Welcome to Kindergarten

M is for Monkeybars

*adapted from https://movingsmartblog.blogspot.com

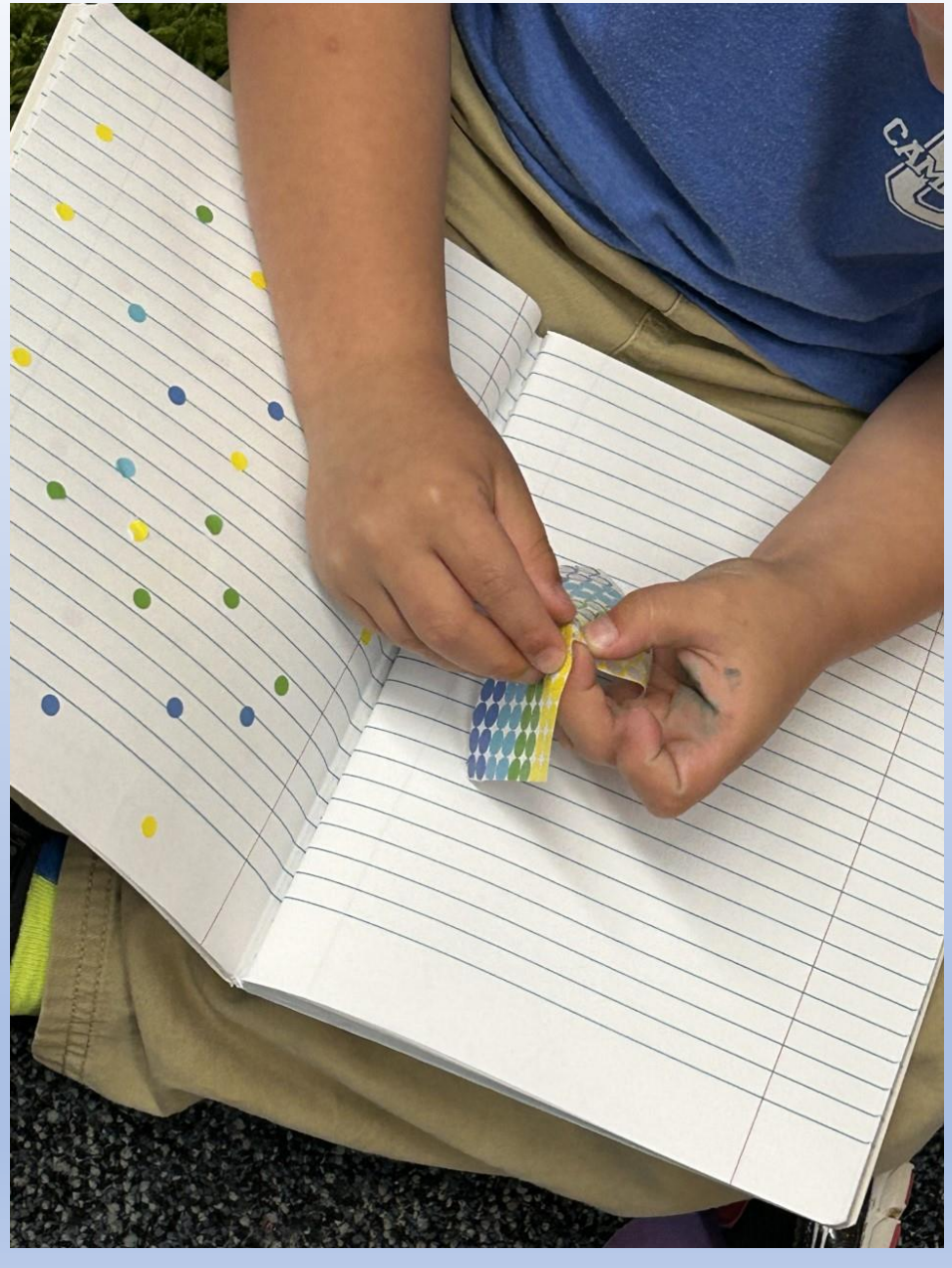
A child's hand is a powerful tool for learning. With his hands he can control the world around him, build and create all that he can imagine and express himself, first in gestures, then with scribbles, and eventually with the written word.

