

    Here the teacher should reflect on the purpose of the child working with the material. If this is not easy to determine, the teacher should consider whether this material is appropriate for their classroom.

- Is this achievable for the child?

    Having determined the objective of the material the teacher should then consider if the objective is accessible to the child. If the material is a higher level than the child can achieve then it is not (yet) appropriate for the child to work with.

- Is this vocabulary/ language point useful at their level?

    While it may be achievable for the child to meet the objective of the material it is also necessary to reflect on how useful the language point is. Especially when children have a low level of L2 it is important to enhance their vocabulary and basic communication skills before using more complex grammar materials.

- Does it provide an opportunity for communication?

    Communication is key for L2 learners. Any learning should incorporate communication skills practice. This can mean additional or adapted materials need to be available.

- Does it provide a language structure to ensure the children can work independently with the material in L2?

Often language activities can require an additional script or language structure to ensure the children work independently in L2. We know that children naturally revert to their L1 without this structure. This often means observing the children with the material and then adapting it to their needs.

- Does this material need an adult present?

Following observation, the teacher may realise that a material requires an adult to model and facilitate conversation in English. This can be an effective use of an assistant in a bilingual classroom.

- Is it enjoyable?

This can seem like an obvious question but for a material to be successful it should also be enjoyable. Second plane children benefit from being intrinsically motivated to learn so the teacher should consider whether each activity appeals to the child. Reflecting on which second plane characteristics are met by the material is a good way to ensure this happens.

6. How to create L2 materials

There is no single approach to creating L2 materials suitable for a Montessori classroom, as this process may begin with either Montessori principles or second language learning considerations. Regardless of which "side" we begin from, we must be clear about whether we are creating "teaching" or "learning" material.

Second language teaching materials refer to the resources and tools educators use to facilitate language instruction. These materials can include textbooks, workbooks, visual aids, audio-visual aids, and digital resources. The primary purpose of these materials is to guide teachers in delivering lessons and to provide structured content for activities during presentations (Tomlinson, 2011). The teacher is the one who adds instructions to the teaching material making it easy for children to follow and use.

In contrast, second language learning materials are resources intended for learners to use independently or collaboratively to enhance their language acquisition. These can include graded readers, vocabulary three-part cards or their equivalents, many versions of board games (with the winning-losing aspect being eliminated) and possibly online language platforms or

vocabulary apps for practice at home. The focus of learning materials, available to learners on the classroom shelves, is to support learners in applying their knowledge, practising language skills, and fostering autonomy. Such materials should encourage exploration and self-directed learning, helping students to engage with the language in meaningful contexts (Nunan, 2004; Little, Dam, Legenhausen, 2017).

6.1. Adaptations of materials for L2 learners

Florencia Ugalde, in her Community Conversations talk, shared her approach to adapting Montessori materials for language learning, highlighting the key considerations in tailoring materials for L2 learners.

> *"We present materials and lessons based on Montessori principles, following our training and the guidelines in our albums. We make only minimal adaptations, always in line with Montessori's child-centered approach. The goal is to follow the child's development, making small changes when necessary, but always adhering to the process for introducing new materials and lessons.*
>
> *At our school, we follow a very systematic process to ensure that every adaptation is effective. How do we follow the child? First and foremost, we observe, observe, and observe. It's crucial to continuously assess the child's needs and progress. Once we observe, we take steps to ensure the materials are developmentally appropriate, because materials that are not accessible or usable by the children won't serve their needs effectively.*
>
> *We then plan bespoke activities—customized experiences that cater to each child's development. We also create what I call "preliminary activities." These are smaller, introductory tasks, especially within the Practical Life area, that help the children build skills and confidence. These preliminary activities are part of the necessary adjustments we make in our presentations.*
>
> *In our Montessori methodology, we carefully consider the materials we will use, the purpose of each presentation (both direct and indirect), the child's age and abilities, and the steps of the presentation itself. After introducing these materials, we observe to ensure the presentations are effective and truly benefit the children.*
>
> *One important point I want to emphasize is that, while we may adapt materials to help children use them in English, we are always careful to*

return to the core Montessori materials as soon as possible. The adaptations are just a way to support the children's language learning, but the focus remains on using authentic Montessori materials that promote their overall development."

6.2. Checklist for implementing language learning autonomy

Experienced Montessori Guide and School Language Coordinator Birgitta Berger has adopted Leni Dam's strategies for fostering language learner autonomy in her work with Elementary and adolescent English language learners. To support this approach, Birgitta has developed a checklist of guiding questions to help you stay on track.

Does your next step/activity/material:

- facilitate language production (rather than reproduction)?
- entail choice (of activity/partners/topic / etc.)?
- facilitate authentic communication between pupils?
- require/facilitate real cooperation between pupils?
- involve the learner's identity and/or previous knowledge?
- allow everybody to take part?
- enable learners to create their materials and content?
- make your expectations clear (content, format, time frame, quantity and quality of work)?
- involve learners in selecting, modifying, or adapting goals and content?
- include evaluation (students' self-evaluation, peer evaluation, evaluation of the activity/lesson, feedback from teacher)?
- involve learners in developing criteria for successful work, learning etc.?
- enable learners to become their teachers and researchers?
- enable you to see your students' learning through their eyes?

Pause and reflect

- What steps will help me with selecting materials that align with both the developmental needs and language level of my L2 students?
- How do I ensure the language input I provide is both comprehensible and relevant for my students' current language abilities?
- What strategies can I implement to encourage L2 learners to use materials independently, while ensuring these materials promote effective communication and language practice?
- How can I create a classroom environment that supports learner autonomy,

encouraging students to take responsibility for their language learning?
- How can I differentiate between materials designed for teaching and those meant for independent learning?
- How can I ensure both types support the students' needs?

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8. Case study example

The following example demonstrates how the L2 teacher approaches the creation of materials, using the Montessori principles to guide the design and organisation of learning materials and activities that have been incorporated into a language teacher's classroom practices.

> **Lillard's Nine principles of Montessori education**
>
> - Movement and cognition are closely entwined, and movement can enhance thinking and learning.
>
> - Learning and well-being are improved when people have a sense of control over their lives.
>
> - The ability to direct one's attention in a sustained and concentrated way fosters an array of positive developments and is itself trainable.
>
> - People learn better when they are interested in what they are learning.
>
> - Tying extrinsic rewards to an activity, such as money for reading or high grades on tests, negatively impacts motivation to engage in that activity when the reward is withdrawn.
>
> - Collaborative arrangements can be very conducive to learning.
>
> - Learning situated in meaningful contexts is often deeper and richer than learning in abstract contexts.
>
> - Particular forms of adult interaction are associated with more optimal child outcomes
>
> - Order in the environment is beneficial to children.

