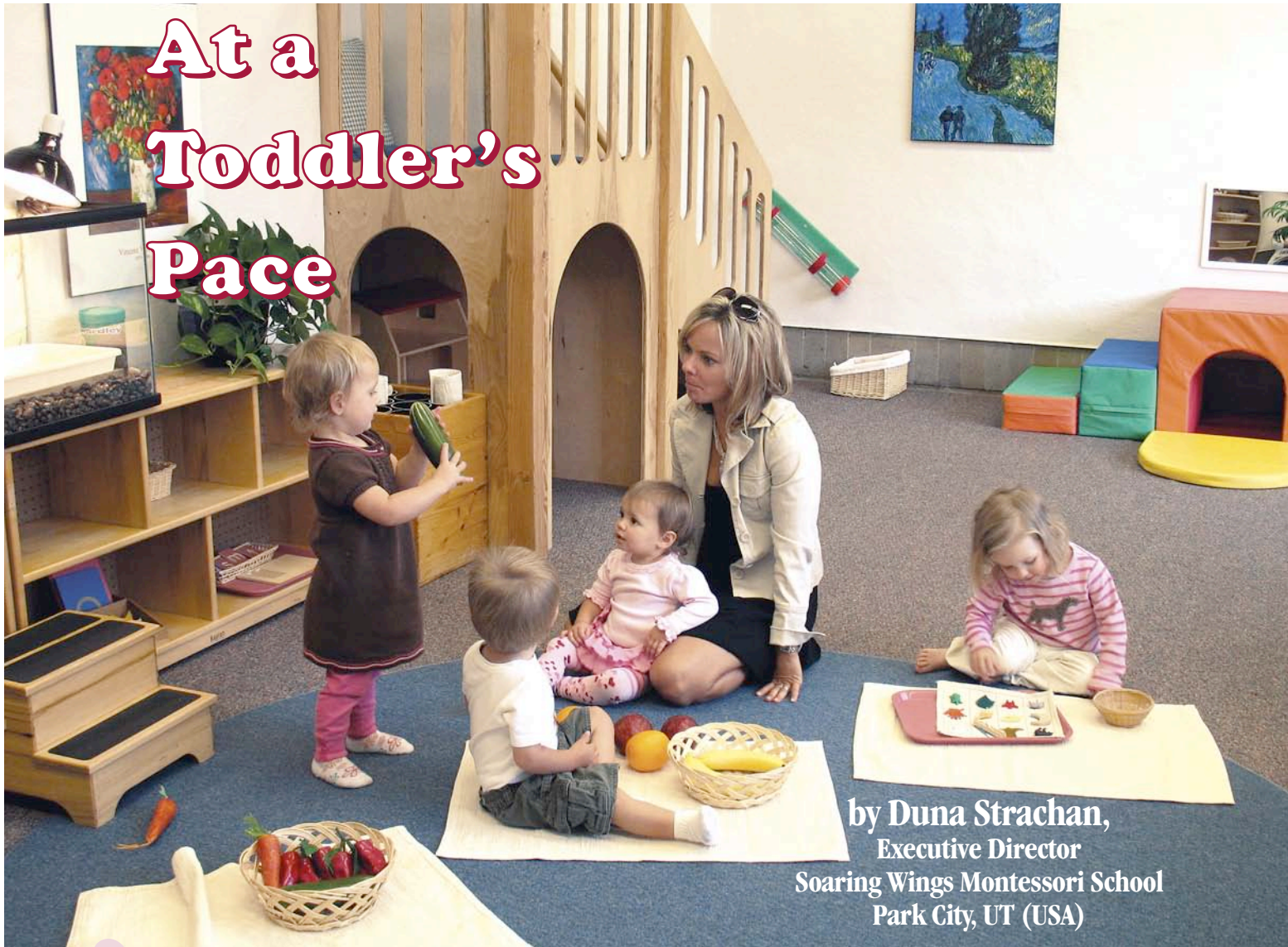


At a Toddler's Pace



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At Soaring Wings Montessori School, in Park City, Utah, the Sunflower Class is in session. A two-year-old finds a quiet corner to look at a book and gaze out the window. An eighteen-month-old is feeding the pet rabbit. Two three-year-olds are putting on jackets in preparation for going outside to sweep the patio. Another three-year-old is carefully matching photo cards of a variety of fish.

Across town in the Snowy Owls Class, the day is off to a similar start. A child paints a fan for the upcoming Asian celebration. Another arranges a Japanese rock garden, while another practices Japanese calligraphy.

In both classes one notices the quiet industry of these young students. Art, music, and plants create a rich and peaceful background. The placement of furnishings and activities evidence the many hours teachers have spent composing these classrooms with their particular students in mind. But you don't notice the adults in the room until one of them steps in to assist a student.

Lead teacher, Leah Linebarger says, "Montessori compares the teacher-child relationship to the valet and his master. The teacher's responsibility is to serve the spirit of the child. The way she does this is through an ongoing process of preparation and observation. The teacher prepares the environment in accordance with the developmental needs of the child. The child is never forced to interact with his environment. If the materials in the environment are enticing and provide the appropriate level of challenge, they will call to the child's senses. The teacher, as the valet, only responds when asked and does so with haste, offering feedback in a positive manner only when it is beckoned for. The child

will build his self confidence based on validation. If he can do this from within, any need to be validated by others will subside. The observant teacher will know how to foster this development. A well-prepared environment allows the teacher optimal observation opportunities and the children optimal opportunities to interact with their environment."

Genevive picks up the paint brush and carefully traces the shapes of the Japanese letters. Grayson organizes each pebble around a miniature bridge as he designs a small Japanese garden. Ted is finishing his snack of rice balls, kelp, and Asian pears. Owen tries on the Chinese lion mask (see page 3) as Griffin plays the little Chinese drum rhythmically to the background music. The class will lead the Asian Celebration through the halls of the school, knocking on doors and inviting each class to step in behind with instruments and colorful Chinese lion costumes. Two or three toddlers opt out of the parade, leery of the noise and change in routine. But most enjoy the celebration and will recreate it for days afterward in class. In the midst of a quiet work period, three students march around the room in a circle playing rhythm instruments. Others look up, "Ah, yes," their expressions seem to say, "there goes the Asian Celebration again." And they resume their work.

