

Waldorf School rejects 'must-learn,' encourages exploration



Seventh- and eighth-graders move to music in a eurythmy class at Cincinnati Waldorf School, located in Winton Place.

TEACHING BY ARTS

TEACHING BY ARTS

STORY BY DENISE SMITH AMOS ■ PHOTOS BY CARRIE COCHRAN

The Cincinnati Waldorf School runs counter to trends in education. While Ohio requires that kindergartners in public school be "reading ready" by first grade, Waldorf lets youngsters learn to read at their own pace, even if it takes until third grade.

While many schools limit or cut recess, Waldorf gives two outside recesses a day, rain or shine.

And when elementary schools de-emphasize music and the arts in favor of subjects on standardized tests, Waldorf teaches music all eight years, including strings beginning in fourth grade and choir in third.

Students also take woodworking, a form of dance called eurythmy, knitting and other creative courses.

Cincinnati Waldorf uses arts and imagination rather than textbooks and technology to teach.

Jodi Simon, a senior computer systems analyst from Fairfield, has two children at the tiny private school.

"School is not so much about learning factual information," she said. "It's about how you figure out how to learn and make good decisions, how you conceptualize and imagine."

That philosophy is obvious in Waldorf's textbooks. There aren't any until sixth grade, when students can think critically, school officials say.

Instead, students create their own "textbooks" that look like art portfolios. Students draw pictures, maps and graphics to illustrate lessons, often pairing them with essays, poetry or other creative writing.

IN THE SCHOOLS



Sarah Bates is a seventh-grader in the school that uses lessons in knitting, woodworking and clay modeling to teach larger lessons about exploration and problem solving.

A book from a sixth grade geometry lesson bears quotes from Shakespeare and Alexander Pope along with colorful geometric shapes and formulas for calculating angles.

Most Waldorf teachers have visual or performing arts skills. They draw maps and pictures on blackboards — no high-tech electronic white boards here — to emphasize themes of study.

See **WALDORF**, Page B5

BY THE NUMBERS

1973

year founded in Cincinnati

184

enrollment of Cincinnati Waldorf

170

about the number of Waldorf schools in North America

ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Located: Winton Place

Affiliated: The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America.

Tuition: \$7,990 to \$8,300 for grades 1-8, \$3,000 - \$5,000 for nursery through kindergarten. About 45 percent of students get financial assistance.

Philosophy: Rudolph Steiner, an Austrian, founded the school after World War I to educate children's body, soul and spirit based on their stages in development.

Courses: There are morning, two-hour "main lessons" which focus on academic areas and switch every several weeks. In addition to academics, the schools teach movement, handicrafts, music, art, knitting, crocheting, sewing, clay modeling, singing, painting and music.



VIDEO ONLINE: GO TO CINCINNATI.COM FOR A VIDEO OF THE SCHOOL



Photos by Carrie Cochran/The Enquirer

Jacob Bennings, a second-grader, hands off a ball of string to Adam Hendricks (left). At right is Sahaja Pandey.

Waldorf: Arts and music aid learning

From Page B1

"We try to make an emotional, imaginative connection with the child, instead of saying 'Open your textbooks,'" said Lori Kran, who teaches sixth grade.

"We do things based on our picture of child development. But at the end, I know my eighth grade children will be able to enter Walnut Hills or any high school," she said.

Waldorf teachers stick with students from first grade through eighth. Kran, whose PhD is in history, has taught her students to play wooden flutes, which they use daily.

"Sometimes I play it by ear. I get a lot of (teaching) ideas from them since we know each other so well," she said.

Currently, her math lessons focus on money and commerce. Kran used a story of an enterprising sailor who got the inhabitants of three Mediterranean islands to barter, creating an economy.

The students drew pictures and wrote letters in the voice of the sailor. Then students set up their own small businesses as fundraisers, offering photography, baked sweets, Indian food and violin lessons for sale.

In a fifth grade class, students drew colorful detailed maps of northeastern states in their "textbooks" and began creating short stories about characters who travel across states.

"Children write their own books, and they become works of art," said Christine Masur, marketing director and parent of two Waldorf students.

"Textbooks are a little boring," said Gus Merrill, an 11-year-old sixth-grad-

er from Pleasant Ridge. His books, he said, "are more creative. You get to put what you want into it."

The school uses eurythmy — timed movements to music — and other physical methods to reinforce academics while sharpening concentration and cooperation.

Students recently practiced geometry with their bodies, moving to music to form geometrical shapes.

A second-grade math class stepped and clapped while counting by twos, threes and fours — the building blocks for learning to multiply.

Paul Darwish, a Blue Ash parent, removed his daughter from a Sycamore school after first grade because she stressed out about homework and timed math tests, he said.

"She has a beautiful mind, but she hated school," he said. Now she's in third grade at Waldorf.

"She's learning different things, but if she were tested against (her Blue Ash peers) using traditional methods, she wouldn't test that well," he said. "But we have a strong belief in the long run. She has a good sense of numbers."

Alan Frager, a professor at Miami University's Department of Teacher Education, says schools don't need to follow timetables and textbooks to effectively reach youngsters. He says most schools put education on artificial schedules to achieve learning "efficiencies," but that can be harmful.

"There's damage to kids who don't learn to read in that first year" he said. "They start to see themselves as failures. And that makes learning to read harder later on."