

Montessori... an Educational Wonderland

By MARCI LUX

It must have been the way Alice felt when she nibbled the mysterious cookie marked "Eat Me," and found herself growing—or was the world shrinking?

From the world outside, a walk into the Trinity Montessori School in Rochester's suburbia can transform you into another Alice. This is the world of the little people, with their knee-high tables and chairs, pint-sized easels, and even a Tom Thumb sink and counter.

The students of this "little green schoolhouse" are only 3 and 4 years old. For them, everything is right-size.

The Trinity Montessori School is a new adventure in education for the Sisters of St. Joseph, who began the school only last year. Their interest in the Montessori Method, named after Dr. Maria Montessori of Italy, originator of the theory, led to the founding of the school on the Motherhouse grounds on French Road in Pittsford.

Forty-four children are enrolled at Trinity. They entered last year at the ages of 2 years, 9 months to 3 years, 9 months and will continue there until 6.

According to the Montessori theory, this period between 3 and 6 is the "sensitive period," when a child is most responsive to learning.

Sister Rosalita, S.S.J., director of the Montessori School, and Sister Lella, S.S.J., a Montessori teacher, have the task of introducing the children to learning while they are most susceptible.

Perched precariously on one of the doll-like chairs, Sister Rosalita received me for an interview at the school last week. Dark brown carpeting matches the wood-paneled walls, contrasting with white wooden shelves and crisp, white curtains at the windows. Plastic bags cover the materials on the shelves, but despite three months of being closed up and unused, the room still looked fresh and pleasant.

"As you can see, our main color theme is brown and white. We keep the surroundings muted, while the materials used in teaching the children are bright and colorful. That way, their attention is drawn to the material itself," Sister explained.

From the first day, the children are presented with certain rules they must obey. One of the first rules is to replace material in exactly the same place when they are through with it.

"When there is order in the environment, there is order among the children. It's important to keep everything neat and attractive," Sister said.

There are two classes every day, 22 children in the morning and 22 in the afternoon.

The curriculum of the school includes geography, language, arithmetic, science, art, music, practical life, and sensorial materials.

At the beginning of class, there is a group presentation of the materials to be used for that day. The teacher explains what the object is, and how it will be used.

"For example, in the science section we may set out different rocks for the children to look at and feel. They may listen to records for different aspects of music, or in math, we might present a new numeral to them," said Sister Rosalita.

In the practical life area, a child may do such things as wash little dishes, peel a carrot, or pour himself a glass of water.

"The object of practical life training is to give him the opportunity to do these things for himself, and to see that they produce a visible result. If he washes a dirty dish, he sees it become clean," Sister elaborated. "At home he may not be given such a chance; adults usually don't give the child that advantage."

"The children love to learn, that's the important thing," she stressed. "For them, learning is an enriching experience."

ence. They aren't pushed. When they go into first grade, they fit in beautifully."

Sensorial materials acquaint the children with dimensions and relationships with sizes by sight and touch. Wooden spheres, cubes and triangles teach them geometric shapes and their correct names. Color cards are used to teach primary colors and gradation of color.

Once the group presentation is over, the child is free to work in whatever area he may choose. He may work alone, in a group, or with the help of teacher. However, he is not free to disturb others. The child is made to understand this from the start.

"When we give a rule, we also give a reason. We say, 'You may not run, because you might hurt someone, or yourself,' or 'You may not fight or interrupt, because you will disturb another person.' It's important to make the child understand why there is a rule. When he does, he accepts it," said Sister Rosalita.

Sister Lella agrees. The children not only learn respect for materials and other people, but they receive it in return. The child will not disturb another unless he is invited to join; otherwise, he will watch quietly. He learns to wait his turn.

Both teachers used the term "inner discipline" in describing what the Montessori child acquires through this training.

ing what the Montessori child acquires through this training.

"In a way, each child is his own teacher," said Sister Lella. "The teacher acts as an observer and a director. She prepares the environment for the child, and helps him if he seeks her help. But the child pursues his own interest at his own rate of speed. He has 'liberty within limits.'"

The teacher is expected to observe and keep a record of what each child used that day, what he mastered, and where he should progress from there. The Trinity Montessori School is equipped with a two-way window for such observation.

Parents of the children may come and observe their children through the window.

