

WALDEN GREEN MONTESSORI

K-1ST ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS CURRICULUM SNAPSHOT

“PINK, BLUE, AND GREEN SERIES”

The **Pink, Blue, and Green Series** work is an integral part of Montessori language. When Maria Montessori began working with the children in the first Casa dei Bambini (Children’s House), she gave them sandpaper letters to trace while saying the correct sound. She didn’t do any specific work in the area of reading, but almost effortlessly, the children began to read. Italian is a very phonetic language (words are spelled the way they sound), and once the children knew the sounds, they could read.

After the Montessori method was brought to the United States in the 1920s, it was clear that another approach was needed to teach reading and writing in English. While there are many phonetically spelled words in English, there are even more that use “phonemes”; that is, groups of letters that create distinct sounds when combined. For instance, “ough” can make several sounds, as in “through” or “bough”. These sounds need to be memorized; they can’t be sounded out phonetically.

The Pink, Blue, and Green Series materials were developed to meet that need. They break down the essentials of English phonics into three groups: short vowel sounds, consonant blends, and phonetic combinations. By moving through these materials in order, a child is able to easily master the art of reading and writing in English.

The Pink Series materials are where it all begins. Pink Series words consist of three letters: a beginning and ending consonant, and a vowel in the middle. All of the vowel sounds in this series are short vowels: “a” as in “cat”; “e” as in “bed”, “i” as in “pig”, “o” as in “hot”, and “u” as in “bus”. The letter “y” is not included in this grouping.

After mastering the Pink Series, the child is ready to move to Blue Series words. These words consist of consonant blends (at the beginning or end of the word, or both), and a short vowel sound. Examples would include “flag”, “mend”, and “clock”. There are about 20 different blends, if you include doubles like “ll” and “ss”. The child may work on this step for quite awhile, as there are hundreds of words that fit into this scheme (see picture for an example of Blue Series matching cards).

Once the Blue Series words have been mastered (essentially, that means the child is familiar with all the blends and can spell most Blue Series Words), they are ready for Green Series. The Green Series is where reading fluency really begins, as the child now has the keys to unlock the inconsistencies and idiosyncrasies of the English language.

The Green Series words consist of all the major phonemes, for example: “ai”, “ou”, “ie”, and “ow”. It also includes vowel combinations with a consonant in the middle, like “a_e” or “i_e” where the “_” is a consonant. These would be words like “cake” or “mice”. It includes silent letters, hard and soft letters, and many other difficult spelling and reading challenges. There are about 40-50 different sound combinations in this group.

There is a huge variety of Pink, Blue, and Green Series work. Common ones include matching cards, rhyming cards, using the movable alphabet to spell words, cards with lists of words for spelling or reading practice, and word cards with matching objects.

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“WASECA READING PROGRAM”

Over the years, the Waseca Reading Program has become a standard in many Montessori classrooms. It is cleanly structured to provide a systematic and sequential presentation of the phonetic elements used in the English language.

The program uses a four step approach in which the children spell the word depicted on the card with a moveable alphabet, a process that involves encoding or using the phonetic principle introduced to make a word. In the next step, the child lays out all of the cards and matches the label cards, thereby decoding the phonetic information. Additional practice in decoding involves writing the words and reading words that follow the same phonetic principle in a booklet.

The sequence is consistent with that of the Orton-Gillingham Method in its application for children with dyslexia.

The cards use photo images to illustrate each word and large print that highlights the phonetic element used in the word. The frame around the picture and the highlighting are color-coded for nine different boxes.

The boxes cover the following categories:

- 1 Red- basic three-letter phonetic words isolating each short vowel sound
- 2 Orange- blends grouped with common letters to make beginning blends, ending blends, then both.
- 3 Yellow- consonant digraphs like sh, ch, th, tch
- 4 Green- endings with –ng and –nk
- 5 Aqua- silent e rule as applied to each vowel
- 6 Blue- different phonograms used to make each long vowel sounds
- 7 Purple- various diphthongs such as r-controlled, oy, ow, aw
- 8 Pink- silent letters
- 9 Gold- less common rules such as soft consonants

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“EVIDENCE-BASED LITERACY INSTRUCTION” (EBLI)

EBLI consists of an explicit, systematic process of teaching literacy skills – reading, writing, and spelling – that assist learners of any age or ability level to reach their highest potential in these areas. Those trained in EBLI teach the skills, information, and strategies necessary to help students unlock the complex English alphabet code so they can use it to read and spell. When EBLI is taught with fidelity, students quickly learn how to read, write, and spell accurately and automatically. These students are then able to apply what they have learned whenever these literacy skills need to be used in school or in life.

EBLI instruction includes the research-based 5 Essential Components of Reading:

- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Fluency
- Vocabulary
- Comprehension

EBLI also includes instruction in:

- Handwriting
- Spelling
- Writing

EBLI provides practical, applicable, effective, engaging, multi-sensory instructional practices and lessons so students quickly become accurate readers, writers, and spellers. Precious few prefabricated materials - besides books, whiteboards, and markers - are utilized with EBLI instruction.

