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Students at Warren Montessori School
photo by Chris Fritchie



“The work of education is divided between the teacher and the environment,” according to Maria Montessori.

Her way of teaching recognizes that from the beginning children need a well-organized environment in which to learn, yet still need a sense of spontaneity and independence. The tasks and activities within a Montessori classroom will fulfill a child’s desire to develop, explore and concentrate. A mainstream classroom may not offer such individuality.

“In traditional education, the instructor teaches to the average student. He or she gives a lesson and when the average student masters the lesson, the entire class moves on,” explains Ms. Khandpur. “If you have an advanced student who learns at a quicker pace, that student must wait for the rest of the class to catch up and usually gets bored. On the flip side, a student who has a particular weakness or needs more time to master a concept is forced to move along with the rest of the class.”

Children need a well-organized environment in which to learn, yet still need a sense of spontaneity and independence.

A child in a Montessori classroom will not have to wait on the “average” student. Instead, lessons are given one-on-one between a certified Montessori instructor and a student.

“The presentation is at the individual student’s ability level. A teacher will observe the classroom and, when a particular student masters the concept they are working on, they receive another one-on-one lesson,” says Ms. Khandpur. “All work is done with hands-

The Montessori Experience

By Amanda VanCura

IT’S ONLY FOR PRESCHOOL CHILDREN. It’s too expensive. There is too much structure. Children are pushed too far, too fast. Creativity is stifled.

According to the North American Montessori Teachers’ Association (NAMTA), these are some of the most common misconceptions about Montessori education, how the schools are operated and whom the schools target. Anyone who talks with a Montessori teacher or parent will almost certainly discover that these false impressions don’t stand true. In fact, those who have experienced Montessori education share a passion for this stimulating method of teaching and learning.

“I have observed the class on numerous occasions and I have never seen a more caring, engaging environment in my life,” shares Amy Smith, whose 2 ½-year-old daughter attends Warren Montessori School near Warren Parkway and Hillcrest. “The teachers work with the children on an individual basis meeting all of their learning needs,

and the hugs and smiles are endless.”

This is a typical Montessori classroom. A well-organized environment, a place where children are allowed to explore independently, a class that fulfills a child’s individual need to learn and develop, and a genuine care for growing a child’s moral, social skills and academic talents.

“The Montessori Method invokes and establishes inner motivation, self-discipline and a life-long love of learning,” adds Anita Khandpur, Director of Starwood Montessori School, located on Lebanon, east of Dallas North Tollway.

These are the kinds of statements that Italian Doctor Maria Montessori would be proud to hear.

THE MONTESSORI METHOD

This unique approach to learning was developed by Dr. Montessori in the early 1900s. Her method is based on the simple but profound truth that children teach themselves. She committed her life to creating a methodology that was dedicated to the self-creating process of the child.

on materials, each containing their own control of error, so that if a student makes a mistake, he/she can discover and correct the mistake without the assistance of a teacher.”

A TYPICAL DAY

A true Montessori school employs Montessori-certified teachers and offers classrooms that are fully equipped with Montessori materials. All groupings are ability-based with mixed age groupings in all classrooms, most beginning with age two and some through age 12.

A day in a Montessori classroom is filled with a variety of things from music to hands-on instruction to movement classes and more. Each school has a specific schedule, but a typical day will often consist of similar activities.

For example, a preschooler’s day at Starwood Montessori may begin with Montessori work time. The teachers will give individual presentations and students work with hands-on materials. Later in the morning, children have circle time, or group learning time. This could be a unit study, a special reading time, parent presentation or show-and-tell. After a snack, children head to a specialty class, such as computers, Spanish, music or movement education. Recess, lunch and naptime (depending on the age) are part of the afternoon’s activities.

While younger students nap, older students (usually four and up), may have afternoon work sessions that include math and language activities. At the end of the day, the entire class would come back together for a short group activity prior to dismissal.

Mrs. Smith initially had her daughter in a mainstream day care, but quickly found that her child was not being stimulated as she had hoped.

“I knew I wanted to move her to an environment that would constantly engage her in learning,” Mrs. Smith states. “I could tell immediately a change in my child’s attitude and overall demeanor. She was happy, talking about what she



Students at Warren Montessori School

photos by Chris Fritchie

did at school, who she played with and singing songs... all of which I did not see prior to her time in Montessori.”

