

Teaching French with Montessori part 2

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repeating the same French words *veille-toi* (wake up) and *il dort* (he is asleep).

Allow spontaneity

Children progress at different rates. Nonetheless, the speed at which they learn the words is irrelevant, for what really matters is that they eventually show that learning has taken place. There is very little that can possibly equal the satisfaction I feel when a child comes to me totally spontaneously and says *bonjour*. I have heard nursery teachers say that some children decide to say *bonjour* instead of "good morning" at register time. Some say *merci*, some burst into French songs during the day, and some put French words in their conversations with their toys. This is the first step towards independent learning, which is what good teaching is about.

Children need repetition, but repetition must not be tedious

From feeling games to guessing games and card games, the same word can be introduced and repeated in various ways. The important factor in a lesson is that the children get to hear and repeat the vocabulary as often as possible.

Children learn by repeating movements. Toddlers will go up the stairs, wash their hands or put their socks on as many times as they feel they need to repeat the movement. Bear that in mind with French words. Songs offer much repetition and the children often ask for the songs to be sung again. I remember a little boy aged four who volunteered to say our 'family' rhyme to his friends in the class. The family rhyme consists in saying *bonjour* to all five fingers who are in turn the five members of a family.

We all sat and listened "Bonjour papa, Bonjour mama" then I thanked him but as I was going to ask him to sit down, he said "I want to do the other family" waving his other hand!

The three period lesson

This is already a familiar way for you to make sure knowledge has taken place. It is easy to apply the three-period lesson to the language class. Use cards for instance. Imagine a lesson on colours. Show a yellow card and a green card (you can even use the

colour tablets). With the cards or the tablets clearly shown to the children, say *jaune* (yellow) and *vert* (green). Later on, ask the questions: "which one is *jaune*?", "which one is *vert*?" The third stage is of course: "what colour is this?" Do the three period lesson in the initial lesson, during the follow-up lessons and subsequent lessons. Once the children have learned the words, keep going over them in games, for example, because a language would naturally use the same words over and over again in various circumstances.

The silent period

Some children take to French like a duck to water. They feel confident from the start, imitate sounds accurately first time around and have no hesitation in volunteering to sing songs in front of the other children.

Even a child who is willing to take part from the start, saying words well and showing enthusiasm may need a few days to absorb what he has learnt. I have often found that, just like babies and toddlers learning their mother tongue, there is a delayed reaction between my input and their assimilation of the words. So, if today you were to teach *il fait froid* (the weather is cold) you will find that not all the children may remember the phrase the following week. You may need to prompt them, give them clues such as the first syllable or the movement associated with the phrase. It may in fact take another week or so before they give the phrase back.

There are some children however who do not open up from the start.

Hannah and Katie (aged 6) playing a whispering game/auditory memory game.

Some are very shy indeed. They may not want to do the movements to our songs; they may just wish to sit and listen; they may respond to some games but not others. In every one of my classes there is a mixed audience but a silent child is not necessarily a child who is uninterested. It is not a child who is not listening, nor it is a child who is lazy. Yet, there have been many occasions when I have had to explain to their fee paying parents that it is alright if their child does not take part and the best thing to do is to give him time. I have frequently found that parents are putting a lot of pressure on their children. One dad removed his three year old son from one of my nursery classes after a term because he was not speaking French in sentences!

There are, however, some understanding parents: I remember a boy aged four who spent a whole term sitting away from his mother, while she sat on our mat taking part in the games and the songs with the other children and their parents. She understood his need to be silent and to detach himself physically from our group. She kept coming back week after week saying that even though he was quiet in class, he used to say all the words correctly with her at home and sing in the car to the lessons and back! It wasn't that he hadn't heard, or that he couldn't follow what was going on. He was perfectly able to do this at a distance. He simply was not ready to join in. One day, he moved to the front with everyone else and for the first time, he sang along and took part in the games as if nothing had happened.

Parents who show impatience need to be reminded that they did not stop talking to their children when they were babies simply because they did not respond immediately. It took a few months for their children to say their first word. Why should it be any different with learning French? It is just the same as learning to speak for the first time. 🐣

**In Part 3 in the Autumn issue:
The Montessori Games
adapted to the
Language Class.**

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