LANGUAGE

When the child enters the Montessori school at the age of three, the child is near to the age when he learned the sounds. For this we incorporate sound games, sandpaper letters, and the moveable alphabet. We help the child to analyze the sounds in his own language, and then recognize and use these sounds with graphic symbols. This is direct preparation for writing and indirect preparation for reading. The child’s spoken language is an indirect preparation for what comes later for writing and reading. Howard Gardner wrote a book entitled Frames of Mind, and he says, “It has been established, convincingly, that written language piggybacks upon oral language in the sense that it is not possible to continue reading normally if one’s oral, auditory language areas in the brain have been destroyed.” Thus, it follows reason that a poor oral language is a grave stumbling block when it comes to writing and reading when these skills are going to be conquered.

Language in the Montessori Environment is broken into three areas: Spoken, Written and Read. (See attached document Language Overview in the Montessori Environment.)

SPOKEN
We want to give the child confidence to speak and to express his thoughts.
We want to give the children ideas to express and the knowledge of how to express these ideas.
We also want to give the children an extended vocabulary.
We want to give the child logical expressions of thoughts and ideas.

WRITTEN
Dr. Montessori had no intention at first to teach young children to write. Originally she developed the writing material for older children. However, she was aware of the young children’s love for touching and tracing. It came to be that the three year olds were most eager. Dr. Montessori was surprised when she saw the explosion into writing. As always, the children had shown her what they needed. Writing is easier than reading. When writing, one expresses one’s own thoughts; therefore, it naturally comes first. When someone is writing that person analyzes the sounds of his own words. When we are reading we are analyzing someone else’s thoughts and words which is naturally harder to do.

READ
Reading is a mental act and demands a higher maturity in the child. We must make sure that a child knows all of his letters before he begins to read. This means the child should master the technique of forming the sounds into words. The child must also have a good understanding of the words. Spoken language and written language are both important aspects of reading. The child will let us know when he is ready. Do not push. One may ask how to know when a child is ready. The child will most likely come to us and ask what he has written.

Our Goal
The child who recognizes a word which is put together with other words and has a total comprehension of the message being read; this is a child who truly reads—we call this ‘Total Reading.’
THE PATH TO HANDWRITING USING MONTESSORI MATERIALS

How do children come to handwriting?
Writing means that I have an idea, my idea, which I want to share and which can be put into x number of words; every word is analyzed to find the sound, and I look for the corresponding letter. Finally I put the symbols in a special order; I write.

How do we come to help the children to write on their own?
1. All indirect preparations are taken into account: ALL Practical Life exercises, all the knobs in sensorial, the many ways the children use their hands in the environment, for example.
2. Metal Insets
3. Sandpaper Letters
4. Movable Alphabet
5. The form and size of the letter, which is important, so we begin to focus on that, through the exercises of Tracing, Spacing and Grouping.
6. Once the child has begun the process of forming letters and putting them together through Tracing, Spacing and Grouping, then the child begins the process of copying labels in the environment. This is also known as the ‘explosion into writing.’
   a. Copying poems, short stories, etc.
   b. Later writing and illustrating their own short stories
EXAMPLE ONE:
Silver Polishing
Silver Polishing is part of the Care of Environment exercises in Practical Life. The exercises in Practical Life take care in helping the children build concentration, coordination, independence and logical sequencing. The exercise itself does certainly help the children learn 'how to polish.'

DIRECT PURPOSE:
• Coordination
• Concentration
• Independence
• Understanding of the sequence of activity

INDIRECT PURPOSE:
• care of environment
• writing

EXAMPLE TWO:
Table Scrubbing
The movement of the scrubbing is highly beneficial for the development of writing—because of this exercise, the child by 3 ½ will be able to hold a pen in the correct position. The child should do this exercise as much as possible in the classroom.

DIRECT PURPOSE:
• Coordination
• Concentration
• Independence
• Logical Sequence of Action

INDIRECT PURPOSE:
• care of environment
• preparation for writing—the most useful preparation for writing—development of the arm and hand

EXAMPLE THREE:
Geometric Cabinet
A: A wooden cabinet with 6 drawers plus a presentation tray containing 35 plane figures: the 'insets' and their corresponding 'frame.’ The bottom of the drawers and the tray are painted in the same color blue as the insets. Each plane figure is fitted with a knob. The tracing of both the frame and the inset of the shapes trains the child’s muscular memory as well as the hand movement is the indirect preparation for writing.

