

Winston's Montessori School holds open house

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There is no desk for the teacher. The classroom has no front or back. The structure of the day varies depending upon the interests and capabilities of the students. Students are encouraged to think independently in a multi-age setting where the teacher serves as the facilitator of knowledge as kids explore their world. The Montessori curriculum is committed to providing a unique child-centered environment employing the methods of Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian educator. According to Administrator Barbara Sterchi, "It's fun to be a child her. I would certainly enjoy coming here to spend my day."

The Montessori School of Winston-Salem sponsored Open House on Sunday, February 22 at its location 3904 Old Vineyard Road in honor of National Montessori Education Week Feb. 22 - 28. They joined more than 5,000 Montessori schools across the United States, including approximately 200 sponsored by public school districts. Current, former, and interested parents were invited to walk through the halls, view the commemorative tile display, stand on the engraved brick patio, tour the classrooms, handle the materials and "feel ownership" for Montessori education in the Winston-Salem community. The celebration ended with the singing of songs of love and peace around the school's "Peace Pole."

In the classrooms, the children discussed the life of Maria Montessori whose philosophy and method of education is basic to any Montessori school. Multi-age grouping, extensive curriculum implemented with hands-on developmentally appropriate materials, cross discipline learning and care of the global environment serve as cornerstones of a Montessori classroom. From their original early childhood classes for ages 3-6, many Montessori schools have expanded curriculum to include infants, toddlers, elementary, some middle school and high school programs.

The Montessori School of Winston-Salem serves 140 children who are grouped in the Toddler/Young Pre-Primary Program (1 1/2 - 3 1/2 years); Pre-Primary Program (3-6 years); Extended Day/Kindergarten Program (5-6 years); Lower Elementary Program (6-9 years); and the Montessori Summer Program of 8-9 weeks.

The main area of curriculum in any Montessori classroom are Practical Life, which involves activities relating to the care of self and the environment; Sensorial materials that help the child understand shapes and relationships using all senses; Math which uses Montessori designed materials that provide hands-on experience to support math concepts; Language Montessori materials such as the movable alphabet and "sandpaper letters" presented phonetically for beginning readers, and Cultural Subjects such as geography, history, zoology, botany and physics which allow the child to learn about his universe and the interrelatedness of all life.

Darryl and Leia Williams have a son Lance and a daughter Iman who attend the Montessori School. Lance, who is five, enrolled in the program four years ago, and Iman who is three, is currently in her second year of attendance. Although there are few African American children in the program, Darryl and Leia commend the instructors on their sensitivity to varied ethnic groups. "I love the program because it gives a child an opportunity to explore different learning environments at their own pace without a set structure," said Darryl. They are comfortable with the student/teacher ration in their children's classes of 10 to 1.

Leia appreciates the fact that her children love to go to school. "If you instill in a child at an early age, a love of learning, they can carry this for life. They are free to discover their gifts and to explore aspects of their environment when they are developmentally ready," Leia said. "It is interesting to watch several children in a classroom all doing different things at the same time. But the room is quiet, and the children respect one another's spaces," Leia said.

She and her husband are pleased to participate with the school Workshare program which encourages parent involvement. Parents are required to serve at least 15 hours per child per academic year. They take students on field trips, build furniture, assist with snacks and other contributions. One parent who is an engineer built the outside fences around each classroom garden so



Instructor Susan Gresley-Jones assists (left to right) Jack Knight, Evan Bain and Ben Russ with the building of the pink tower, a self correcting work that requires students to arrange blocks of different sizes into a tower.

their produce will be protected. Parents who fail to uphold their obligation to Workshare are billed at the end of the year at \$10 per hour. "It's unbelievable how much parent support we have," Darryl said.

Leia and Darryl are also pleased that their son is already studying French in kindergarten.

Darryl is the vice president of sales at Sara Lee Knit Products, and many of his colleagues send their children to the Montessori School. Leia is the president of Limance which features the African head-wrap displayed at Pan African Imagery. They are pleased that the cost of the Montessori education is very competitive with traditional

daycare options. Tuition varies depending on how long the child attends on a weekly basis. For example, the toddler program for a two-day option is \$1,160 for the year; for a three-day program \$1,740, and for a five-day program \$2,900 for the year.

Instructor Susan Gresley-Jones teaches in the pre-primary class-

room where 3, 4, and 5-year-olds are mixed. She also teaches French. She holds a B. A. in Psychology and was also trained at the Toronto Montessori Institute in Canada where she was born. One of the main objectives she observes in the Montessori education is to teach children independence. After she teaches the children how to use certain manipulatives, they are free to choose which "work" they want to do. She and her assistant Susan Williams watch as they work to ascertain whether they need an additional lesson.

Some of the tools in the math area included knob cylinders of varied sizes to show children geometric relationships in math. The bead bars show students how to count. They understand that a bead is a unit. The 100-bead bars are often put together to illustrate the bead cube of 1000 beads. They are able to see what 1,000 beads look like in a square.

The screw driver work allows children to unscrew nuts and bolts with a screw driver and to screw them back in again, prepared for the next child who may desire to do that work. This activity helps them develop fine motor movement that later translates into writing ability. The pink tower is a self correcting work which uses blocks of different sizes that form a tower that is large at the base and small at the top. If the child puts the wrong block in place, the tower

will fall. In this case, the child is not dependent on the teacher to show his how to design the tower.

The instructors often use classical music as a backdrop to classroom activity. They also teach the children songs of peace, friendship, and sharing. This helps students to respect one another. They also sing traditional songs such as "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "Old McDonald Had a Farm" during which they can determine which animals the farmer had on his farm.

The Montessori School is a privately funded non-sectarian school founded by a group of parents in 1973. It is affiliated with the American Montessori Society, a professional organization established in the United States to monitor the character and quality of Montessori education. The Winston-Salem Montessori School just added three office spaces, two classrooms, a multi-purpose room with a kitchen and two garden areas. This addition was celebrated during the Open House festivities. Montessori schools are in Canada, New Zealand, Mexico and other areas of the world. Peace is a critical theme of this educational system. "If we can respect each other, we can have peace in our families, peace in the classroom, and peace in our communities," said Administrator Barbara Sterchi.

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