“I felt very confident that my daughter was prepared for kindergarten. Now that she has been in kindergarten for several months, I know that she was ready,” believes Christi Gowan, a Frisco ISD teacher and parent of a daughter who attended Warren Montessori. “Spending two years in a Montessori program has helped her with her confidence as a student, her skills at being independent in a classroom setting and her ability to succeed.”

Mrs. Gowan adds that her daughter

was exposed to many different experiences while at Warren Montessori. The school has a garden, allowing children to participate in planting flowers and growing fruits and vegetables. In addition, the children are exposed to a variety of cultures and age groups.

“The age range of the students in her class was three to six,” she explains. “This gave her an opportunity to be exposed to all levels of abilities and instruction. Due to this, the instruction in a Montessori classroom is more individualized.”

Mrs. Smith, whose daughter still has a few years before entering school, agrees. “The Montessori work that the children take part in is geared to help them later in schooling. In the younger classrooms, they work on fine motor skills, practical life skills and cooperation. As they get older, they transfer these skills to more challenging tasks. The Montessori focus is building on children’s strengths and guiding them to explore new things as it is developmentally appropriate.”

CHOOSING A SCHOOL

Following are answers to some of the most common questions that pertain to Montessori education. Before making the final decision to select a school, it is important to visit several schools and talk with other parents.

Are all schools truly Montessori?

Because Montessori is a method of educating that is not trademarked or copyrighted, a school can call itself a Montessori school without incorporating all of the philosophies. “A school might incorporate some principles or materials, but should call themselves ‘Montessori-based’ and not ‘Montessori,’” believes Ms. Khandpur.

A true Montessori school will not only incorporate the principles and materials, but will include multi-age classrooms, independent instruction, the use of hands-on materials and a structured environment. In addition, the American Montessori Society (AMS), who regulates

Students at
Warren Montessori School
photo by Chris Fritchie

teachers and teaching methods, will certify instructors. The school itself may also be regulated by AMS, which ensures that true Montessori methods are taking place.

When should my child start? This method of education is so individualized that Ms. Khandpur recommends most students start as early as 20 to 24 months.

"This may seem early to some parents, but these are extremely formative years for a child," she says. "We find that students who begin in our toddler program develop a much stronger foundation for later years of learning. They master the concept of independence, coordination, concentration and order."

Are there programs for older students? Many Montessori schools offer elementary programs designed for children age six through twelve. Curriculum is broken down into lessons that are designed to be self-correcting, build self-reliance and foster a love of learning.

"We do have students that start at all ages, including during elementary years," explains Ms. Khandpur. "These parents find that the traditional method of education is not suited to their child's needs and are looking for an alternative environment to help their student succeed at school."

How does the cost compare to traditional preschool? Most Montessori schools are quite comparable to mainstream preschools. In fact, a 2005 NAMTA survey showed that the median annual tuition for ages three to six years based on a six-hour day was \$5,875. The cost will vary depending on the type of program (pre-primary, primary, elementary, etc.). In addition, some Montessori schools offer half-day, full-day and after-school options.

"Most families find it surprising that a Montessori school is no more costly than a traditional preschool environment," says Ms. Khandpur. "The best part is in the Montessori environment, the student is receiving a quality education from a



certified teacher, which is typically not the case in a preschool or daycare where the emphasis is more on childcare."

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THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Maria Montessori states, "There are many who hold, as I do, that the most important part of life is not the age of university studies, but the first one, the period from birth to the age of six. For that is the time when a man's intelligence itself, his greatest implement, is being formed. But not only his intelligence; the full totality of his psychic powers."

Dr. Montessori truly believed that

education starts at birth. Parents and educators who choose her method of teaching share in her beliefs. Parents are, of course, a child's first and most influential teachers. And, carefully choosing a school to assist the child in the formative life years can be an important parental decision.

In addition to researching local schools and speaking with parents, be sure to do your own research on Montessori teaching. Visit the American Montessori Society at www.amshq.com or the North American Montessori Teachers' Association at www.montessori-namta.org.

No matter what type of education a parent chooses, Dr. Montessori believed that the parent, teacher, child and school relationships are of utmost importance in a student's life.

"Whoever touches the life of the child touches the most sensitive point of a whole, which has roots in the most distant past and climbs toward the infinite future." -Dr. Maria Montessori

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