Lucie Urbančikova developed this material while working as an English specialist at Andílek Montessori School in Prague, Czech Republic. At this school, English is the second language of most children and is primarily interacted with at school, not in the wider community. Czech is the official national language and the primary language of instruction at school. In a Bilingual Montessori "Community Conversation", Lucie offered detailed information about how she designs materials and activities for English learning incorporating the Montessori principles and discusses how to ensure that they are upheld for her learners.

Lucie compares teaching materials and learning materials. Teaching materials used by teachers during lessons (presentations, in Montessori) can

be very simple because the adult is the element that gives new language, its phrases or structures to the children, rather than the materials themselves. Here, Stoll Lillard's Montessori principle 8, "Particular forms of adult interaction are associated with more optimal child outcomes", is taken into consideration, as the way that Lucie designs the materials makes it possible for her to interact in a certain way with the children so that they are prepared, after the lesson, to autonomously access and use the materials at will. The materials can include pictures or word cards, or just objects from the classroom.

Learning materials are those that the children can (and choose to) use independently. They must have some built-in way to provide the language to the child or guide them in using certain words, phrases or structures, thereby "substituting" the adult's guidance or input. These include board games, discussion cards or prompts for creative writing activities.

To underscore the difference a set of materials, for working on the topic of clothing, is shown. The teaching materials are paper cutouts of a variety of coloured clothing and paper dolls. Teaching the lesson consists of showing learners the clothing item names, repeating the given language and their colours (e.g. a white t-shirt, etc.) and, for example, showing children how to ask their partner to put a certain item on their paper doll. Lucie considers principle 7, contextualisation when she designs the clothing materials; she uses names of items of clothing that children wear during the corresponding season they are using the learning materials in. The topic is contextually relevant to children because the expressions that they learn will be applicable and the paper-doll dressing game is appropriate to their age group and developmental characteristics; children enjoy paper doll dressing games independently purely for fun (principle 4, enjoyment), not just because they are shown that they must use them to study English.

The corresponding learning material includes all the same materials mentioned for the teaching, in addition to a strip of paper depicting a set of the same clothing items, in the same colours, that are included in the cut-out clothes for dressing the paper dolls. The game will be for a child to practise saying Can you please put the…. On your (doll / boy / girl …)? Here, principle 2, the possibility of the learner to make choices, is applied because, firstly, the children choose to use the materials. Secondly, although this next choice is limited so that learning can be effective, children feel that they are making a choice as they decide the order in which they request clothing items from their partner.

The child has a strip of paper showing which colour specific clothing items to ask their partner to use so the teacher's guidance is included as part of the learning materials. This follows research findings about learners' needs when using a new language. The learner makes a big effort to produce the words and phrases in the target language, so if that effort can be reduced, for instance by eliminating the need to decide what clothing to name, the learner can produce the language more fluently. This allows the learner to feel more successful in their language use, building their confidence, at the same time as language is used to fulfil an enjoyable aim. It is a strategy known as isolation of difficulty, in Montessorian terms, or scaffolding, in the wider field of education.

In addition, after their partner has followed the paper-doll dressing instructions, the strip can be shown in order to check if all the doll's clothes are the right ones. This self or peer-checking mechanism is valuable for allowing the learners to be in control of their own progress and self-assess their work, even at a young age and low level of proficiency in the target language. Principle 3 will be at play at least during this part of the children's work, because they are strategically using the materials and systematically revising the outcome of their dialogue to see if they understood each other correctly and managed to accurately follow their partner's suggestions. The whole activity also applies principle 6, as it relies on peer interaction in a range of ways.

The materials are carefully arranged in special boxes, precisely coloured in and presented to children in a tidy and aesthetically pleasing way. This shows how Lucie also has principle 9 in mind when designing this material.

The activity involves speaking and moving the tangible objects representing clothes and children, so it also follows principle 1. Children's learning is enhanced because they are manipulating and moving the materials, rather than simply looking at what is on the page of a worksheet or book.

In our Community Conversation series we have other examples of how other teachers have approached the creation of L2 materials.

> For example, with 6-12 year olds:

- Mariann Manhertz in Combining Montessori & 2nd Language Enrichment
- Paula Esteve in Cómo conseguí que mis alumnos amasen la lectura/How I got students to love reading

For 3-6 year olds:

- Florencia Ugalde Specialized Language Activities in 3-6 Classroom : Faithful to Montessori
- Denise Fernandes Empowering Young Readers in the Children's House

For the whole school:

- Licia Arnaboldi Montessori L2: the Intercultural Dimension

Conclusion: Integrating Montessori principles in L2 learning

The Montessori approach to education, with its deep understanding of the elementary child's characteristics and its emphasis on developmentally appropriate learning, offers valuable insights for L2 instruction across diverse educational settings. By examining the key traits of elementary learners - their need for variety in repetition, individualised learning, engagement of the reasoning mind and imagination, social development, and strong sense of justice - we can craft L2 learning experiences that are not only effective but deeply engaging for children aged 6-12.

Angeline Lillard's Nine Principles of Montessori Education, referred to below and discussed in greater detail in Section 3.2, provides a framework that aligns remarkably well with best practices in second language acquisition. The emphasis on movement and cognition encourages kinesthetic learning that enhances language retention. The focus on choice and learner agency promotes intrinsic motivation, crucial for sustained language learning. The development of executive functions through Montessori practices supports the cognitive demands of managing multiple languages.

Importantly, these principles are not confined to Montessori classrooms. As we've seen in the case study of Lucie Urbančiková's ESL classes, educators can adapt Montessori-inspired approaches to various L2 learning contexts. By creating learning environments and activities that respect the child's developmental needs, foster independence, and provide meaningful contexts for language use, we can significantly enhance L2 acquisition.

For L2 educators, understanding and applying these principles means:

- Designing varied activities that allow for necessary repetition without monotony
- Individualising instruction to meet each learner's needs and interests
- Engaging the child's reasoning mind through exploration and discovery in

the target language

- Leveraging social interaction for authentic language practice
- Using the child's sense of justice and fairness as a springboard for meaningful communication
- Integrating movement into language learning activities
- Offering choices to promote learner agency and intrinsic motivation
- Creating a prepared environment that facilitates independent language exploration
- Providing contextualised, meaningful language experiences

By embracing these Montessori-inspired approaches, L2 educators - whether in Montessori settings or not - can create learning experiences that are not only linguistically rich but also developmentally appropriate and intrinsically motivating. This holistic approach to language education respects the child as a capable, curious learner, setting the stage for a lifelong journey of language acquisition and cultural understanding.

As we continue to navigate the complexities of multilingual education in an increasingly interconnected world, the timeless wisdom of Montessori, validated by modern research, offers a valuable compass. It reminds us that effective language learning is not about rote memorisation or drill exercises, but about creating environments and experiences that speak to the whole child - their mind, body, and spirit. In doing so, we not only facilitate language acquisition but also nurture confident, capable global citizens ready to engage with diverse cultures and perspectives.

