

Newspaper Clippings Of Our Montessori School

— Florida, Mid to Late 1960's —

When IBM transferred my husband to Cape Canaveral in the early 1960's (before it was renamed Cape Kennedy), we became one of the first 10 families they sent there for the Apollo Program. The IBM workforce later grew to 1,000, and the same rapid growth was true of many other companies.

With this explosion in growth in the area came the need for good preschools. So after reading every book Maria Montessori had written, I set out to establish what was the first Montessori school in Florida.

This new type of program became very popular, attracting a great deal of attention from the local press. These are a few clippings I have saved in an old scrapbook. The major article — which kicked off the entire process — is shown in full, on the next page.

Janet Kierstead

The Montessori Method

by AMY CLARK
TODAY Staff Writer

"My little girl eats and sleeps better now," said one mother. "And my son gets along so much better with his brothers and sisters since he entered the class," said another.

These are typical comments that Mrs. Donald M. Kierstead hears as mothers pick up their children at the close of daily Montessori classes at the Kierstead Early Learning Center in Titusville. The school is based on the principle set down by the late Dr. Maria Montessori, an Italian teacher and physician.

Twenty nine boys and girls ranging in age from 3 to 6 years, attend the center. The directress (Montessori term for teacher) is Anne Vliegenthart and the classroom assistant Mrs. Theodore Zimmerman.

Classes are held each week-day morning from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. The colorful rooms feature small tables and chairs, child-size easels for painting, shelves full of Montessori apparatus built in Holland and a kitchen and bathroom.

Eight months after the opening in Titusville of the only "pure" Montessori school in Florida, 23 boys and girls are students there. The children range in age from 3 to 6.

Although the Montessori method of education has spread throughout Europe since its founding in Italy 50 years ago, it is still a controversial subject in this country.

The accompanying story is an account of the Titusville school's operation now.

Classes have raised floors to keep all the fixtures such as the sink and cabinets within a child's reach," said pretty Janet Kierstead. "My husband Donald built the new floors himself. Getting ready to open our

Continued on Page 2D

SHE'S FASCINATED BY FORMS
... Four-year-old Libby Jean Twyford learns to recognize cylindrical shapes

LINING UP RODS
... Mark Knowles, 5-year-old, puts the number rods in order

A MOVABLE ALPHABET
... Directress Anne Vliegenthart guides 4-year-old Michele Kierstead in making up words

MAKING PREPARATIONS — Mrs. Anne Vliegenthart, directress, and Mrs. Donald Kierstead arrange the weight measures and geometric forms which will be used by the children attending the Kierstead Early Learning Center, S. Dixie Hwy. The Center is based on the learning methods developed by Maria Montessori. — S-A Photo by McClendon.

LISTEN — At Child Day Care meeting last Monday, sub-committee members listen to audience reaction from a packed city hall on a proposed city ordinance regulating child-care facilities in the city. Next meeting is tonight. Left to right—Councilman Vern Jansen, chairman; Will Holliday, school personnel officer; Mrs. Janet Kierstead, operator of Florida's first "Montosori" kindergarten school, and Attorney Bob Nabors. — S-A Photo by Jay Glaug.

An Excellent Article in USA TODAY. Getting started was a struggle, to say the least. But we were lucky, as it happened that the newspaper that ultimately became the widely read, USA TODAY, was just starting up in Brevard County. And their intent was to cover not only national, but local news. So they featured our plans in a full-page story. In it, the reporter did an excellent job of describing the Montessori Method. (It's still well worth the read for anyone wanting to understand the Montessori approach.)

A First For Brevard

Introducing: Montessori

By NANCY PFUND

TITUSVILLE—Brevard's pioneering spirit has intoxicated yet another forward-looking citizen.

Mrs. Janet Kierstead armed with a basic ideal: "It could be better," a preschooler of her own, and the family savings, will open one of Florida's first preschools wholly indoctrinated in the Montessori Method of learning.

The basic principle of the method, developed by Dr. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), is that children are essentially serious minded and will educate themselves if only permitted to do so.

DR. Montessori was the first woman ever to receive a doctorate degree from the University of Rome (Italy) medical school. Her extensive psychiatric work with mentally disturbed children in Europe led her to develop teaching techniques for normal children.

The Montessori Method encourages a child's initiative and employs specially prepared and highly refined teaching material and games for sense and muscle development.

Emphasis is focused on the child's freedom to absorb. The directress' (teacher) function is one of a supervisor and guide rather than formal instructor. The child would not be forced or driven into learning motor or perceptual skills.

THE first six years of a child's life are called the "years of absorption." During this time he is not making a conscious effort to study but is continuously gathering knowledge by "absorbing" it from his environment.

