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## Montessori Center of Farmington

## Where education starts for 18-month-old toddlers

By Loraine McClish  
staff writer

Renee Bean switched off the lights for a second or so in a room scattered with toys, and a dozen youngsters toddled their way onto a rug for a session of singing "Old MacDonald."

"We're not baby sitting here," said Bean, who is owner, administrator and sometimes teacher in the Montessori Center of Farmington Hills.

"This is a classroom. There are no mothers here or mother's helpers."

The classroom for the 18-months to 2 1/2-year-old set got under way less than a year ago and is the newest addition to the Montessori classes held at 29001 13 Mile.

Speaking slowly and softly — or sometimes not at all — is one of the teaching methods used by the school's staff whose aim is to help the child discover and understand things for himself.

"We have two children here who don't speak English at all, and we communicate very well with them. Sometimes we don't need words. The children learn from their peers. The adults here to guide them and introduce new materials to broaden their capacity for learning," Bean said.

MOST OF THE learning that is done in the toddlers' classroom comes under Bean's heading of "Practical Life."

"Practical life is anything that is common to the child in his own home but more often than not is forbidden," she said.

"Our babies wash dishes, pour water, learn to walk up and down stairs — common things like that. And in six weeks time there isn't one of them who isn't speaking better and walking steadier."

Carrying water perfects coordination. Absorption in an activity (that may be forbidden in the home) lengthens the span of concentration. Following a regular sequence of action increases the ability to pay attention to details.

Good working habits are learned as each task is completed: sponging up the spilled water, putting the puzzle or the block back on the shelf.

The Montessori classroom mixes the 18-month-olds with the 2 1/2-year-olds, the 2 1/2 with the 3-year-olds and the first-graders with the third-graders.

The use of many materials permits a varied pace that accommodates the many levels of ability in the classroom. The younger child can take as long as he or she wishes on one piece of equipment. The advanced child is constantly challenged.

THE MONTESSORI system of education was initiated by Maria Montessori in Italy about 80 years ago with the belief that no one is educated by another; the individual must do it for himself. The adult's job is to provide the stimulation for learning.

Bean has three children, all of whom

have been educated in the Montessori manner. Her oldest has just begun first grade in Kenbrook Elementary School.

"I've been teaching this for 11 years and always knew it worked. But now that I'm a mother with a child who has adjusted so beautifully to a desk in public school after the freedom here, I'm ever so much more sure."

"Kindergarten is critical. It completes a cycle when it all flowers and comes together," Bean said. "Our children leave here reading. They are all self-motivated and maybe, most importantly, they are all patient within themselves."

Bean owns and administers the Montessori Center of Farmington Hills as well as the Southfield Montessori Center.

"I thought I was done building when I opened the second center," she said. "Then we added the class for the toddlers. Now I think we're going to add classrooms for the first to third grades next year. Maybe classrooms for the fourth to sixth grades after that. It seems like I can't stop adding."

Both centers offer day care from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Bean's sister, Karen Lowen, a pathologist for the Oak Park School District, offers help to students with special problems.

Visitors are encouraged.

"Especially drop-in visitors," Bean said. "Mothers and their children are welcome to sit in on any classroom any time class is in session. I always tell people who ask about this not to bother about calling for an appointment. We're not going to do anything special to get ready for company. Just stop in and see what we're doing here."



Toddler Garod Bundgaard gets help from his teacher Renee Bean in learning how to walk up and down stairs, something that he may be forbidden to do in his home.



Putting together a small puzzle with dozens of miniature pieces will strengthen the fingers of Renee Bean's student Shelly Danner in the class for 18-months to 2 1/2-year-olds.



Learning traffic signs is the lesson for the day given by teacher Annie Mampilly. On her right is Jeffery Alexander. On her left are Bonelia Cousin and Prathima Yeddannapudi. Mampilly says she seldom wears her sari for street wear, but wears one to class because the children like to see her in her native dress. She encourages her charges, and their parents, to talk about their ethnic cultures.

Staff photos  
by Randy Borst

## Dinghy Sharp

## A master in communicating with learning disabled

By Carlina Brooks  
special writer

Dinghy Sharp will do almost anything to get your attention.

Lecturing to an assembly of parents and teachers of children with learning disabilities last week in Southfield, he behaved oddly on purpose.

She yelled, whispered, pranced, danced, stomped, whistled, snapped her fingers, gestured wildly, changed gears abruptly and mouthed words silently in the middle of a shouted sentence.

All this was so that her audience would "ace" her talk in order to fully understand her.

Sharp, whose first name is pronounced like the boat "dinghy," is a resident of Union Lake and a consultant to the Farmington Public School system.

A trim, gray-haired woman with a warm smile, Sharp admits she's hyper. That goes with being born with a severe learning handicap called Dyslexia.

But she is a master, both in formal education and in communicating with those who have trouble interpreting what they see and hear.

SHARP teaches in 12 Farmington

Elementary schools. She's a teacher's teacher. She conducts workshops for parents, has 167 tutorial service volunteers, and she works with the Michigan Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (MACLD) to help individuals of all ages.