"They're very pleased with the school," Sister Rosalita said of the parents.

Each of the children was interviewed and tested for ability to follow directions and cooperate in a group situation before being accepted.

There are average children whose parents became interested in the Montessori school through an advertisement put out by the Sisters of St. Joseph. There is still quite a long waiting list for the school.

Although there are no immediate plans for a Montessori elementary school, such a school is "within the Sisters of St. Joseph's vision," says Sister Rosalita.

Assisting Sisters Rosalita and Lella for the coming school year will be Sister Maureen, S.S.J. Sister will serve her required year of internship at the Trinity Montessori School prior to becoming a Montessori teacher. Last year Sister Lella completed her internship with Sister Rosalita at the Trinity Montessori School.

Sister Rosalita was trained at the Montessori training center at Fairleigh Dickinson University and was an intern at the Bede School in Englewood, N. J.

When the school re-opens in September and the new people return, the teachers will be happy to see them.

As Sr. Rosalita says, "You can feel miserable some mornings when you come in to school. Then the children arrive, all smiling and happy, and everything brightens up. You can't help but be happy, too."

1,300 Students Due at Aquinas Institute

By WHIT JOHNSON

More than 1,300 boys will enter Aquinas Institute on Sept. 4—and school for them will be vastly different from what their fathers knew.

The changes and the challenges they will face include a revision of special study courses to eliminate overlapping. New courses have been introduced into the curriculum to provide a broader perspective on the history and development of man.

Eastern and Western cultures and a more demanding approach to the study of current events and United States history are included.

Father Peter J. Ellinger, C.S.B., coordinator of guidance services at the Basilian Fathers' school, points out that many school systems this year have revised their social

studies curricula bringing history courses up to date and adding other social sciences. Father Ellinger worked closely with college representatives to reorganize the course offerings.

"We want to develop a greater sense of history on the part of our students," says Father Ellinger. "Our courses develop 'thinking patterns'; they pull together the threads of religion, history, economics and civics."

Aquinas is one of the first area schools to develop a course which provides students with an understanding of the contribution of the Negro, Puerto Rican and other minority groups to American life. Taught by Michael Donovan, head of the school's history department, the curriculum brings out the background and the nature of

the present struggle for justice and equality of opportunity.

"The obligation of the school to present history fully and accurately and to deal with current situations with faithfulness in fact and spirit, not only for minority group students but for all students is undeniable. Our curriculum materials have been revised to reflect the role and contribution of minority groups in American life," Donovan said.

As in other new social studies courses, memorization of dates is considered less important than the broader view of values and ideals. This will tie in areas such as religion, art, science and education.

New and expanded courses in economics and political science will be available to students at Aquinas this year according to James K. Perry of the school's faculty. "Economics is everybody's concern today. The problems of monetary policy, the question of taxation and interest, the recurrent threats of inflation and depression ought to be a part of every student's education," Perry states.

Languages will be taught with less emphasis on grammar and more on the spoken word. It will not be unusual

for the teacher to speak only in the language he is teaching for the entire class period. The use of record players and tape recorders as well as the language lab makes the conversational aspect of the language more appealing to the students.

Realizing that the school curriculum simply will not be up to the space age of tomorrow, several Aquinas teachers spent the summer attending colleges and universities throughout the country bringing up on new developments. While students enjoyed their vacation faculty members explored new school curricular programs and the new ways to teach them.

Aquinas Principal Leon G. Hart, C.S.B. and Vice Principal John T. Cherry, C.S.B., attended workshops at the University of Rochester and Georgetown University to keep abreast with the rapidly changing field of secondary education, a sort of revolution in our day, according to Father Hart.

The revolt, he says, "cuts across the very fabric of education—the curriculum and the ways to teach it. English, mathematics, science, economics and foreign languages—almost any subject you can name—are appearing in new clothes, new concepts, new methods."



Father Leon Hart, Aquinas principal

Carmelites Move To Marquette

Milwaukee—(NC)—Carmelite college seminarians will attend Marquette University here starting in September.

Father Keith Egan, O.Carm., said, "We are probably the first religious community to move onto a university campus en masse."

The Carmelites recently bought a three-story apartment house, a block north of the Marquette campus for an expected 80 students and nine faculty members.

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