Within the years of absorption he is experiencing "periods of sensitivity." As each sense (sight, auditory, motor, smell, etc.) portion of his brain develops, the child feels an inner drive to learn more about his surroundings through these senses.

If stimulated at the peak of his color perception, for instance, he will form a sharper sense of color dis-

tingtion than at any other time in his life.

HE IS a natural mimic. Not only can he learn his native language but can form a solid language foundation for learning others in the future. Instinctively orderly and easily acquiring self-discipline, they have remarkable powers of mental concentration which only need stimulation.

The average man experiences this phenomenon only once in his lifetime.

The Kierstead Montessori School will provide this stimulation.

Mrs. Kierstead and her husband, Do, an engineer with IBM at Kennedy Space Center, will be the school's administrators. Mrs. Kierstead taught for two years under the California school system but would be unqualified to teach the Montessori Method.

UNDER contract to begin supervising in the school in September is Mrs. Mary Frances Clodfelter of Atlanta, Ga. She has completed her postgraduate work of the Montessori Method at the Southeastern Institute for Montessori Studies in association with Oglethorpe College, Atlanta and is fully qualified for the position.

The Kiersteads hope to build their school on the new Knox McRae Road extension. "We'll have one room to start with," said Mrs. Kierstead, "with a two-way window for observation."

Montessori apparatus will be shipped from Holland for the children to use

to teach themselves languages, arithmetic, reading, writing and self-help skills such as dressing.

IN THE classroom the directress explains how the apparatus is properly used and places it with all the other "games" on a shelf accessible to the child. Then the children are allowed to "play" with this material as it interests them.

There is no pressure applied to the preschoolers. They are merely surrounded by a richly equipped environment, shown how to use it and allowed to be freely motivated as the aforementioned "inner drive" dictates.

THE Kiersteads hope to begin construction within the month after the City Council meets to approve zoning for the proposed location of the private non-profit school.

A desirable class load for a beginning class would be 20 pupils to one directress. Surprising? No, not if one remembers that the directress is there only to guide the individual child — not instruct him.

Over 200 Montessori Schools have been established in the United States affiliated with Associated Montessori Internationale in Holland. This will be Florida's first although many preschools use Montessori principles.

Mrs. Kierstead, 1220 Thoreau St., Indian River City, 267-4401, may be contacted for additional information concerning the pre-school program.

So her article and the photo shown here kicked off the process, which then took many months to come to fruition. As soon as it was published, I received a phone call from the wife of the local pediatrician. They had one preschool child — and lots of friends. So she invited me to speak to a group of parents in their home. From that first evening meeting, we filled up a large portion of the class.

Also immediately following the appearance of this article, I got a call from a Dutch Montessori directress whose husband had just been transferred into The Cape by Rockwell. She ultimately became our directress.

As for the school itself, we first attempted to buy a vacant lot to build on. But the city dragged its feet in completing the road leading to the property. So eventually, we bought an old house, and my husband and I (with children in tow) spent the weekends converting it into a school. He opened up some walls and built new, raised floors in the kitchen and bathroom. This, to make the counters accessible to the children. I did the painting. Plus, I spent weekdays struggling with city approvals, responding to parents wanting info, and organizing all else that went into establishing a private school.

Commission OKs Private School; Now To Council
 Thoreau Planning and Zoning Commission Wednesday recommended approval of a request by Janet Kierstead to operate a private school in a residential area.
 Property is located at 2205 Old Dixie Highway on the west side of Judson Avenue. The school will be a Montessori type where very young students are taught individually at the peak of their learning capacities.
 Request goes to city council for a final reading at their Tuesday meeting.
 In other action, the planning commission recommended approval of a request to vacate several feet from between the Florida Plaza land to meet commercial and industrial traffic. Baker and the owner wants to develop the property, but first he must have the alley vacated.

Pre-School Schooling Approved
 Titusville will have a "pure" Montessori school in September. The city council Tuesday night granted Mr. and Mrs. Donald Kierstead permission to operate the private school in R-1 zone. This was the last hurdle the Kiersteads had to encounter before the fall opening.
 The school will be located at 2205 Old Dixie Highway on the North side of Judson Avenue. The Montessori system of education teaches four- and five-year olds the elements of reading and writing. It will be the only school of this kind in the area.



An Absorbing Method
 Mrs. Don Kierstead, 1220 Thoreau St., Titusville, is her daughter, Michelle, 3. (Brevard will be the administrator of Brevard's first Montessori School for preschoolers. Shown with her first Photo by Gene Blyth)

This was before we had any Montessori equipment, so the USA TODAY reporter had us stage this scene in our breakfast nook — with me, our older daughter, a cute little pitcher, and a book! Eventually, both Michele and our younger daughter, Nichole, attended the school. (Nichole started at age 2, after several attempts to join the carpool, along with her sister. Once allowed into the class — she loved it!)