How do we develop this tool?

Children's muscle control is developed in a natural, orderly way- from the top down and from the inside out- starting at the head and working towards the toes while building out from the torso to the limbs.

This order of priority is established by the brain and insures that the large muscles necessary for coordination and locomotion (getting from here to there) are well organized and in control before taking on the complex mastery of the more than 60 combined muscles in the hands (let lone the dozens of bones, hundreds of ligaments and tendon, etc.)

So in the developmental totem pole, the hands come last.



Fine Motor Skills are the highly precise motor control necessary to bring all five fingers together to do a detailed work requiring minute, almost imperceptible movements, such as using a pencil to write your name.

But writing your name involves much more than the use of your hands- it involves much of the whole body…

In order to write my name…

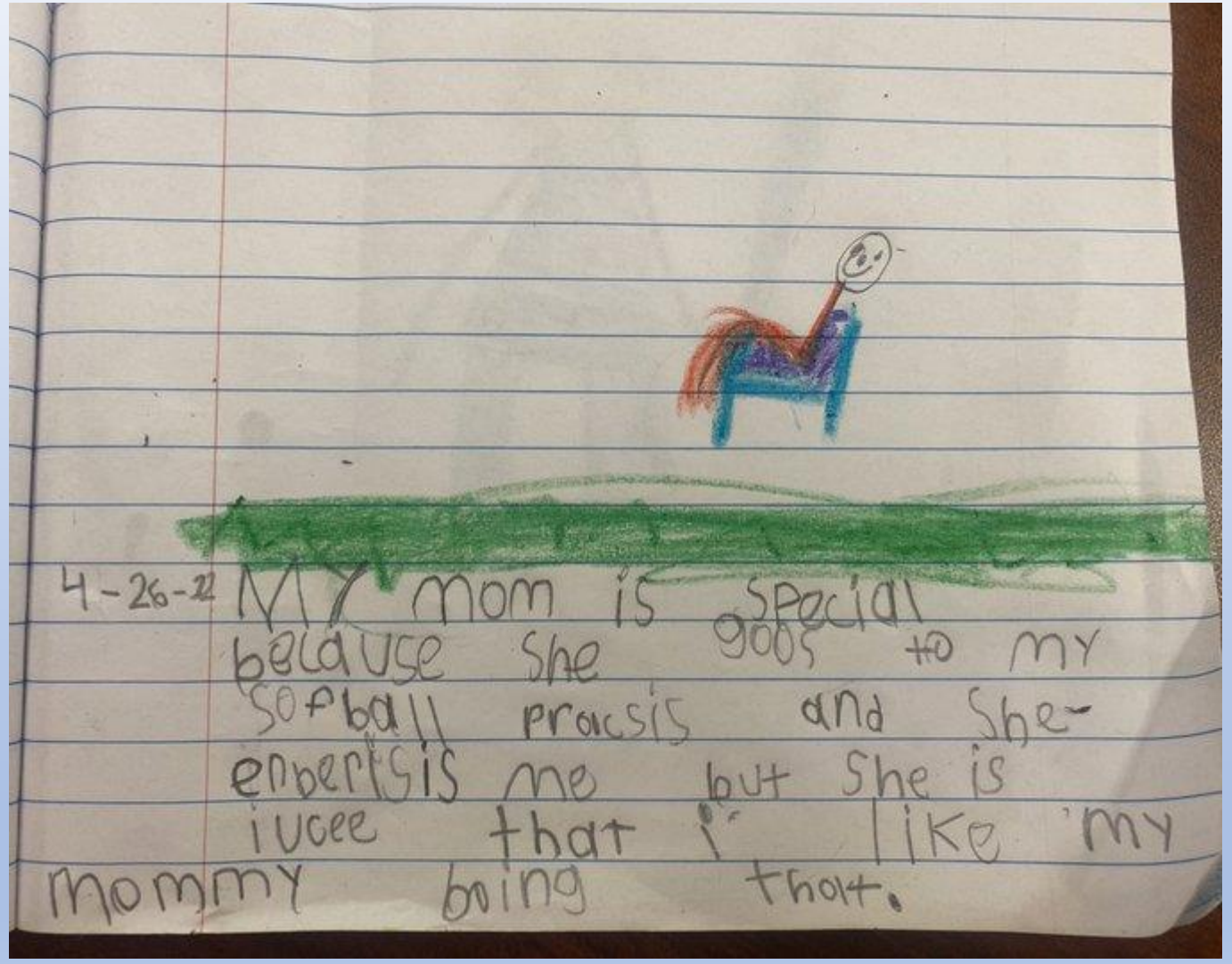
1. The upper body must be strong enough to hold the body in an upright standing or sitting position.
2. The shoulder muscles must be strong enough to control the weight of the arm, and flexible enough to rotate freely to position the arm for writing.
3. The upper arm holds the weight of the lower arm and hand, delivering the had to the page.

