

Language Arts Curriculum:

Language can be one of the great human treasures, one of the central roads to communication and connection. It can also be a means to deceive, manipulate and disconnect. How we lead the child to master the language – both spoken and written – can make all the difference to how she can and does use it.

Deep connection to the sound, rhythm, and image of the language is the ground and heart of all great writing and poetry, and the skill of the outstanding orator, poet, and politician. Often teachers and parents think that we must teach the children the skills first and later they can focus on the art of the language – as though the art is an extra tagged onto the important skills. In the Enki approach, we believe that the skills are a vital part of the art, but are worse than useless if not taught as inseparable from and integral to the whole. It is the art of the language that brings unknown worlds to life, inviting us into a personal experience of the unknown, allowing us to live another's world, and not merely to study a distant idea. As soon as we begin to treat this as a commodity we have brought the children the experience that the sacred and the mundane can be separated.¹ Since this is untrue, in doing so we have also broken faith with our primary role: to act as a conduit for the vastness of the phenomenal world. We have chipped away at our own trustworthiness and therefore our natural authority.²

Language in itself is an expression of our interest in relationship, our desire to communicate. Since this interest is central to the child in the elementary years, the language arts are central to our elementary school curriculum. For all these reasons, **whether the child is just beginning to read, doesn't have a clue and shows no interest, or is fluently reading chapter books, the core curriculum is of equal value.** The Humanities aspects – the developmental mirror – and the poetry of the language are equally relevant for all. As well, those who are already reading will still receive support for their spelling by going back through the rules of the language in their poetic and imaginative expression. If a child is reading fluently and/or writing well, we spend less time on the mechanics aspects and move more quickly into longer and fuller work with reading and writing, but the content of the subject matter remains the same, and the base skills we introduce – in their living expression – remain the same.

1 See HTG/Overview/Philosophy and Goals/Ecosystem/web/sacred and mundane

2 See HTG/Grade One/Establishing Healthy Boundaries/setting boundaries/the role of the adult

The first, and most profound, language teaching the children will ever receive comes from our own patterns of speech and silence. The underlying principles of this apply throughout life, and to all we do.³ This is also the reason that high quality poetry and prose are central to our curriculum, day in and day out.

From there, a central part of experiencing the art of the language comes through being able to participate fully and to engage with or “play” in it. For this skills are needed, and so they are taught. During the Morning Lesson the emphasis is on the context/art of the language and skills emerge within that. Later in the day, reading and writing skills are practiced in their own context.⁴ However, when skills are practiced, we seek to have that practice echo back to the more full and connected work with the essential energy of the material.⁵ Even in the strict practice work, we seek to work with skills as parts of a living whole, and not as isolated pieces. For example, such things as phonic rules are brought to the children primarily through stories that capture the energy of the rule. When the vowel friends venture out, they find they cannot maintain their own identity without a friend. The friend leads the way and the children end up with the paired vowel rule: “When two friends go walking the first does the talking.” Like all other aspects of the curriculum, this rule is not a random fact or verse to commit to memory for some distant technical reason, but a description of some aspect of life, of the world of relationships. In this way, practice work is a re-connector and not a dis-connector.

3 See HTG/Overview/Integrating Body, Speech, and Mind/speech/rhythm, tone, and volume

4 See HTG/Grade One/Establishing Healthy Boundaries/fostering individuality/choice/practice; and, HTG/Grade One/Rhythms/Daily and Weekly rhythms/rest-practice time

5 See HTG/Overview/Philosophy and Goals/Heart of the Matter/essential energy; and, HTG/Overview/Essential Energy

Language Arts Skills

Listening speaking, reading and writing: four parts of one whole. Reading and writing, in particular, are seen as two sides of one coin. If we did not write there would be nothing to read, and if we did not read, why would we write? Therefore, throughout our curriculum, these are approached together. In addition, reading is one way to “listen,” and writing, to “speak.” With this understanding of the inseparability of the language arts, we can look at the methods and content for teaching.

Reading:

During the first two grades it is important to introduce the children to many techniques and use many doorways to develop reading skills. Reading demands a variety of sub-skills; any one or more of which may open the door for any given child. However, **each child will read only when he is ready, and this may not happen for years - even in a perfectly healthy, bright child.**

There are four tools necessary for anyone to read:

- 1) Phonics;
- 2) sight words;
- 3) context recognition; and,
- 4) feel for the flow/rhythm of the language.

All of these are necessary for full reading. We cannot force a child to read. We can force decoding (sounding out) as a technique, but one of the most common places for children to get stuck in reading is in “over-decoding.” But to really read with a sense of and appreciation for the language, and to do so with fluid comprehension, is a magical process that takes place in its own time.

Therefore, we view our job as one of introducing the child to many doorways and inspiring a love of language and story. **Until third grade we will not hold the child accountable for any reading accomplishment, nor do we work with direct tutorials to speed things up.** We will, however, watch work in all areas for signs of learning problems. If detected we look to remediate them immediately, largely through movement work which is the base of academic success.⁶

⁶ See HTG/Overview/Integrating Body, Speech, and Mind/body/sensory integration, and the higher senses; and, HTG/Grade One/Integrating Body, Speech, and Mind/body/neurological integration