



Monica Munoz works with four-year-old Eric Austin who is learning the Spanish language through skills doing everyday play activities at the Spanish Montessori learning centre.

Herald photo  
by David Rossiter

## Spanish Montessori catching on

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**W**ord has gotten out about the Spanish Montessori Learning Centre on 3 Avenue South, but there's still room for more children.

Director Monica Munoz opened the centre six months ago — the realization of a life-long dream to run her own Montessori school — and now has 27 youngsters from babies to six years old. Of the 27, only two have parents who hail from Spanish-speaking countries.

"The others are all Canadian, English-speaking children," Munoz smiled.

Her staff is a rainbow of talent as colourful and interesting as the nature scenes painted on the windows. They hail from Peru, Brazil, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Colombia — and Canada. All have early childhood certification, but most have other backgrounds that bring the children a wealth of diversity. One is a social worker, another an agronomist. There's an arts grad who speaks three languages and two who are keenly interested in further Montessori training.

The centre is licensed for 40 children, including eight babies (there are five

infants now). It's bright and cheery, with inviting Montessori manipulatives the children love to play with — and happen to learn at the same time. Toys and games that make up other centres include the daily life area, where kids can learn about food preparation and household chores.

"The parents come for the language as well as the Montessori," Munoz said. "They want the children to learn Spanish, but they learn so much more. Sometimes people have called to ask if it's OK that their children don't speak Spanish and we tell them of course it is, it's OK to bring them in. We respect the language. We are teaching the kids — they learn their numbers, they learn their letters, they learn Spanish — I want the community to know that's what we're doing here. We are not babysitters here."

Munoz was a teacher for 16 years, in Colombia (South America), in Montreal and in the U.S. She and her husband saved and have planned for years toward their goal and now, with globalization creating a desire for people to become bi- or multi-lingual, the time seemed right. She has a master's degree in special education and fell in love with the Montessori method early on. In addition to the Spanish immersion daycare, the centre is prepared to offer services before and after school, if numbers warrant. She

can offer after-school education assessment and help with school work and summer programming.

"We will soon be ready to offer adult Spanish classes," she added. Details to come.

Lethbridge parents and educators have long been believers in the Montessori method. A private preschool and kindergarten, Lethbridge Montessori School has flourished for years and the public school district has embraced the concept enough to offer Montessori instruction in two schools. Fleetwood Bawden has Montessori classes for Grades 1 through 5 and Gilbert Paterson offers it for Grades 6 and 7.

Spanish language is still not as widespread in the schools, however. Munoz hopes that as the years go by there will be more opportunities for her students so their Spanish skills don't fade away. Spanish is available as an option only in high school, which is why she has planned the adult Spanish classes, to be held evenings at the centre.

Munoz is excited for spring, when she can get started on preparing a garden space in the centre's back yard, so the children can learn to grow vegetables.

SMLC is located at 1208 3 Ave. S. For information call 403-524-3436 or 403-593-2344.