



Montessori Matters

February 2009
Issue 4

We discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being.

~ Maria Montessori

The Cursive Question

Notes from Nikki

Recently my father, a collector of antique books, gave me a small hardback book entitled *The Beginner's Reader*. Published in 1898, this little primer not only boasts beautifully water-colored illustrations but, interestingly enough, also offers each of its 28 reading lessons in cursive text, not the usual manuscript. In the forward of the book the author, Miss Florence Bass, states, "[T]he work is begun in script because children learn more rapidly that which they attempt to reproduce." Looking at the book reminded me of a frequent question we are often asked from parents: "Why cursive at the Primary level?" I offer the following thoughts on cursive handwriting and its benefits to children, both in the Primary program and beyond.

Ease and Control of Movement:

The fluid movements of cursive mirror the natural, circular arm (and then hand) movements of the young child. Looking at the "scribbling" of children show us that curves and loops come quite naturally versus the "balls and sticks" of manuscript writing. With that being said, to learn cursive writing is a direct support of body control for it calls upon a decisive movement in the context of the way the body moves. Cursive invites a natural flow from left to right. As cursive is introduced during a child's "sensitive period" for writing, they have an innate opportunity to refine their handwriting with less effort.

Continued on pg. 2

Continued from pg. 1

Beauty and Aesthetics:

A common response (or perhaps lament) is that “no one writes in cursive anymore”. In fact, a recent article in the Sacramento Bee (Dec. 30, 2008) boldly states that, “[T]he millennial generation is increasingly cursive illiterate.” So why bother? Just as the Primary classroom offers the children simplicity, beauty and grace, so does cursive handwriting. Once mastered, it becomes a refined and practiced point of reference. At the elementary level the introduction of calligraphy (with a fountain pen and India ink), Medieval illuminations, and other stylization provides further opportunity for beauty and individual expression.

Writing Before Reading:

One of the interesting characteristics of the Montessori language program is the concept of writing prior to reading. An early language experience in the Primary classroom is that of the cursive Sandpaper Letters. This multi-sensory material (feeling the sandpaper, hearing the sound of the letters, seeing the pink background of the consonants and blue background of the vowels) allows the child to learn the sounds that they will soon use to sound out their first written words; its goal is not that of reading, but instead of preparation for writing. The next step in writing is the cursive Moveable Alphabet. Using the sounds introduced by the Sandpaper Letters, the Moveable Alphabet allows the child to express himself, first by “writing” short phonetic words and then composing phrases, sentences and stories. The flowing cursive letters allow the young writer to connect sounds to form a single word, which is separate and distinct from other “words”. Children writing with block letters don’t have the natural break between words which is a big step in the transition from writing with the alphabet and the process of reading either one’s

own words, or those written by another person.

Reduction of Errors:

Another benefit of cursive writing is that, because of how letters are formed, letter reversal (particularly in the middle of words) is virtually impossible. This stands in contrast to the common confusion of *b/d* and *p/q* in manuscript. Additionally, it is also rare to falsely capitalize letters in cursive, so capitalization (like spelling, punctuation, paragraphs, etc.) may be introduced once a child is a confident writer as a point of interest and refinement.

Transition to Manuscript:

Unlike the more difficult transition from manuscript (or “print”) to cursive, the transition from cursive to manuscript tends to be a much simpler process. Often times just a brief connection between the two is required (“this is what a *b* looks like in manuscript”); however some letters (or learners) require no orientation at all. Some critics argue that all media and children’s activities are printed, however with so many varieties of font (with seldom few that correspond to a child’s printing), we are forever asking children to re-adjust and make relationships between various letter shapes.

What the Research Says:

A study in 2000 out of the University of Washington discovered a strong correlation between explicitly taught cursive handwriting and quality of writing (Graham, Harris and Fink, 2000). Other researchers have pointed to the following additional benefits of handwriting versus print: depth of idea development (Jones, 2004), complex writing and compositional fluency (Graham, Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, & Whitaker, 1997), grammatical prowess (e.g. producing grammatical sentences more articulately), visual perception, spelling, higher sequential thinking, reading and IQ (Berninger, Rutberg, Abbott, Garcia & Anderson-Youngstrom, Brooks & Fulton, 2005).

Thankful for your child's teacher? Consider a tax deductible donation to Atlanta's own teacher training center, Montessori Institute of Atlanta. You can join others to ensure this training center is a resource for excellent Montessori teacher for years to come. No donation is too small to contribute to this ongoing effort of preparing future teachers to impact the lives of children through Montessori. Contributions can be given to Nikki or mailed directly to *Montessori Institute of Atlanta*
1970 Cliff Valley Way, Ste. 250 Atlanta, Georgia 30329
Be sure to make note that you are a parent at Montessori In Town!

MIT Parent Receives Recognition for Community Service

Elizabeth Hearn, the mother of Cisco Harrison in Jeanie's class, is the recipient of a 2009 Martin Luther King Jr. Community Service Award. Awarded jointly by the Rollins School of Public Health and the Goizueta Business School at Emory University, this award is given annually to individuals and organizations whose work embodies the spirit of Martin Luther King Junior's legacy.

Elizabeth was selected for her efforts to improve the lives of the homeless here in Atlanta and most especially for her efforts to promote awareness of this issue amongst her students at The Paideia School. Every other year, she conducts an innovative program with junior high students in which they simulate the life of a homeless person for 5 days, giving them a glimpse of what life is like when you can't go home and have to live and eat on the street. The objectives of the course are to expose these young teens to the realities of homelessness, to dispel notions that homeless people are all unfriendly and not deserving of respect, and to increase the students' awareness of the materialism that inundates our culture.

Students start the week with nothing other than one blanket, a sheet of plastic, one set of clothes and \$5. They are permitted to trash-pick additional comfort items, such as cardboard or old cushions from dumpsters. Students are also expected to carry their belongings everywhere they go in plastic bags they've obtained from a grocery store. They are asked to put aside their own shoes and to wear only a used pair from a collection of discarded shoes and to make no phone calls. They sleep in a fenced in yard for five days, out in the elements and sleeping on concrete. They walk everywhere they go (averaging 11-15 miles per day), visiting and learning about agencies that provide social services to the homeless and volunteering at shelters.

Past students have come away with a profound understanding of the issues and difficulties the homeless face daily as they simply go about the basics of living daily life and have reported a heightened awareness of the "Affluenza" that inundates our culture. Parents have been very supportive of the experience.

Congratulations, Elizabeth. We are so proud to have families like yours a part of our school life here at Montessori In Town.

The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically... Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education. ~ Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

MONTESSORI IN TOWN CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEB. 26: PARENT EVENING

6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Maureen's Class at Poncey Highland Campus

Jeanie's Class at Glen Castle Campus

Please RSVP to Room Parents

MARCH 2 - 31: CLASS OBSERVATION

Please schedule by email: office-mit@mindspring.com

MARCH 5: PARENT EVENING

6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Anne's Class at Poncey Highland Campus

Please RSVP to Room Parents

MARCH 16 – TEACHER WORK DAY

SCHOOL CLOSED

MARCH 23 & 24 – SCHOOL PHOTOS

Further Details to Follow

APRIL 1 – 12:00 DISMISSAL FOR ALL

Parent-Teacher Conferences

APRIL 2 & 3 – SCHOOL CLOSED

Parent-Teacher Conferences

APRIL 6-10 – SPRING BREAK

SCHOOL CLOSED