

FINAL REFLECTION PAPER ON OBSERVATIONS AND TEACHING PRACTICUM

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My practicum experience at Breakthrough Montessori Public Charter School has deepened my understanding of teaching as an intentional, reflective, and relational practice. Across both observation and teaching experiences, I developed a stronger awareness of how learner achievement, classroom culture, instructional responsiveness, and professional identity are closely connected. Working in a multilingual Montessori setting required me to think beyond lesson delivery and to consider how language, belonging, structure, and student agency shape the learning process. For example, engaging with teaching and learning across the school allowed me to recognize how leadership decisions, teacher support, and shared instructional practice directly influence the quality of students' learning experiences. Throughout the practicum, I came to see that effective teaching is not only about presenting content clearly, but also about creating the conditions in which students can participate meaningfully, communicate confidently, and grow within a respectful community of learners.

Learner Achievement

Students achieved the intended learning outcomes to a meaningful extent, especially when instruction was supported by clear modeling, repetition, visual cues, movement, and opportunities for guided participation. In the lessons and observations, I reflected on during the practicum, student success was often visible through participation, re-engagement, oral production, and increased independence rather than through isolated testing alone. For example, during one language lesson, I observed students respond more confidently after the teacher modeled the language, paired with movement and visual support, and then invited them to answer independently. Students who were initially hesitant became more willing to participate and complete the task with less adult support. This was particularly evident in lessons where students were given structured support and then gradually invited to respond more independently. Such experiences reflect the importance of scaffolded instruction, in which support is carefully matched to learners' developmental and linguistic needs so that they can perform beyond what they could do alone (Gibbons, 2015; Vygotsky, 1978).

My teaching and observation experiences also showed that learner achievement includes more than mastery of academic content. In this setting, learners demonstrated growth when they were able to use language to ask for help, participate in discussion, resolve peer conflict, and return to a task after frustration. These moments were especially important in a multilingual early childhood environment, where language development is closely tied to confidence, belonging, and access to instruction. Wong Fillmore and Snow (2000) argue that classroom language plays a central role in students' ability to engage with learning, and this was confirmed repeatedly during my practicum. Students

were more successful when adults modeled language clearly, provided opportunities for repetition, and made communication an active part of the lesson rather than an assumed skill.

Educational theory guided how I interpreted these experiences and informed my instructional decisions. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of guided learning was especially relevant because students often achieved more when adults offered strategic support and then gradually stepped back. Likewise, Montessori's emphasis on independence did not conflict with scaffolding; rather, it showed me that carefully designed support can help learners move toward autonomy in a purposeful way (Montessori, 1967). As a result, I came to view learner achievement not simply as the completion of a task, but as the learner's growing ability to participate, communicate, and act with greater independence and confidence.

Classroom Culture

My practicum made it clear that just like learner achievement, classroom culture is shaped by the daily interactions, routines, and expectations that define how students experience the learning environment. The classroom management strategies I observed were most effective when they balanced calm structure with flexibility and dignity. Teachers often relied on modeling, redirection, visual support, movement, consistent routines, and respectful language rather than public correction or punitive responses. This created a learning culture in which students were guided toward self-regulation and participation within a clear but supportive framework. Such an approach strongly reflects Montessori's view that discipline develops through freedom within limits, purposeful activity, and respect for the child (Montessori, 1967).

I also observed that a positive classroom culture depends on explicitly teaching the language of interaction. In several observations, teachers supported students not only academically but socially by modeling how to express feelings, repair conflict, and communicate respectfully with peers. These experiences reinforced for me that classroom culture is not built only through rules, but through the language practices that shape community life. In culturally and linguistically diverse settings, these supports are especially important because students may come with different expectations around communication, help-seeking, collaboration, and conflict resolution. Culturally responsive teaching reminds educators that students' behaviors and participation styles must be understood within broader social and cultural contexts rather than judged through a single norm (Gay, 2018).

