

The Language and Music School

Founder and Coordinator, Maria Emilia Fermi-Crawford Ph.D.

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A Parent Review, by Toria Burrell-Hrencecin



Maria Fermi and my daughter
at the LMS, September 2007.

While searching the web for a good pre-school to send my 3 ½ year old daughter I was lucky enough to discover the **Language and Music School in Oak Park**. Why I am writing this? No-one has asked or even suggested the idea. I'm simply writing out of love and enthusiasm for this school and a desire to share my discovery with others.

Unique: The Language and Music School is unlike any other pre-school I've found (It's much *more* than just a pre-school: it offers **Pre K** and **Kindergarten** level curriculums and a unique **Spanish immersion** and **music program**.) The first thing that attracted me was

the **emphasis on music**. (Being a musician myself, I wanted my daughter to have the opportunity to learn piano and have a strong musical introduction.) The second thing was the idea of **Spanish immersion**. They teach all the regular topics: colors, numbers, days of the week, weather, nature, animals, seasons, etc, but all in Spanish! It's a wonderful **combination of Spanish and music**: singing songs for each stage of the day, e.g. a song for washing hands, a song for eating snack, a song for putting away musical instruments, etc, and all in Spanish. And not "bad" singing either; I've been to many a "mom + tot" music class and cringed while the teacher "sings" out-of-tune. Here, we are talking **talented, degreed music-teachers**, playing the guitar, piano and singing tunefully!

Early Learning Window: I've read plenty of books and articles on early learning (and experienced it myself as a child). I whole-heartedly agree with Maria Fermi's philosophy: that there is a precious window of time between 0 and 5 years old, when children are open like sponges to absorbing languages, not only their native one, but foreign ones too, and music (as another "language"). **Brain development** during these years has been shown to increase dramatically when the child is immersed in or exposed to foreign languages and/or music. Everything learnt during this time stays for life! It builds the **solid foundation for future learning**. And the beauty of it is, children don't even realize they are learning: it is not "studying" in the sense of hard work and grind: it is purely absorption. Through the process of playing and having fun, they are naturally picking up foreign languages and music, and at some point, the learning process "clicks" so that it becomes automatic, and so much easier for them to study later on when they are older.

So I was already sold on the concept of this school and decided to try it for my daughter last September, 2007. And now, 7 months later, I am more than just satisfied that I made this decision: I am thrilled and overjoyed! Everything about this school is wonderful, and in my opinion, much *better* than the average pre-school. (My daughter has also attended *two* other regular local pre-schools, so I have something to compare it with).

Easy scheduling: A busy mother's dream: this school allows you to **customize** your child's hours and days to suit you and your family. Their **flexible schedule** allows you to make changes as you go along. For example, in the beginning, I decided to try 2 days a week, for the 3-hour morning period. Then I increased my daughter's time to 3 days a week, mornings only. Now, I have increased her time there again to 3 full days a week, for the morning *and* afternoon periods. You can choose anything from 1 to 5 days a week, mornings (**9.30-12.30pm**), afternoons (**12-3pm**), or full days (**9.30-3pm**). Also, if you have to miss days due to vacations, appointments, bank holidays, etc, you can schedule make-up days.

Easy registration: Another unique feature: you can (more or less) **drop in** at any time throughout the year (depending on space). For example, I did not register my daughter until August 2007, and was relieved that they had spaces for her to start in September, only a month later! This was so easy compared with the usual 6 month-to-1-year-in-advance registration required for most pre-schools.

Day Care: (**8am-5.30pm Wed, Thurs, Fri. 8am-3pm Mon + Tues**). In addition to the regular pre-school hours, they also offer before and after school day care. This works out really well for me: on two days a week, my daughter stays just one extra hour after school until 4pm. She loves the days she stays until 4pm, when she gets to play more 1-on-1 with her favorite teacher.