4. The lower arm provides a sturdy fulcrum on which the wrist rotates.

5. The wrist holds the hand steady and rotates to the appropriate position. The fingers fold around the pencil which is held in place by the thumb.

6. Together all five fingers do a precision dance on the page: a. placing the pencil at the exact angle to meet the page, b. pressing down and maintaining the right amount of pressure to leave the imprint, and c. coordinating the tiny up, down, left, right movements across the page.

If any of those muscles in that chain of events don't do their job, writing his name, or anything else, will be a very hard thing to do.

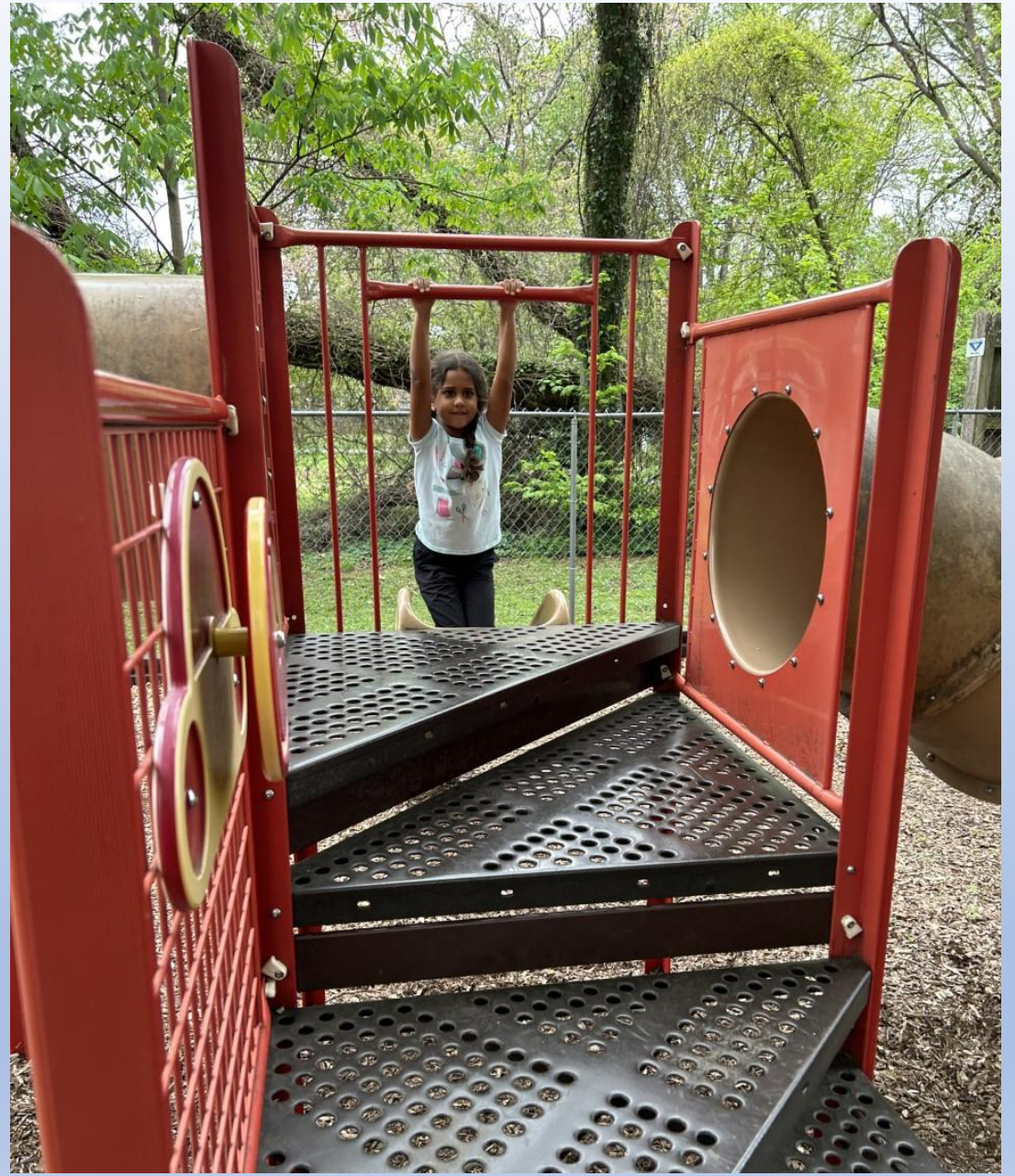


Which brings us back to Monkeybars…playing write!!

Climbing, hanging, swinging and any other high energy activity that builds strength in the upper body and core muscles are vital precursors to fine motor skills.

Twisting, turning, dangling, and swinging helps develop the flexibility and agility necessary for rotating the shoulders, elbows, wrists, and fingers.

Pushing, pulling, tugging, and lifting himself up builds strength while developing an intuitive understanding of simple physics such as weight, pressure, and resistance.



And when he comes off the monkeybars, messy play is ideal for building up strength and dexterity in hand muscles. Play-doh, sand, water, and mud… yes, mud! Any other tactile play is a great sensory experience for the brain and hands which one day my mean neater handwriting!

Wheel barrowing is great for building upper body strength. It is recommended to hold your child from the hips rather than the feet as it prevents an unnatural bow in the back and lightens the load on little arms.

Crab walking

Kids love this and you'll be amazed at how far they can go with a little practice. Sot on the floor and raise up your seat using your hands and feet. Then crab-crab-crab along as far as you can go! Have kids go forwards and backwards too!

Caterpillar Walking