9. Appendix 3.6.1.

Guiding Questions for Creating L2 Learning Materials

This material was created by Lucie Urbančíková for participants of Bilingual Montessori Community Conversation funded by Erasmus+ titled Second Language Learning Materials in a Montessori 6-12 Classroom: Key Features That Make Children Excited to Use Them on Their Own

1. Who is the material for?

2. What are the group's strengths?

3. What are the group's areas for growth?

4. What is the goal of the learning material?

5. Where is it on Bloom's Taxonomy?

6. What is the key vocabulary?

7. What is the key phrase (lexis)?

8. What language skill(s) am I targeting?

9. What are the preceding teaching material(s)?

10. What gaming principles could I use?

11. Which gaming principle (from question 10) meets the needs of answers above?

12. What will be the learning material(s)?

13. How can I scaffold the activity?

14. What principle can "substitute" the adult?)

15. What other activities can we do with this material?

16. My other notes, thoughts, ideas:

My Reflective Cycle

It helps me stay on track with the process of adjusting the materials to meet the needs of the children in my classroom.
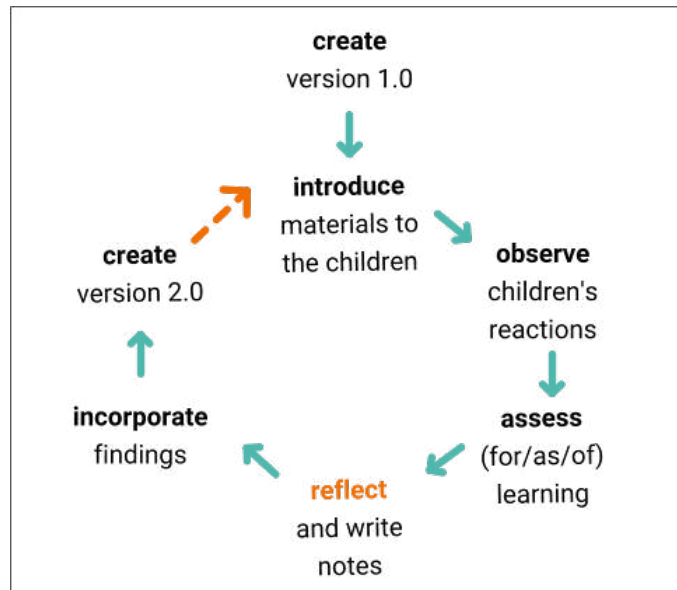
Reflecting on the Process and Outcomes

Daily / weekly reflective questions: Looking for the specifics

- What did I observe?
- What information did I get from the assessment(s)?
- Did the material fulfil its purpose / educational goal?
    - yes - How did it happen?
    - no - Why not?
- What changes / adjustments do I need to make?
- Can it be altered to meet new / other goals?

Monthly reflective questions: "Meta reflection" = step back from the specifics and look at the process as a whole:

- What works?
- What does not work? Why can this be? What can I do about it?
- What is the atmosphere in the classroom?
- What did I discuss with the lead guide?
- How does what I do fit the school's approach to L2?
- How can I improve my system of "archiving" the materials?
- What materials do I need to work on next month?

Preparing the bilingual learning environment

Contents

Key takeaways

- **Grammar** is not just rules, but patterns of meaning, form, and use.
- Children acquire grammar **implicitly in L1**, going through predictable sequences.
- **In L2**, learners also go through sequences that cannot be altered by instruction.
- "**Focus on form**" briefly draws learners' attention to grammar in meaningful contexts.
- **Montessori materials** can enhance input and elicit output focused on target forms.

Introduction

What do we need to know about learning and teaching it? Most adults consider grammar an inseparable part of language learning. In the following section, we will explore the term grammar itself, examine the development of grammatical structures in language acquisition and give evidence-based recommendations on when and how to work on grammar with learners in the second plane of development.

1.   What is grammar?

According to the applied linguists Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia, the grammar and vocabulary of a language are intertwined, making up patterns rather than being governed by rules: 'Grammar is a meaning-making resource. It is made up of lexicogrammatical form, meaning and constructions that are appropriate to the context and that operate at the word, phrase, sentence and textual levels'. (Larsen-Freeman/Celce-Murcia, 2016, pp. 1-2)

This definition has implications for the study and teaching of language as it widens the range of possible objectives and operations. It also enables us to move beyond a mere teaching of rules to focus on the communicative goals of all language work. As language teachers, we aim to enable children to grasp the meaning of language, help them learn when and why to use linguistic items and how to form them to participate in oral or written discourse.

2.   Grammar in language development in L1

As children are not born speaking, this is something they must learn. Considering the complexity of language, this learning process takes place at remarkable speed, without instruction or correction, in similar stages all over the world, no matter which language is involved. What used to be called the mother tongue is now referred to as the L1, the first language acquired in this manner.

As mentioned in Part 2, in theirfirst language, children move from cooing to babbling, then through the one-word and two-word stages to telegraphic

speech. At this stage, children are blissfully unaware of grammatical issues. While they unknowingly follow grammatical patterns in using nouns for objects and verbs for actions, their first utterances do not follow conventional syntax structure. However, in their acquisition of morphemes, their use of questions and formation of negatives, children appear to follow clearly identifiable stages (Yule, 2023, p. 216-218).

What's acquired? In order to speak a language as adults do, children need to acquire five areas of linguistic competence: Phonology, Lexis, Semantics, Grammar and Pragmatics. These are the **linguistic milestones** as compiled by the University of Sheffield/Centre for Linguistic Research.

2.1 Phonology

Phonology refers to the acquisition of sounds ranging from basic biological noises such as coughing, crying, cooing etc. produced very soon after birth to babbling (at 25-50 weeks) and melodic utterances (at 36-72 weeks) where intonation, rhythm and melody develop, resulting in babies sounding more and more as though they are speaking the language. Babies of different nationalities sound increasingly different from each other.

2.2   Lexis

Lexical development is the acquisition of words. Children use words for:

- Naming things or people: ball, Daddy, juice, milk.
- Actions or events: down, more, up.
- Describing things: dirty, nice, pretty.
- Personal or social words: hi, bye-bye.

2.3 Semantics

Semantic development is the acquisition of the meaning of words. Children tend to use words more broadly than adults (for example, the word 'dog' may be used to refer to all four-legged animals with a tail). Over-extensions reflect a child's learning and their growing knowledge of the world; noticing similarities and differences between objects.

2.4   Grammar/Syntax

There are **three main stages** of grammatical development.