With master's degrees in pre-school and early childhood education; speech and language pathology; audiology and teaching of the deaf; remedial reading; and learning disabilities, she began teaching 34 years ago in a one-room schoolhouse in Albion.

When she was a little girl, her parents had difficulty keeping her quiet. She would jump up and down and scream and was a very energetic child, she recalls.

"Since I had to be by myself, my parents bought me a little sailboat. I spent so much time on it they called me Dinghy Spauldini." The nickname stuck and today she uses it in publishing her instruction techniques for the handicapped.

And there was another reason for switching from Florence Spaulding Sharp to Dinghy when she moved to Farmington about 20 years ago.

"There were four other Florence

Sharps," she says. "They were getting my phone calls about the kids in my classes, and I was getting theirs about golf leagues and attending weddings."

MORE THAN a decade ago, Sharp concluded that mentally and emotionally handicapped youngsters were getting specialized help in school, but many more had learning difficulties not considered severe enough to warrant special treatment.

Questioned about the causes of learning disabilities, Sharp explained it can be conceived, hereditary, caused by an insult at birth, be medication or by an early illness. She said her own son, Michael, is handicapped.

One out of five persons has some kind of neurological or developmental handicap, she said.

Sharp told parents that knowing the cause does not help with the remediation or the coping. "Nor will it change how to deal with your child," she says. "Children can be taught compensations and how to cope."

Youngsters with a hidden handicap usually have reading disability, she says. "Their perception of the world is one-sided and often misleading."

"THEY OPERATE under great pressure for scholastic achievement compared with others. They react with frustration and are often rejected because of outrageous behavior. Their sense of innate worth as individuals can be affected."

"A child may have a minimal brain dysfunction, which is a fancy way to say he doesn't interpret what he sees or hears." For these children, she advocates a "structured" life and endless patience.

"This child did not choose to be different. Parents and teachers have a responsibility to make this child feel important, secure and all right."

Sharp does not retreat from criticism of her peers. "The child is not an under-achiever; the teacher is an over-expecter," she says.

She calls about and tell "bring and brag" and says the learning-disabled child will hold up his offering and say: "Here it is."

"Trying to teach phonics to this child

is going to make him vomit," she declares. "Words should never be flashed in isolation. To these kids, it's murder." To parents she says, "Talking is learning by imitation, so we should be the best models we can be. Don't use baby talk or idioms, and be succinct. Here is a kid who if you yell 'cut that out,' you had better hide the scissors."

TO THIS KID the family car is the "damn car" that won't start in the morning and the "stupid cop" is the one who gave you a ticket. The kids are imitating you, she warns.

Sharp polishes unorthodox teaching methods, if they work. "I don't require any child to learn the alphabet," she says. "When does he use it?"

She uses symbols of the phonetic dog and boy. And use big black pencils, she instructs. "The child may reverse b and d, w and m. He may see inversions."

Children who do not like to talk, often cannot verbalize, she explains. They answer with "yes" or "no" and the "because" answers everything.

All kids between the ages of 4 and 8 will do some stuttering some of the time," she says, asking that adults accept this as normal.

Sharp is a supporter of Chisanbop, and calls it super. She claims the most disabled can learn it. "Counting forward (on fingers) is adding, backward is subtraction, and multiplication is in bunches," she explains.

"IT'S AMAZING. All of a sudden the whole scheme of the numbers system is new to them. With Chisanbop, you'll never have to remember a multiplication table again as long as you live. You can be the smartest kid in the class — king for a day."

Sharp advises building on the strengths your child does have. The child with vision or hearing problems has other skills. One may do poorly on written work but is good at verbal spelling.

You may have a bright little kid who is visually impaired, and brighter than tests show. Why? Testing is a visual mechanism.

If there is a discrepancy between the visual and auditory channels, and once he sees and hears simultaneously, he understands, he's an auditory learner.

"If he has trouble telling time," Sharp advises, "Get him a digital watch."

## Poets celebrate new book publication with party

A reception and poetry reading will be held from 3-6 p.m. Sunday, in Poetry Resource Center to celebrate the publication of "Sub Rosa," a collection of poems by three Detroit area writers, two of them from Farmington.

"Harry Lou Docksey, Susan Sage and Doreen Taylor are all strong, but relatively known voices from the local literary scene," said Stephen H. Tudor, associate editor of Corridors, a publication of the Detroit Writers' Guild. "Sub Rosa is their first publication in book form."

Sage is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert E. Sage. She majored in English at Wayne State University. During her senior year there she won the prestigious Tompkins Award for a series of her poems. At present she is an em-

ployee in the university's Slavic Department.

Docksey is the daughter of Mrs. Anita Docksey. She also was an English major at Wayne State and has published poems in both Green's Magazine and Corridors Magazine.

The Michigan Poetry Resource Center is located at 743 Beaubien, near Lafayette, and is supported by the Michigan Council for the Arts and Detroit Council for the Arts.

There is no charge to attend the party. Docksey, Sage and Taylor will be reading from their works and be available to sign copies of "Sub Rosa." Wine and cheese will be served.

Sage has been asked to read in a series that will be sponsored by the Poetry Resource Center later this year.