The practicum also helped me think more carefully about the relationship between structure and flexibility. Strong classroom culture depended on predictable routines, but also on the teacher's ability to adapt when students needed more support, more movement, or a different entry point into the lesson. This balance was particularly important in classrooms serving multilingual learners and neurodivergent children, where access often depended on thoughtful adjustments in pacing, language, and instructional support. Echevarría et al. (2017) emphasize that comprehensible instruction requires teachers to make ongoing adjustments that support participation, and I observed this principle consistently throughout the practicum. Moving forward, I see opportunities to strengthen classroom culture by continuing to refine transitions, engagement strategies, and constructive ways of promoting accountability while preserving student dignity and inclusion.

Impact on Teaching Practice

The observations I conducted during the practicum significantly informed and refined my own teaching approach. One of the most important shifts in my thinking was recognizing that language support must be integrated across all aspects of teaching rather than added only during designated language instruction. Before this practicum, I already valued oral rehearsal, sentence frames, and vocabulary support, but the observation process showed me more clearly how essential these supports are for classroom participation, self-advocacy, peer interaction, and academic confidence. Gibbons (2015) explains that scaffolding is most powerful when it allows learners to participate meaningfully in the life of the classroom, and this idea became increasingly central to my own teaching philosophy. As I taught and observed during the practicum, I saw that students were more successful when I embedded sentence starters, repetition, and teacher modeling into everyday instruction, which showed me that language support is not an add-on but a core condition for access and participation.

Another major area of growth involved my understanding of improvisation in teaching. Through observation and discussion, I came to understand that improvisation is not a lack of preparation, but a thoughtful and responsive adjustment to student needs. In the Montessori setting, improvisation often meant modifying pacing, simplifying language, adding movement, or changing the level of support while still maintaining the purpose of the lesson. This understanding has influenced my teaching by encouraging me to prepare carefully while remaining attentive to what students reveal in the moment. In this sense, responsiveness has become a key part of my instructional practice rather than something secondary to planning.

My practicum also deepened my appreciation for communicative and student-centered TESOL approaches. I observed that students were more engaged when language was used for real purposes, when lessons invited oral participation, and when grammar or vocabulary were taught through active, meaningful interaction rather than abstraction. This reinforced my understanding of communicative language teaching as an approach that values language as social action and meaning-making rather than isolated study. It also aligned with my growing belief that Montessori and TESOL can work together effectively when instruction remains purposeful, interactive, and responsive. The practicum therefore helped me move toward a teaching approach that is more intentional, inclusive, and grounded in both developmental understanding and language pedagogy.

Professional Growth

This practicum played a significant role in shaping my professional identity as an educator. It helped me see myself more clearly as someone committed to building bridges between Montessori philosophy and TESOL-informed practice. Rather than viewing these as separate frameworks, I now understand them as mutually enriching when approached thoughtfully. Montessori offers a strong vision of independence, observation, and respect for the child, while TESOL contributes powerful tools for scaffolding, language visibility, and inclusive participation. Bringing these together has become a central part of how I now understand my role as an educator.

The practicum also contributed to my growth in self-awareness. It highlighted strengths in my practice, especially my attention to language development, my ability to observe closely, and my willingness to connect theory to real classroom experience. At the same time, it revealed important areas for continued growth, such as strengthening how I document student language progress, sharpening how I assess learning through authentic classroom evidence, and continuing to refine strategies that support different learners while preserving coherence and flow. This process reminded me that professional growth depends not only on knowledge, but also on reflection, humility, and a willingness to keep improving. Most importantly, the practicum prepared me for future teaching challenges by reinforcing that effective teaching requires both technical skill and human responsiveness. It confirmed for me that multilingual learners thrive when language development is embedded into meaningful activity, when expectations are clear but supportive, and when the classroom community values both academic learning and personal dignity. It also affirmed my broader educational vision of creating learning environments that are rigorous, inclusive, and deeply respectful of students' identities and developmental needs. As I move forward, I do so with a stronger sense of purpose, a more refined teaching philosophy, and a deeper understanding of the kind of educator I hope to become.

References

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