Holophrastic Stage (12-18 months) – Children learn and produce single-word utterances that function as phrases or sentences. For example:

- 'Gone' could mean 'it's all gone'
- 'Teddy' could mean 'that's my teddy'
- 'More' could mean 'I want more'

Intonation plays a key role during this stage. Children learn the ability to distinguish between interrogative, declarative and imperative phrases, and despite their limited grammatical structuring, are able to aid their communication more effectively. For example:

- 'Dada?' said with a rising intonation, would imply a question
- 'Dada' said with a falling intonation, would imply declarative statement
- 'Dada!' said in exclamation, would imply imperative statement

Two-word Stage (18-24 months) – 'Baby chair', 'Mummy eat' and 'Cat bad' are all examples of utterances at this stage and as it may be obvious, require interpretation. Context of an utterance can aid the ambiguity behind such statements. For example: 'Baby chair' could mean…

- Possession: 'this is baby's chair'
- Request/command: 'put baby in chair'
- Statement: 'baby is in the chair'

Telegraphic Stage (2-3 years) – When children have acquired and start to use multiple-word utterances. At this stage, some of the children's utterances are grammatically correct…

- 'Amy likes tea' – (Subject + Verb + Object)
- 'teddy looks tired' – (Subject + Verb + Adjective)
- 'Mummy sleeps upstairs' – (Subject + Verb + Adverbial)

Whilst others have grammatical elements missing…

- 'This shoe all wet' – (the stative verb carrying meaning is missing: is)

Children are more likely to retain and use CONTENT words (nouns, verbs and adjectives that refer to real things). FUNCTION words (that have grammatical

function: pronouns, prepositions and auxiliary verbs) are often omitted.

Overgeneralisations (when children make virtuous errors in their allocation of inflections) are also found at this stage. For example: The inflection -s to mark plurality is seen to be added to irregular verbs: sheep – sheeps. The inflection -ed to mark past tense is seen to be added to irregular verbs: go – goed

2.5 Pragmatics

Pragmatic development focuses on children's motivation to acquire language in the first place (to express needs, to control behaviours of others, to relate to others, to gain knowledge of the environment, to express yourself, to use language imaginatively and to convey facts and information). This process is on-going until the age of approximately 10 years.

3. A critical period for language learning?

The sensitive period for learning an L1 which is denoted as early childhood, from birth to the age of six years (for more information see part 2), is undisputed and for a long time this restriction was also applied to L2 acquisition. However, recent research findings counter this view, pointing to factors other than a critical period to account for the decline in L2 proficiency after early childhood. There is no evidence that young children learn additional languages better; what we can say is that they learn differently. As learners get older, they may acquire additional strategies and therefore advantages, both in terms of motivation and metalinguistic knowledge that they can transfer from one language to another.

At the elementary stage, children will acquire much of their ability to formulate coherent language in the L2 as they hear and read the language and are offered motivating tasks for language production, mirroring the acquisition patterns of the 3-6 year olds. The many approaches outlined in sections 3.4. Building Literacy I and 3.8 Building Literacy II provide the tools for this work. These approaches align with the 'Comprehensible Output Hypothesis' (Swain, 1985), which posits that learners need not only comprehensible input for language learning, but also opportunities to produce comprehensible output. According to this hypothesis, output (i.e. language production by the learner) does more than just help learners to

become more fluent as they use language; it actually contributes to the language learning process.

The L2 context of school is very different from the L1 environment in the home. A key distinction is the amount of time spent in contact with the L2 or target language. Educators may therefore feel the need to 'reinforce' or 'speed up' the acquisition process by providing grammar instruction aiming to compensate for the reduced exposure to the target language. However, there is no evidence to support such an approach with children. What has been shown is that meaningful interaction and active use of the language are crucial, rather than mere exposure.

Pause and reflect

- How can understanding the differences in language acquisition between young children and older learners influence my teaching strategies in an L2 classroom?
- How do we approach grammar teaching / learning at our school?

4. Grammar in language development in L2

The next language anyone learns after or beside their first acquired language is considered their L2. This may be the language of their other parent, of their environment or a foreign language, not generally spoken in their surroundings.

L2 speakers progress through stages in their language production similar to those of children developing their L1. What they are producing is called 'learner language' or 'interlanguage', to use the term coined by Larry Selinker. Interlanguage develops in both child and adult learners, differing from the speakers' L1 and the L2 input they receive. With young learners, interlanguage may resemble the production of children acquiring their first language (Long/Doughty, 2011, p. 82-83).

The German linguist Manfred Pienemann identified the following six stages of acquisition for learners of English as a second language (from Pienemann/Keßler/Roos (eds.), 2006, p. 36, 57)

Stage	Form	Example
1	One-word stage (including phrases or chunks of language)	How are you? Where is…? Pizza ↑ (the symbol ↑ stands for the rising intonation used when intending to ask a question)
2	SVO (subject-verb-object) SVO question Past -ed Plural -s (nouns)	I live here. You live here ↑ John played. I like cats.
3	Introducing questions with a questioning element (wh-word, do etc.) Introducing sentences with adverbs	Where he is? Do he go home? Now I go home.
4	Inversion in wh-questions with copula Yes/No inversion	Where is she? Have you seen him?
5	Aux (do/did) following wh-word Negative question using auxiliary 3rd person singular -s	When did she see it? Why didn't you buy it? Peter likes bananas.
6	Indirect questions	I wonder what he wants.

A universal sequence of development for second language acquisition appears to be characteristic of learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This sequence has been observed in both natural (e.g. family) and institutional (e.g. classroom) language environments.

The key findings from research by Pienemann and others are that learners go through these sequences at different speeds. The order of sequences can apparently not be affected by teaching. Only a structure that is within reach of a particular learner can successfully be presented to them. There is, however, no guarantee that a structure taught in such a way will immediately become part of that learner's spontaneous language production. Target forms that learners appear to have mastered one day may appear 'forgotten' the next (Lethaby/Mayne/Harries, 2021, pp.66-67). Where grammar is concerned, the insight that teaching does not equal learning is especially important.

Research indicates that children make use of a great deal of formulaic language, particularly in the early stages of L2 acquisition. These word

sequences, often referred to as chunks (including idioms and collocations) are building blocks for first language production. We see them in Stage 1 of Pienemann's stages of language acquisition. As learners progress, they embed such chunks into new structures as well as developing new and more complex processing strategies. Chunks that take the form of questions (How are you? Where is…?) or collocations (brown bear, Go away!) already include grammatical structures which are learnt implicitly, without being explicitly addressed or taught.

Pause and reflect

- How can understanding the stages of interlanguage development influence my approach to teaching grammar in an L2 classroom?
- What strategies can I use to support learners at different stages of Pienemann's sequence of language acquisition?
- How can I incorporate the use of formulaic language and chunks into my teaching to facilitate natural language acquisition for my students?
- Which Montessori materials or activities correspond with these stages?

