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—Star photo by Dick Gerrard

Trustee K. Dock Yip contends in the letter below that programs for 3 year olds in Toronto's inner-city would be a sound investment. Above, Barbara Rod-

rigoe leads a York Montessori Nursery School class at Eglinton United Church. A similar project is to be opened on Jan. 4 at Sackville Public School.

'Pre-school programs are needed most in the inner-city'

To the editor of The Star:

Any attempt to cure poverty that does not have education as its main thrust is doomed to failure. If all the children in Toronto's inner-city core were educated, in 15 years we could wipe out poverty. But we must begin at the beginning.

It was Maria Montessori, a medical doctor in Italy, who first advocated the idea of pre-school education for the disadvantaged. A woman of tremendous drive, she devoted most of her boundless energy and talents to the educational and social rehabilitation of culturally disadvantaged children between the ages of 3½ and 6. These children, assumed to have normal mental potential, came from the slum sections of Rome to her *casa dei bambini* (house of childhood), the first of which was opened in 1907.

A review of the specialized literature on disadvantaged homes indicates some interesting information: 1. Brain power develops from eating foods high in protein content. Therefore, during pregnancy it is wise for a woman to have a high protein diet. And we must feed children more protein food in their formative years. Children in poverty often eat a lot of potato chips, which are low in protein. But this is an educational problem; the parents often do not know better.

2. Benjamin Bloom, the distinguished researcher in child development, claims that a child attains 50 per cent of his mental development from birth to age 4; 35 per cent from

4 to 8; and the rest from 8 onward. Dr. Donald Hebb of McGill University and other child development specialists agree that a child undergoes his greatest intellectual, emotional, speech and social development before he is 5 or 6. During these early years much of his knowledge is gained independently, provided that he has the opportunity for stimulation, variety and challenge. Poverty tends to decrease the range of stimulation and challenge which the child can experience.

3. A child must have love. One of the recognized causes for children's failure to thrive is maternal deprivation. These children fail to grow and develop because of the lack of maternal love. Infants in orphanages of the past who were neglected except for feeding, were found to die as result of lack of love. Poverty tends to interfere with expressions of love.

Margaret Wettlaufer, director of kindergartens for the Toronto Board of Education, has this to say: "A good early childhood education can be improved through the provision of adequate pre-kindergartens. To include the education of 3-year-old children in the public schools would be of great advantage, since their education should be developmental and continuous. Many young children come to school with limited language skills and are handicapped throughout their school years by this early disadvantage. Accordingly, the program for 3 year olds must provide a rich environment that encour-



Trustee K. Dock Yip

ages listening and speaking as a prerequisite to reading and writing.

"If a program of early education is to be fully effective, it has to be related to a parent program. This may take the form of conferences, home visits and invitations to the parent to become involved in the classroom."

It is my feeling that pilot projects for 3 year olds could be initiated in the city. There are at least two well set-up junior kindergartens in Toronto that are not being used to their maximum capacity, and could easily be opened to children under 4. Staffing of a classroom for 3 year olds would require three adults: One would have to be a highly qualified

teacher of young children; one a suitable paid lay helper; and one a parent volunteer.

In an inner-city community, as many parents as possible should be involved on a volunteer basis. The involvement of parents is highly desirable in order to increase their understanding of child development, to help them become an integral part of the school environment, and to assist the teacher in giving increased individual attention.

In Toronto, we also have the York Montessori Nursery Schools. Unfortunately, these schools are all located in the more affluent parts of the city, and the fees for a half-day session range from \$335 to \$575 a year. Obviously this is quite out of reach for the parents of children who need this kind of education most.

At the request of the York Montessori Nursery School, the Toronto Board of Education is furnishing a basement room at the Sackville Public School for a voluntary nursery school. This school will be open to 3-year-old children living in the King and Parliament area, and is scheduled to begin on Jan. 4. It is hoped that Dr. E. Wright and his research staff of the Toronto board will assess and evaluate the experience of this project.

Pre-school programs would aid in helping to ease the trauma experienced by the immigrant child in entering the school system, and would ease the emotional strain related to the learning process. This may relate specifically to schools in ethnic

areas. In the Kensington Community School project, the community is being involved in planning a school that will meet its needs. Preliminary discussions have indicated that many want some type of pre-school education.

The Toronto school board solicitor advises me that under the Schools Administration Act a child does not have the right to attend junior kindergarten in a school until he is about 4 years of age. As a result, he considers that school boards do not have the right to operate nursery or pre-school classes. It is my understanding that the provincial government is at present revising the education act, and it is my hope that the school enrolment age will be lowered to 3 years in order to accommodate the pre-school program.

Such programs need not necessarily be located in the schools. The church and community centres may operate the programs, but they must be under the guidance of persons who possess kindergarten training.

In my opinion, the spending of moneys for the education of inner-city and ethnic children is the soundest investment our society can make. No longer will we have to spend large sums for retraining, for institutional care, and for welfare. By investing now, our society will reap the dividends of a sound, self-sustaining citizenry tomorrow.

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