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“WORDS THEIR WAY”

“Words Their Way” is a developmental spelling, phonics, and vocabulary program. It was developed by Invernizzi, Johnston, Bear, and Templeton. Words Their Way is intended to be a part of a balanced literacy plan that includes fluency, comprehension and writing. Word study is implemented as a small component of the literacy plan but it is also interwoven in actual reading and writing texts.

Words Their Way is an open-ended individual process. An assessment is given to determine where to begin instruction. Based on assessment results students are given words to study in order to discover the common attributes. In this manner students are actively constructing their own knowledge of spelling patterns. Students learn features by completing activities such as word sorting, word hunts, games and drawing and labeling. Students work individually, with partners, and in small groups to encourage cooperative learning and individual responsibility.

Background

Randolph Elementary School is a K-5 neighborhood school in Arlington, Va. with 612 students. The breakdown of the school population is as follows: 79% of the students receive free or reduce lunch, 69% are Hispanic, 14% are African American, 11% are Caucasian, 6% are Asian and 74 % of the student body does not speak English as their primary language. The population that was targeted for action research are second grade students. Of these students, 53% are females and 47% are males, 67% are Hispanic, 19% are African American, 7% are Caucasian and 7% are Asian. Nine special education students are included, which is 21% of the targeted population.

Among the four teachers who implemented this project there is a range from 2 years to 9 years of teaching experience. All teachers are certified kindergarten through six grade and have mostly taught the primary grades. One teacher just obtained a master’s degree in special education and another has a mater’s degree in reading.

Action Research

The first step for implementing Words Their Way is to establish a balanced weekly work cycle. This consists of fluency, comprehension, writing and word study. The second step in implementing Words Their Way is a Developmental Spelling Analysis. This is an assessment of students’ knowledge of word features. Based on these results, students were grouped according to ability. Instruction began at the students’ ability level, which falls into one of these five spelling stages. Kathy Ganske describes the stages in her Developmental Spelling Analysis in the following concise manner (Ganske, 1993, p. 3-6).

- 1) Preliterate Stage: This first stage encompasses the writing attempts of children who are not yet reading.
- 2) Letter Name Stage: This second stage, which is based on children’s knowledge of the alphabet and beginning attempts to read, is characterized by attempt to match alphabetic letter names to salient phonemes, or speech sounds, within the words being spelled.
- 3) Within-Word Pattern: This third stage is characterized by greater experience with print and leads to an increased awareness of how words work, and in turn to more conventional spelling.
- 4) Syllable Juncture: The focus at this stage is on preserving the pattern principles across syllable boundaries.
- 5) Derivational Constancy: This stage is seldom reached by young spellers. The words are of relatively low frequency and primarily of Greek and Latin origin.

Once students have been placed in their appropriate stage, instruction begins for the students at what is termed “using but confusing” which are the spelling features they are beginning to use but confuse. As would be expected, these ability groups coincided with guided reading groups.

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“GUIDED READING + FOUNTS & PINNELL”

Guided reading is one component of the literacy instruction during which the teacher provides support for small, flexible groups of beginning readers. The teacher helps students learn to use reading strategies, such as context clues, letter and sound knowledge, and syntax or word structure, as they read a text or book that is unfamiliar to them. The goal of guided reading is for students to use these strategies independently on their way to becoming fluent, skilled readers.

The steps for a guided reading lesson are:

- 1) Before reading: Set the purpose for reading, introduce vocabulary, make predictions, talk about the strategies good readers use.
- 2) During reading: Guide students as they read, provide wait time, give prompts or clues as needed by individual students, such as "Try that again. Does that make sense? Look at how the word begins."
- 3) After reading: Strengthen comprehension skills and provide praise for strategies used by students during the reading.

The steps of a guided reading lesson will vary according to the needs of the students in the flexible group. Flexible groupings are based on student abilities and needs.

A wide variety of books at different ability levels, sometimes called "leveled texts," are necessary so that the teacher can fit the book to the group. Teachers choose books that are easy enough for independent reading, meet the instructional goals for the group, and are interesting and motivating to students. As students become more skilled at using a range of reading strategies, the ability level of the texts used in guided reading lessons can be increased. Previously read texts are always available so that students can reread them independently, with a partner, or at home as they become fluent, confident, and self-motivated readers.

The *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems (BAS)* are accurate and reliable tools to identify the instructional and independent reading levels of all students and document student progress through one-on-one formative and summative assessments. They provide teachers with precise tools and texts to observe and quantify specific reading behaviors, and then interpret and use that data to plan meaningful instruction.