5. When and how to work on grammar

When the development of the learner and the tasks expected of them make it appropriate, a focus on structural patterns can support linguistic growth. This concept can be considered as 'grammar on demand' and aligns with Michael H. Long's 'Focus on form' approach. This is a middle way between traditional grammar-focussed language teaching and a meaning-focussed approach that does without grammatical instruction altogether. The underlying view is that while very young learners can achieve native-like competence through exposure alone and given adequate contact time with the target language, older learners need support to become aware of and be able to master many grammatical niceties of the target language:

'Focus on form refers to how attentional resources are allocated, and involves briefly drawing students' attention to linguistic elements (words, collocations, grammatical structures, pragmatic patterns, and so on), in context, as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning, or communication, the temporary shifts in focal attention being triggered by

students' comprehension or production problems.' (Long, 1998, p. 40)

The overall effect that is intended by focus on form is for the students to notice a form or pattern of language (rather than necessarily to understand the reasons for its usage). This is supported by our knowledge that the first priority of humans is to communicate, i.e. to convey and grasp meaning in an interaction. This comes before any desire or need to conform to linguistic conventions and may explain why older L2 learners without formal instruction do not move beyond a certain level of language acquisition if they are nonetheless able to communicate effectively.

6. Focus on form: from unobtrusive to obtrusive

Focus on form helps learners who are engaged in communication or studying content notice structures that would otherwise escape their attention. This can take place implicitly or explicitly. It is generally accepted that the younger the learners, the more favourable the outcome of implicit instruction. According to Kolb/Schocker (Kolb/Schocker, 2021, p. 49), young learners can benefit from a focus on form in a task-based setting only if:

- they discover the rules and the function of elements of the language themselves
- the process of noticing is organised in a child-appropriate way and the timing of the focus is appropriate and the focus emerges naturally from working on the task.

There are several ways to facilitate a systematic, non-interfering focus on form in a manner suitable to support the language acquisition of young learners:

## 6.1. Teaching words and grammar as chunks or formulaic language

Chunks or formulaic language are sequences or combinations of several words which appear to be prefabricated. This means that they are stored and retrieved from memory as a whole (Kersten, 2015, p. 131). By teaching chunks we follow the natural manner of L2 development where combinations of words form the first stage of language acquisition (see Pienemann's stages of language acquisition above). Chunks are an integral part of the English language, they can be used effortlessly and enable communication to take place from the very start of the learning process (Kolb/Schocker, 2021, p.

108-109).

Input enhancement:This is designed to raise learners' attention to linguistic forms by making them more visible. The aim is to make certain items of written or oral input more visible or audible and therefore noticeable to the learner. This can take the form of underlining, bolding, using italics or highlighting elements of written input. The Montessori grammar symbols can be used as an additional or alternative form of enhancing written input to make parts of speech and word order visible.
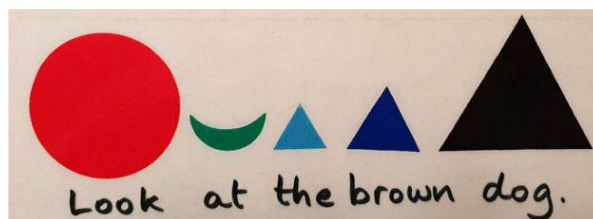
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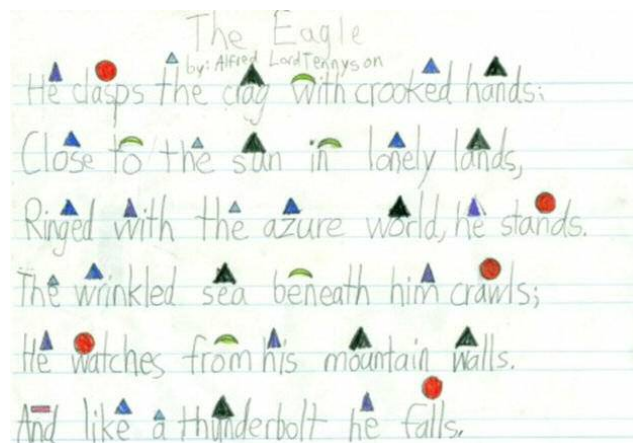
The enhancement of written text can be done in advance by the teacher. It can, however, also be carried out by learners, giving them a more active role in the process and thereby supporting learnability. Again, work with the Montessori grammar symbols is a good example of this. Students can decode a poem or text and thereby gain a deeper understanding both of meaning and structure.

In oral input, added stress or repetition can enhance certain words or forms. With younger learners, clapping, movement and gestures can be used to

enhance oral input to stress certain forms. These are often nouns or verbs. Pie Corbett's storytelling actions are an excellent means of making connectives visible and thus helping children realise how elements are linked to make a story come to life. You can find examples of Corbett's storytelling actions here.

6.3. Input flooding

This involves providing ('flooding') learners with input using the target form. In its simplest form, input flooding can take place through repetition, e.g. multiple readings of a picture book, repetition of songs and rhymes, the use of online and offline audio materials.

Talking or reading about past or historical events gives learners abundant opportunities to read/hear past tense forms in use (without highlighting them). Dictogloss is a method that enables teachers to provide input rich in a target structure combined with listening and cooperative writing tasks to follow up.

> **How to dictogloss**
>
> Dictogloss is an activity where the teacher tells or reads a story or text to learners who then work in pairs or small groups to reconstruct it. Younger learners can do this by drawing one or several pictures to support their oral retelling. Older learners able to write will note down words. In a subsequent step, they will retell or summarise the text they heard previously. Dictogloss involves several skills (listening, note-taking, speaking, collaborative writing) and targets both vocabulary and language forms.
>
> Dictogloss | TeachingEnglish | British Council

6.4. Output production

This entails activities that encourage learners to use specific forms or structures. Repetitive chants or rhymes do this orally (e.g. 'Who stole the cookie from the cookie jar?') as do games involving questions and / or answers that follow a certain pattern ('Go fish', 'Who am I?', 'Twenty questions' or 'The king likes tea, but he doesn't like coffee').

Guessing game: The king likes tea, but he doesn't like coffee.

In this guessing game, the learners are given this piece of information about the king of a strange land: "The king likes tea, but he doesn't like coffee" and are told that the king's preferences follow a certain (as yet secret) pattern. A few clues help the children get started: "The king likes cats, but he doesn't like dogs. The king likes white, but he doesn't like black." Further items can be written under the first sentence to give an overview. After some time, the learners can be given the clue that the king actually likes "T", meaning the letter "T" and therefore prefers all items spelled with this letter to those that don't include this letter of the alphabet.

Once they know, the students can continue, orally or in writing.

The activity can lead on to story writing or be followed up by new riddles created along similar lines by the teacher or by students.

(from Anthony Chamberlain and Kurt Stenberg (1996): Play and Practice. Lincolnwood (Chicago, Ill.): National Textbook Company.

