

*"These two powers of the mind (imagination and abstraction) which go beyond the simple perception of things actually present play a mutual part in the construction of the mind's content. Both are necessary for the building up of language. A precise alphabet, on the one hand, and grammatical rules on the other, permits an indefinite accumulation of the wealth of words. For words, if they are to be utilized and enrich the language, must be capable of taking their place in the groundwork of sounds and of grammatical order. And what happens in the construction of a language happens also in the construction of the mind."*

*~Maria Montessori*

## ***Language and Literacy***

The process of learning how to read should be as painless and simple as learning how to speak. Montessori begins by placing the youngest students in classes where the older students are already reading. All children want is to "do what the big kids do" and as the intriguing work that absorbs the older students involves reading, there is a natural lure for the young child.

Beginning at age two or three, Montessori children are introduced to a few letters at a time until they have mastered the entire alphabet. They trace each letter as it would be written, using two fingers of their dominant hand. As they trace the letter's shape, they receive three distinct impressions: they see the shape of the letter, they feel its shape and how it is written, and they hear the teacher pronounce its sound.

Children move from the Sandpaper Letters to tracing them in fine sand. The teacher and child will begin to identify words that begin with the kuh sound: cat, candle, can, and cap. Seeing the tablets for the letters c, a, and t laid out before her, a child will pronounce each in turn — kuh, aah, tuh: cat!

Once children have mastered the sounds, they are then able to build words using the Moveable alphabet. Students are learning to decode (read) as they are encoding

words; first words with a consonant-short vowel-consonant pattern, then consonant blends, and finally complicated phonograms.

Formal instruction utilizes the Waseca Reading Program and Language Works. The reading program was designed to provide a systematic and sequential presentation of the phonetic elements used in the English language. It follows an approach used widely in Montessori classroom 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 of introduction is consistent with that of the Orton-Gillingham Method in its application for children with dyslexia

Children in Montessori classrooms often read early because of their exposure to an environment rich in language. Montessori classrooms offer phonetic and whole-word strategies in reading instruction.

A wide variety of literature is provided, and students participate in thoughtful discussions about books and their authors. They also learn how to use reference materials to gather information for presentations, discussions, and reports.

Reading is a component in all areas of the curriculum. Montessori believed that children write before they read. Writing in the classroom encourages self-expression. Children write early and early writing often begins by tracing. Children write in all areas of the curriculum and are encouraged to do so. Story writing is a student favorite! Students typically maintain journals for writing from prompts.

To help children develop the eye-hand coordination needed to correctly grasp and write with a pencil; Montessori introduced them to a set of metal frames and insets made in the form of geometric shapes. When the geometric inset is removed, the children trace the figure left within the frame onto a sheet of paper. Then they use colored pencils to shade in the outlines that they've traced, using careful horizontal strokes. Gradually, children become more skilled at keeping the strokes even and staying within the lines.