

After the child has been led to master the use of the pencil, he next proceeds with the alphabetic signs. Here cards are used upon which sandpaper letters are mounted—the vowels in light-coloured sandpaper mounted upon dark cards and the consonants in black sandpaper upon white cards. It may be mentioned here that plush would furnish a much more pleasing mounting for this purpose, than does such in-artistic material as sandpaper. This part of the exercise is thus described:

The directress presents to the child two of the cards upon which vowels are mounted (or two of the consonants, as the case may be) As soon as we have given the sound of a letter we have the child trace it."

"There develop, contemporaneously, three sensations when the directress shows the letter to the child and has him trace it; the visual sensation, the tactile sensation, and the muscular sensation. In this way the image of the graphic sign is fixed in a much shorter space of time than when it was, according to ordinary methods, acquired only through the visual image."

"In teaching the consonants, the directress pronounces only the sound, and as soon as she has done so unites with a vowel, pronouncing the syllable thus formed and alternating this little exercise by the use of different vowels. She must always be careful to emphasize the sound of the consonant, repeating it by itself, as, for example, *m, m, m, ma, me, mi, m, m*. When the child repeats the sound he isolates it, and then accompanies it with the vowel."

The passage from the above exercises which provides for the recognition and naming of the letters to that of word composition is described as follows:

"As soon as the child knows some of the vowels and the consonants we place before him the big box containing all the vowels and the consonants which he knows. The directress pronounces very clearly a word; for example, 'mama,' brings out the sound of the *m* very distinctly, repeats the sounds a number of times. Almost always the little one with an impatient movement seizes an *m* and places it upon the table. The directress repeats 'ma—ma.' The child selects the *a* and places it near the *m*. He then composes the other syllable very easily. But the reading of the word which he has composed is not so easy. Indeed, he generally succeeds in reading it after a certain effort. In this case I help the child, urging him to read, and reading the word with him once or twice, always pronouncing very distinctly *mama, mama*."

The important principle underlying these various stages will at once be recognized by our teachers as that of having the child learn through as many types of images as possible. This mode of teaching writing and word recognition is really in common use among our primary teachers, as is seen in our tracing exercises, etc. The distinguishing features of the Montessori Method may, however, be stated as follows:

1. The writing is based upon earlier muscular and visual exercises.
2. Writing precedes word recognition.
3. Word recognition is approached by the method of *phonic synthesis*.

The first of these aspects, although it involves a much more elaborate use of didactic materials than seems necessary, is a phase of the process which will not appeal to our primary teachers. At least it gives an orderly method for conducting a stage of the learning process which, while it is in general use among us, has not perhaps been adequately formulated. The second and third phases of the Method, however, are likely to be objected to by the scientific educator.

Dr. Montessori gives as a reason for teaching writing before reading the fact that writing naturally precedes reading, and, further, that the art of composition should precede logical reading. Under this head she says:

Learning
the alphabetic
symbols

Leading
features of
the various
stages

Author's
reasons for
order of
the stages