Written output can also focus on specific items, such as prepositions (describing a room) or comparative forms (describing and comparing two people, animals or cities). All forms of story writing can involve specific tenses (usually past tense). And poems are a wonderful way of encouraging creative writing with a linguistic focus:

He runs. He dodges. He
dribbles. He kicks. He scores!!!
Christiano Ronaldo.

by Birgitta Berger

Weighing, mixing, blending,
Smelling, tasting, eating,
Cookies are my favourite thing
to bake.

from 'Verb Poems'
by Laughlin Learning

7. Montessori materials to support awareness of language patterns and structure

The question of whether to use the Montessori language materials for L2 learning should be considered during the creation of a school's language policy. It should be noted that all Montessori grammar materials are designed to raise language awareness in a child's L1, at a stage when the child has been acquiring this language for several years and is familiar with a great deal of vocabulary as well as linguistic patterns. In general, this does not hold true for the L2 and Montessori grammar materials were not designed for the purpose of teaching an additional language.

However, some elements of Montessori language work do lend themselves to supporting L2 acquisition because they have familiarised learners with structures of their first language and these can subsequently be applied to their L2. Many materials and areas in the classroom also provide rich resources to connect real-life and hands-on experiences to language work:

- Sensorial materials
- Practical life materials
- Montessori farm for simple sentences (reading and command cards)
- The movable alphabet for spelling
- The grammar symbols for word order (imitation/invention).
- The science area for experiments
- The cultural area for learning about different regions of the world

Please note that while certain materials listed above were designed for use in the primary or 3-6 setting, some teachers employ them for L2 learning in the elementary classroom.

Pause and reflect

- How can input enhancement techniques (e.g. bolding or stressing) do I use to help learners to notice important language structures?
- How do I work with Montessori's grammar symbols in my L2 lessons?
- What activities or games can I introduce to encourage students' output production of specific grammar forms?
- How can Montessori materials be adapted to support L2 learning while building on students' L1 knowledge?

8.   Conclusion

It is helpful to remember that the term "grammar" refers not only to rules formulated for learners and used in traditional course books, but also to the description of language that is used in a certain region or context. Language patterns are a useful synonym for this perspective. Learning a new or an additional language entails developing an ability to recognise and use such patterns. Younger children will focus on meaning and communication. As they get older, learners will increasingly be able to discover, process and utilise language patterns. What language work in the L1 does, namely raising awareness of specific phenomena of the language children have been acquiring and using fluently for several years, need not be repeated to the same extent in the L2. In working with the second language, grammar should be a tool and not a goal.

This needs to be accompanied by the acceptance of the learner language as an interim. The concept of "interlanguage" (cf. section 4 above) enables teachers to see "errors" produced by their learners as indicators of the stage of language acquisition they have reached. By acknowledging this, we are focussing on the learner and the learning process rather than the teaching process and its goals alone. It is advisable to share this perspective with the parents who are frequently not aware of such concepts and come from a more traditional educational background.

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Contents

Key takeaways

- Make **assessment a natural part** of the learning process to guide both teaching and student learning.
- Each **assessment type** has a specific role,
- Ensure all **staff** understand and use assessment terms consistently.
- Use **feedback and reflection** to help students and teachers continuously improve.

Introduction

The topic of assessment often evokes strong opinions, feelings, and concerns. This is largely because many of us have experienced educational systems where assessment was primarily used to rank and compare individuals against explicit or implicit expectations. However, research over the past two decades has provided evidence that assessment should be an integral part of the learning process, helping both teachers and students to enhance student achievement. In essence, assessment should not be something students worry about in advance, but rather a tool that teachers help students embrace as valuable support for their learning.
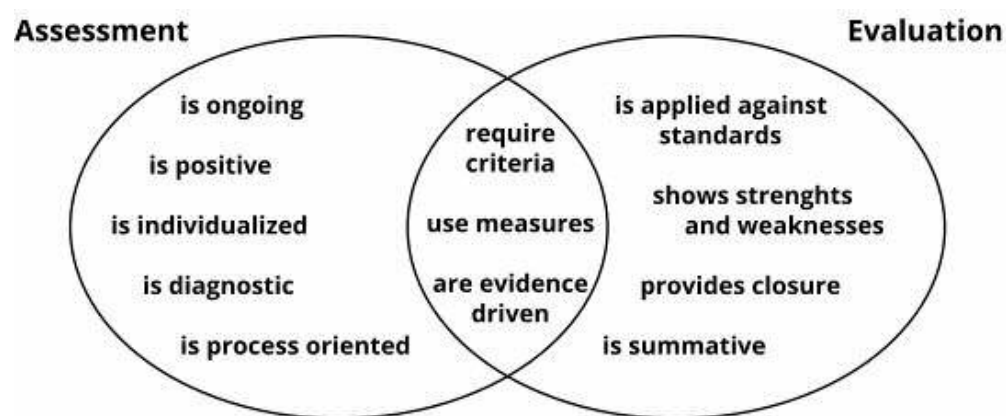
Given the broad nature of the term 'assessment', this section lists and describe various types of assessment and related concepts. Each description is followed by examples of how these concepts can be implemented in a bilingual educational setting.

1. Assessment and its purpose

One goal of education is to improve student achievement. To accomplish this, all parties involved in the educational process—students, teachers, parents, and school administrators—need reliable data. This data collected via various assessment processes serves multiple purposes:

- It guides teachers in adjusting their instruction.
- It helps students identify areas which they have mastered as well as specific areas for improvement.
- It informs parents and school administrators on how best to support both teachers and students.

Before delving into specific terms, frequently used in gathering data on the student learning process, it is crucial to distinguish between assessment and evaluation. Educators and researchers continually debate these definitions and related terms, often leading to slight variations in their interpretations.

Assessment / Evaluation Venn diagram:

Assessment
- is ongoing
- is positive
- is individualized
- is diagnostic
- is process oriented

Shared (center)
- require criteria
- use measures
- are evidence driven

Evaluation
- is applied against standards
- shows strenghts and weaknesses
- provides closure
- is summative

While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably and share some features, they differ in many important aspects. Therefore, in the context of building bilingual programs, it's essential for all stakeholders—teachers, guides, assistants, and administrators—to discuss these terms collectively. This ensures a shared understanding of each concept within their specific school context.

Pause and reflect

- How do I approach assessment in my teaching?
- Is there a common understanding of assessment and evaluation among my colleagues?
- What questions regarding assessment and evaluation do I need to discuss with my colleagues?

2. Key terms

2.1. Formative assessment (Assessment for learning)

Formative assessment is an ongoing process that occurs throughout the learning journey. Its main purposes are to:

- Identify areas for improvement for teachers and learners
- Allow teachers and students to adjust the learning process
- Help students develop skills for self-reflection to help them reach their full potential

This type of assessment involves providing students with specific, actionable feedback. It supports the learning process by encouraging students to act on this feedback, fostering self-assessment and self-reflection. In bilingual settings,

formative assessment should continually evaluate content knowledge and language skills in each language of instruction.