Academic strength: I'm amazed at how well my daughter is doing at this school. She has taken to Spanish like a duck to water! In fact, because of her increasing use of Spanish at home, I *myself* became inspired to take adult lessons in Spanish too. (**Adult lessons in 10 languages** and dozens of **instruments** are also offered at this school!) It has enriched both of our lives so much to be able to communicate in another language. I can see many ways in which my daughter's reasoning skills, creativity, ability to think and make sense of her world, problem solve and empathize have all been enhanced by her understanding and use of another language. I can feel my own brain being stretched and enlivened by the study of Spanish too. Learning anything new is always exciting, but the study of another language opens up many new, unexpected doors of thought, reasoning and understanding of life.

Reading and writing skills: Not officially "taught" in most pre-schools, this is not something they avoid at the LMS, I'm glad to say. If your child is ready for it, they will encourage it. Their program includes **Pre K and Kindergarten curriculums**, as well as pre-school. My daughter is already showing a natural desire and ability to read and write, not in *any* way pressurized by me, but simply from her curiosity and enthusiasm for what she is doing. What's really impressive: this school **tailors its curriculum** to suit each individual child, no matter what their abilities. Earlier this year, I was concerned that my daughter ought to be going to "official Kindergarten" soon because of her academic readiness. I began looking around for private Kindergartens and Montessori schools where she could be encouraged to learn at the Kindergarten level. But I need not have worried: Maria Fermi was already aware of her advanced skills, and was already stretching her and encouraging her to read, write and do extra little assignments while waiting for the other kids to catch up. Therefore, I'm relieved and happy that my daughter is in the right place and will be staying at this school for another year.

After school classes: (**Wed, Thurs + Fri**). Even when your child is past pre-school or kindergarten, they can continue coming to this school in the evenings or weekends, for private instrument and/or language lessons and recitals. I'm certainly envisaging my daughter continuing on here for her piano lessons and other music or language-related activities.



Music strength: The music program at this school is of the highest quality. They offer **private instrument lessons**, built in to the school day, so I started my daughter off with piano lessons in September 2007. She has a half hour, 1-on-1 piano lesson every Friday, in-between the morning and afternoon school sessions. There are a number of piano teachers to choose from. She has **Denise Trautman**, a kind, young, enthusiastic teacher who is great with the youngest kids.

(Denise also teaches flute and French among other things). My daughter performed her first solo recital in December 2007, and will be participating in the IMS music competition this May. Music is an integral part of this school's curriculum, whether or not you sign up for private instrument lessons. I've found there's no need for extra-curricular music activities now, since so much is on offer here.

Special needs / Special Education: If my daughter had been anything like my son (who has autism) this school would *still* have been the perfect choice. My son was not ready for regular pre-school when he was 3. He had a learning delay and still has special education services at age 8. If I had known Maria Fermi when he was pre-school age, I know he would have benefited greatly from her school. Maria has a special interest in and knowledge of learning and behavioral challenges, such as autism, ADHD, bi-polar disorder, etc, and has worked with these kids for many years, through music therapy and special education. I can see how the structure of her classroom and curriculum is well suited to the autistic or special needs child, as well as the regular child. In fact, children with extra difficulties get more attention and help from her here, and thrive under her genuine love, interest and enthusiasm for them. Even though my son doesn't attend her school, Maria has taken an interest in him, offering me support and advice from her expertise and knowledge.

Maria Fermi, Founder and Coordinator: An excellent school like this is clearly the product of an amazing person like Maria, with brilliant ideas, inspiring vision, energy, enthusiasm, talent and dedication. The teachers that work with her are also talented and dedicated to the school, and the office staff that greet you upon arrival are friendly and fun to work with. It's not surprising that this entirely independent school has flourished successfully for 14 years. Parents and children are clearly carrying the benefits away and spreading the word too. All the other parents I've spoken to speak very highly of Maria. She simply injects positive energy into everything and everyone she encounters. From the warm, loving way she greets each child personally, as they enter the classroom, to the kind, open way she listens to each parent as they talk to her of their concerns, to the wonderful, musical songs, dances and lessons she creates daily, Maria is indeed an inspiration.

Many more details about the classes, schedules, teachers and curriculum can be found in their brochure or on their web-site:

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