• presentation tray: six wooden tablets
• 6 drawers containing various figures:
  i) Curvilinear triangle, ellipse, oval and quatrefoil
  ii) Quadrilaterals: rhombus, right-angled trapezoid, isosceles trapezoid, parallelogram and one equilateral triangle
  iii) Six circles decreasing in diameter from 10cm to 5cm
  iv) Rectangles: 1 square; 5 rectangles: the bases vary from 10cm to 5cm; the height remains constant
  v) Regular polygons: pentagon, hexagon, heptagon, octagon, nonagon, decagon
  vi) Six triangles:
    (1) acute-angled isosceles
    (2) right-angled isosceles
    (3) obtuse-angled isosceles
    (4) acute-angled scalene
    (5) right-angled scalene
    (6) obtuse-angled scalene

B: Three sets of cards, matching each figure in the Geometric Cabinet, each set arranged at random.
  • Set One: The figures are completely filled in.
  • Set Two: The figures are outlined with a thick line.
• Set Three: The figures are outline with a thin line.

DIRECT AIM:
• The discrimination of the geometric figures to provide the child with a key to orientate him/herself within the world of shapes.
• An enhancement of visual memory

INDIRECT AIM:
• Preparation for mathematics (Geometry)
• Preparation of the hand for writing

EXAMPLE FOUR:
The Red Rods
Ten red wooden rods differing in one dimension—length ranging from 10cm to 100cm. The unit of difference between each rod is 10cm. The Red Rods help the child learn to discriminate length.

DIRECT AIM:
• Visual discrimination of difference in one dimension: length
• Muscular memory of length

INDIRECT AIM:
• Preparation for writing—tracing the rods from left to right
• Indirect preparation for mathematics

EXAMPLE FIVE:
The Metal Insets
Two stands with a sloping back and a narrow ledge at the bottom. On each stand rests five metal frames, into which fits a metal inset. The square metal frames are dark pink in color and the insets are blue. In the center of each inset is a small knob by which to hold it.

The ten insets are:

i. square
ii. triangle
iii. circle
iv. ellipse
v. rectangle
vi. oval
vii. trapezoid
viii. pentagon
ix. curvilinear triangle
x. quatrefoil

DIRECT AIM:
• The metal insets bring all of the other preparations for writing together. It is a preparation for the fingers and the wrist, learning to move the hand from left to right, and staying within a defined area.

• This is a synthesis of the indirect preparations that the child has done to refine movements of the hand. Therefore it should be done last. This means that the child should have some coordinated skill.
• The exercises go from simple to difficult. This helps to keep the work alive and more engaging. However, some children may start at different levels.
EXAMPLE SIX:
Sandpaper Letters
The letters of the alphabet (lower case cursive) cut out of sandpaper are each mounted on a separate thick card or wood. The consonants are mounted on pink cards and the vowels on blue or vice versa. The letters are presented three at a time and are always referred to by their respective sound, not the name. They are traced and spoken by the adult first and then the child. The Sandpaper Letters are connecting the sound to its graphic representation.

DIRECT AIM:
- To make the child aware of the sounds in the words and to learn the sounds both by muscular and visual memory.
- Preparation for writing.

INDIRECT AIM:
- Preparation for reading.

EXAMPLE SEVEN:
The Movable Alphabet
The Movable Alphabet is a large box containing all of the letters of the English alphabet. Vowels are blue, consonants are red or pink. This color coding corresponds to the sandpaper letters, with which the child has had much experience. The Movable Alphabet encourages the child to write, using the sounds that she knows. We are very clear in using the term write, rather than spell, because writing is what the focus is on, not spelling. Words that are written with the Movable Alphabet are never corrected.

Since the words have come from the child, she is more likely to attempt to read them back usually before she begins any other form of phonetic reading work. The Moveable Alphabet teaches the child that she can express herself through written language. Its beauty is that the cumbersome mechanics of writing and the parameters of proper spelling are not present, so that the child is free to truly express her ideas without criticism or obstacle.

DIRECT AIM:
- Direct Preparation for Writing
- Help the child in exploration and analysis of his own language
- Reproduce words with graphic symbols

INDIRECT AIM:
- Indirect preparation for reading

EXAMPLE EIGHT:
Tracing, Spacing, Grouping (Chalkboards)
Tracing—shows the child how to 'copy' the writing of a single letter; no lines are used in this step.
Spacing—shows where the letters sit on lined paper.
Grouping—shows the child the groups of the letters that start the same way; or the groups that the letter touches below the line, like the g, the y, etc. There are many ways to 'group' the letters and the children learn to explore.

DIRECT AIM:
- Direct Preparation for Writing