Learner self-assessment

Guiding learners in developing the skills to keep track of their own learning and assess their own language proficiency fosters their autonomy and supports metacognition. In some Montessori learning environments, work journals are used, starting in lower Elementary, for all subject areas. The nature and complexity of the journal is adjusted according to ability. For example, some 6 year olds may not yet have strong writing skills so they can be given a simple sheet where they can use symbols to record work done on a given day. When they are ready they will be offered a more complex template where they can track tasks, work completed and goals.

Learner self-assessment can evolve to include space for reflection. A teacher may work with a learner, on a regular basis, to review and support the setting of new goals for the following week. Children in a bilingual learning environment might keep a logbook/notebook in the target language, where they can note new vocabulary, spelling words to practise, objectives for writing assignments and have space for free writing.

Peer assessment

Learners with more advanced skills in the L2 can develop self-awareness and respectful communication skills through the opportunity to assess each other. They may, when working together on projects or big work, apply language skills by using specific checklists to assess the frequency and accurate use of specific terms, sentence types, punctuation, etc. They can choose board games and other kinds of games for learning and practising aspects of their second language that *are* challenging e.g. certain kinds of sentences, such as conditionals, or talking about the past with the correct verb forms.

Children can be guided to give constructive feedback with assessment for learning techniques. Additionally, they can learn how to use rubrics and apply them to assess their classmates' presentations or other creations where they apply language skills. This, in turn, helps children to understand how best to apply rubrics or reach objectives in their own work. Teachers can assign or support learners in organising pair rotations where learners are assigned a "buddy" for a certain period, like a week or more, who they work with to cooperatively assess each other's L2 work. This works best when supported by

the use of checklists or reminders of what they can help each other with. Carefully thinking about someone else's work helps children think critically to identify strengths and weaknesses in their own work.

Students assess teachers

Elementary aged students can gradually learn to think in an evaluative way about what language learning experiences they enjoy and which they do not. They can also reflect on how comfortable or successful they are with certain language activities and tasks. Teachers may have conversations with learners to help them reflect and, at the same time, find out what changes can be made to improve the learning process. In this way, children assess the teacher's work through reflection on how their own learning processes are unfolding.

Pause and reflect

- How do you currently incorporate formative assessment in your teaching practice?
- What specific strategies do you find most effective for identifying areas of improvement for your students?

2.2. Summative assessment (Assessment of Learning)

Summative assessment takes place at the conclusion of a learning period, such as the end of a month or upon completion of a topic. Its key characteristics include:

- Providing a final evaluation of acquired knowledge and skills
- Usually resulting in a grade, score, or percentage
- Serving as the primary basis for formal grades in school reports, particularly in bilingual programs where language skills require official grading

This type of assessment measures what students have learned and retained from the instructional period, offering a snapshot of their achievement at a specific point in time.

Elementary programs have different systems for selecting and storing learner's work. Students may develop a portfolio as a tool for evaluating progress over

a longer term period such as an academic year. Portfolios are one recommended instrument for this purpose and coherent with Montessori principles. Over this 6 year period children will need adult support to develop criteria of what work should be saved in a portfolio or album. One strategy is to introduce the concept of "drafts" and your "best work" giving learners categories to classify the many iterations of a writing project that they may produce. They can include multimedia artifacts like audio / video recordings of monologues, interviews or conversations, written or multimodal texts, mind maps and other media. They are useful for providing a holistic view of the children's language development.

Teachers assess students

It is now common for schools to use digital communication platforms, like Transparent Classroom or their own custom-made designs for planning and record-keeping. The school's language learning objectives should be reflected in these tools and there are different ways to approach this. It is important to be mindful of being able to record a child's comprehension of new L2 vocabulary. This is the first stage and will progress at different rates toward the productive mode.

Target vocabulary groups can also be identified and some schools have incorporated developmentally appropriate "can-do statements" derived from the CEFR and made operational for English in Cambridge Exam Prep materials. After children gain a functional understanding of the target language and basic literacy skills then assessment can turn to the more advanced skills of spelling, genre-awareness, and grammar.

Teachers can regularly observe students during language-rich activities and maintain anecdotal records, noting language milestones, vocabulary usage, and overall language development.

Language milestones might include:

- a child simply showing preference for hearing the L2 during certain activities (a story, song, rhyme, teacher showing and describing learning materials);
- at a slightly more advanced stage, spontaneously producing several words together in the same utterance in the L2;
- writing one or more complete sentences;
- completing a process of drafting, then producing a final, tidy version of a

page of written and illustrated work with a heading or title.

Montessori methodology naturally incorporates assessment for learning, for example the 3-part or 3-period lesson. At the naming stage the teacher introduces new vocabulary while showing the learner the corresponding object or picture. Assessment begins at the recognition stage when, after showing the child, the educator invites the learner to associate the vocabulary with a particular object by saying, "Now show me the…". Several variations are used moving the objects around the work space and different instructions are given that allow the child to create associations between the word and the material. This is the longest part of the 3-period lesson. During this phase a teacher may cycle between naming the objects and returning to the recognition stage. It is possible that the lesson will end here and not move on the final stage. If a child is not able to make correct associations they are not ready to proceed to part 3. The presentation will be given again on another day.

The third period of the lesson is initiated after the child can correctly and consistently identify the object. The teacher invites the child to name the material without using the vocabulary asking, "What is this?". The child remembers and applies the new information to match or name the objects or to make phrases of their own. The educator makes a mental note (to be recorded later) of the information the child has / has not yet mastered.

Pause and reflect

- How do you currently approach summative assessment in your classroom?
- What methods do you use to ensure that the evaluations reflect a comprehensive understanding of students' knowledge and skills?

2.3. Diagnostic assessment

Diagnostic assessment is a tool used to:

- Gather factual information about a student's current knowledge level
- Help teachers tailor their instruction to meet students' needs
- In language learning contexts, create groups of students with similar language abilities

This type of assessment allows educators to understand their students' starting points, enabling the design of more effective and targeted learning experiences.

2.4. Evaluation

Evaluation in educational contexts typically involves:

- Assessment by an external authority
- Measuring against clearly defined standards and benchmarks
- Determining a student's level of skills, knowledge, and abilities

In bilingual programs, evaluation can take two main forms: (1) Individual student evaluation: For example, through standardised tests like Cambridge Exams or IELTS, and (2) School program-level evaluation: Assessing the effectiveness of the entire bilingual program.

These evaluations provide objective measures of achievement and program success, often using criteria established outside the immediate school environment.