Each assessment enables teachers to:

- Determine students' instructional and independent reading levels
- Recommend a placement level for instruction
- Form initial groups for reading instruction
- Plan for efficient and effective instruction
- Identify students who need intervention and extra help
- Monitor and report student progress across a school year and grade levels
- Assess the outcomes of teaching
- Inform parent conferences

The *Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment Systems (BAS)* assessments are conducted one-on-one. In Part 1 of the assessment, the student reads aloud and talks about the system's original, precisely leveled fiction and nonfiction books, while the teacher observes and notes the reader's behaviors on carefully constructed forms. In Part 2, the teacher conducts a revealing Comprehension Conversation.

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“INTERACTIVE READ-ALOUDS”

Teacher read-alouds demonstrate the power of stories. By showing students the ways that involvement with text engages us, we give them energy for learning how reading works. By showing them how to search for meaning, we introduce strategies of understanding we can reinforce in shared, guided, and independent reading.

An “interactive read aloud” is a systematic method of reading a book aloud. The teacher is doing the word decoding work and the students are asked to do the thinking work. Through careful planning, teachers can scaffold the student’s understanding of the book being read. The teacher also models strategies for comprehension as well as teaches vocabulary.

Research has demonstrated that the most effective read-alouds are those where children are actively involved in asking and answering questions and making predictions, rather than passively listening.

Talking, writing, and/or drawing in response to reading gives kids an opportunity to make their thinking visible. Passion is contagious... great instruction starts with passion.

When teachers read aloud to students, meanings can be negotiated in discussion before, during, and after the story reading. Reading aloud to students includes think-aloud or interactive elements and focus intentionally on the meaning within the text, about the text, and beyond the text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006). Read aloud, as part of the gradual release of responsibility, feeds naturally into shared, guided, and independent reading as teachers demonstrate for students the ways the reading process works (Burkins & Croft, 2010).

Benefits of “interactive read-alouds” include the following:

- building vocabulary
- developing understandings of story structures
- supporting developing connections between print elements
- encouraging high levels of understanding
- teaching the reading process in a meaningful context
- modeling fluency
- motivating students to read

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“MONTESSORI GRAMMAR SYMBOLS + SENTENCE ANALYSIS MATERIAL”

Some of us remember grammar studies from grade school with all the joy of a dentist visit. The thought of teaching it is daunting and unpleasant. Fortunately, just as with so many sticky areas of study, Montessori takes the pain out of learning grammar. The hands-on materials are visual and sensible; the child quickly learns the parts of speech and how they function, and then moves on to the parts of a sentence and how they function.

Maria Montessori, knowing that children respond well to shapes and colors, decided to use a system of colored shapes to represent the different parts of speech. Each shape and color has a meaning:

1. The **Noun** is represented by a black triangle. The triangle stands for the pyramid, one of the first human structures, and black is for carbon, believed to be the first mineral discovered by humans.

2. The **Adjective** (small dark blue triangle), **Article** (smaller light blue triangle), and **Pronoun** (large purple triangle) are part of The Noun Family and so use the triangular shape with different colors.

3. The **Verb** is a circle, to represent the shape of the sun which gives life. The red color also symbolizes life (blood). The verb gives life to the sentence. The **Adverb** is a smaller circle and is often pictured orbiting the verb like a planet; it depends on the verb for existence.

4. The **Conjunction** is a small pink bar which represents a link in a chain; the **Preposition** is a green crescent to symbolize a bridge. There's no known significance in the color of either.

5. The **Interjection** is a gold triangle with a circle on top; it combines the symbols of the noun and the verb together. Interjections function as both noun and verb in a sentence; it may have been the first word spoken by humans (ow!). It is gold because they are the “king of all words”.

The study of grammar is to language what the study of anatomy is to science. By studying grammar, we become better writers and readers. Generally, the grammar materials are started in first grade. The child at this age is developing an interest in words, their meanings and their functions.

1st-3rd grade students also learn to analyze simple sentences with subjects, predicates, direct objects and indirect objects using the Montessori Sentence Analysis materials.

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“SPIRAL LANGUAGE”

The “Spiral Language” curriculum is aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and focuses on reviewing previously taught standards/concepts on a weekly basis. By doing so, students are given the opportunity to continuously practice what they have already learned and are more likely to master the skills as they continue to practice. While a majority of each week’s level is a review, new skills are also practiced.

The scope and sequence of the content is developed so that concepts and skills are revisited at each grade level with increasing depth. As more facts and principles on each topic are encountered, the understanding grows in breadth and depth, creating a metaphorical spiral. Progression is not only vertical (e.g., increasing complexity), but also horizontal (e.g., broader range of applications). Learning is extended, reinforced and broadened each time a concept is revisited.

Advantages of the Spiral Progression Approach:

- Mastery of concepts - One keeps moving upward but keeps returning to the fundamentals
- Improved retention- Reinforces what is already learned ; concepts are revisited
- One learns best through the repeated experience of a concept
- Rich breadth and depth of knowledge achieved
- Continuum – vertical and horizontal articulation