See how slow you can go, inching long like a caterpillar! Walk your hands out in front of you, then walk your feet up to your hands.

Other tools you can use to develop fine motor:

Clothes pins- therapeutic benefit: strengthens muscles used for a pincers grasp which is a precursor the a tripod grasp on writing utensils. (most efficient type of pencil grasp.)

Stickers- therapeutic benefit: stickers are small and delicate. They require children to use a neat pincers grasp with the tip of their fingers and to be gentle so as not to crumple the sticker (graded finger control).

Scissors- therapeutic benefit: the open and close motion of the hand against a resistive medium helps strengthen the same muscles of the hand that are used for handwriting. Cutting is also an excellent bilateral coordination activity because as one hand cuts, the other holds and moves the paper (active assist). Cutting takes motor planning skills as to plan how to cut out a figure.

Play-doh- therapeutic benefit: Great resistive medium to strengthen little fingers.

Shoelaces- therapeutic benefit: These can be used to work on various fine motor skills. When holding up the tip of the lace, children work on improving neat pincers grasp. This is an important part of dexterity.

Beads- therapeutic benefit: The small size of beads provides the opportunity to work on many fine motor skills that require neat pincers grasp. They can also be used for in- hand manipulation skills such as nesting and retrieving.

Push Pins- therapeutic benefit: these can help strengthen neat pincers grasp which in turn is a precursor to a tripod grasp with writing utensils.

Tweezers- therapeutic benefit: Strengthens muscles involved in neat pincers grasp which are also used to hold a pencil correctly during handwriting.

Hole Puncher- This is a good tool to strengthen muscles of the hand and also a great activity when teaching cutting skills because the hole puncher mimics the open/closed motion of the scissors.