External language assessment

Some Montessori schools with bilingual programs offer students the option of taking language exams that are provided by highly reputed language assessment and certification awarding organisations. The social recognition of certificates that children can obtain through these exams can be an important motivator for students and for their families. Children who participate can enjoy the process of preparing for these exams and of taking the exam itself, as they are designed to allow children to show their progress. These standardised tests for second language learners can offer a benchmark by assessing listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In her Community Conversation, Svetlana Bekerman presents material she created for Cambridge exam preparation for the Elementary aged children in the Montessori school in Paris, where she works. Roberta Andenna describes the approach of her school in Italy to Cambridge and National standardised exams.

Scholars who focus on childhood multilingualism and language learning have also raised criticism of this kind of assessment. In the next section, we will look into this debate and discuss alternative views around the topic.

2.5. Feedback

Feedback is a crucial component of the learning process that:

- Provides students with information about their performance in relation to learning goals or outcomes
- Offers specific guidance on how to improve
- Helps students bridge the gap between their current level and expected performance

In order for the feedback to be effective, it needs to be timely and specific, it must focus on the task, not the individual and it must contain suggestions for actionable steps for improvement. In bilingual settings, feedback may address both content knowledge and language skills, helping students progress in both areas simultaneously.

2.6. Self-assessment (Assessment as learning)

Self-assessment is a powerful educational tool that:

- Actively involves students in the assessment process
- Helps students understand their own learning journey
- Enables students to monitor their progress over time

Using self-assessment, students have an opportunity to develop metacognitive skills,increase ownership of their learning and practice a form of reflective tools. In bilingual programs, self-assessment can be particularly valuable as it allows students to evaluate their progress in both content knowledge and language skills across multiple languages.

2.7. Reflection (Assessment as learning)

Reflection is a metacognitive process that:

- Encourages students and teachers to think critically about learning experiences
- Analyses strategies used and outcomes achieved
- Promotes self-awareness and active engagement in the learning process

Key components of reflection include examining what has been learned, considering how the learning occurred and identifying areas for improvement. In bilingual settings, reflection can help learners to evaluate their use of different languages in various contexts, to understand their progress in both content knowledge and language skills and to develop strategies for navigating between languages.

Students reflect on their own teaching to become aware of what language areas and skills they are good at, what helps them in the learning process and, at the same time, what areas they need to work more on and what could be the potential obstacles they need to conquer.

By engaging in regular reflection, learners become more self-aware and take greater ownership of their educational journey.

Teachers reflect on their own teaching to identify changes that should be made, challenges to overcome and good practices to repeat and share with peers.

Pause and reflect

- How do you actively involve your students in the self-assessment process?
- What techniques can you use to ensure they are genuinely engaged in evaluating their own learning?
- How do you incorporate reflection into your own teaching practice?
- What specific methods do you use to evaluate your effectiveness and identify areas for growth?

3. A metaphor about assessment

A real-life example from a restaurant setting can help illustrate different types of assessments. Imagine a cook preparing soup in a restaurant kitchen.

Before serving, the cook asks a waiter to taste the soup. The waiter responds, "It's not quite salty enough. Add a bit more salt, but be careful not to overdo it." This is a formative assessment – the cook can still adjust the soup based on this feedback.

Later, the waiter serves the soup to a customer. After the meal, the waiter inquires, "Was the soup seasoned to your liking?" The customer replies, "Actually, it could have used a bit more salt." This represents summative assessment – the cook can no longer alter this particular serving of soup.

Periodically, external reviewers like Michelin Guide assessors or local food safety inspectors visit the restaurant. They taste various dishes and provide an official evaluation based on specific criteria. This process exemplifies evaluation – an external assessment against established standards.

At the end of the shift, the cook reflects on the day's feedback and considers ways to improve the soup recipe for future service. This final step illustrates reflection – a critical examination of one's performance and strategies for improvement.

4. Recent developments in language assessment

Montessori assessment practices involve observation as one of their key elements. Teachers often use systems, including software for recording observations online, for organising the observations and linking them into communication with parents. Assessment in the Montessori approach is built into many activities and it is also a regular practice that is connected to children's use of work journals or diaries for keeping track of their own learning activities. Teachers regularly discuss and revise the work journal entries with students, allowing for a dialogic approach to continuous assessment, which means a way of assessing that takes place by way of a conversation. The teachers' questions help children to appropriate language - make this kind of language their own - that enhances their ability to reflect on their progress

with the L2 and to express themselves with increasing eloquence.

Current research in the area of assessing multilingual learners shows that languages interrelate in people's minds in complex ways, and are not mentally stored as separate knowledge. This means that to think about how to use one language correctly, for instance, why the words in a phrase have to be in a certain order, a multilingual person uses more than one of the languages that they know. This fact is explained by what Jim Cummins (Cummins, 2000, p. 38) calls a "common underlying proficiency" that allows people to reflect on language, or describe language, by applying a type of knowledge called metalinguistic awareness. In Montessori, there are a range of materials that children use for strengthening metalinguistic awareness, such as the materials for grammar analysis. It is important to note, however, that these are materials that are only appropriate for working on language that the child fully understands and can use fluently. For an L2, however, children may benefit from using the materials for comparing how words can form phrases in each language, and some differences between their languages.

There are important implications for assessment of the fact that languages are not stored separately from each other in a person's mind. When we assess children's language development it's necessary to consider that in working with one language, such as English as an L2, the influence of the other language is not a problem but a logical step towards developing a full command of that L2.

A clear example of one language influencing another is when we pronounce words in the L2 following sound patterns that belong to the L1 and don't correspond to the L2 words we are trying to pronounce. This can sometimes make it difficult for people to understand the learner, so it can be identified in assessment as an area to work on and improve in. It is important to note that accent is a subjective area. Often, the way an L2 speaker pronounces is not actually a barrier to communication, their pronunciation maybe be different than what we expect, but not to a point that makes their words unrecognisable.

It follows then that a criteria of pronunciation assessment is intelligibility, or comprehensibility - how well a person can, listening to the learner, recognise the words that they are saying. If a learner has frequent difficulty in pronouncing words clearly enough for other people to understand, the teacher and the learner can discuss the challenge and devise a plan to

improve pronunciation of the words that are challenging.

A conversation about sounds that are similar and phonemes that are different between the L1 and the L2 can be helpful. We can offer children games and activities like clapping along with syllables, reciting rhymes, tongue twisters and action songs that support targeted practice of problematic phonemes or frequently used but mispronounced phrases.

An additional assessment area for consideration relates to the skills that multilingual speakers have, e.g. code-switching - knowing that the person they are speaking with understands the words or phrases the speaker chooses to use during their communication. Multilingual speakers who recognise when tapping into other languages is useful or even possible are employing skills that monolinguals cannot. This helpful resource from Language Magazine delves into engaging with multiliteracies to support the development of socioculturally responsive assessment. Considering these perspectives allows teaches to more fully assess a learner's full range of skills.

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