

President's Corner

Pat Moore

This fall the Michigan Montessori Society welcomes Mary Lamos as the new president of the MMS Board. Mary has previously served very successfully as President. She is the owner and administrator of Downriver Montessori and has served on the MMS Board since 2001 in many different capacities. She is dedicated to serving the Montessori community, especially in our latest quest to address the State Star Rating system as it effects Montessori education.

It is with deep appreciation, that we thank retiring board member Cathe Calder for her numerous years of service to the Michigan Montessori Society. She has been a Board member for many years and served as President for a number of those years. Most recently, she has been the editor of the MMS newsletter She has graciously hosted MMS Conferences at her beautiful school-- Meadow Montessori in Monroe. Her dedication, knowledge and commitment to MMS have made a positive impact on Montessori in Michigan. We know that Cathe will continue to support our efforts in Michigan.

Welcome to our new Board Member, Cyndi Iannuzzi. Cyndi has been a Montessori teacher for over twenty years and has Primary credentials from AMS and AMI. She teaches at Montessori Children's Academy in Clinton Township and recently gave a workshop on the Implementation of Practical Life at Lunch at our Best Practices workshop.

Fall Workshop

Please join us November 2nd for our fall workshop: **How Brain Science Supports Montessori Wisdom.** Early registration ends October 24th.

Michigan Montessori Society Welcomes New Board Member!



Cyndi Iannuzzi began her Montessori journey in 1991 when she became AMS certified. She taught in Michigan for 4 years before moving to San Diego California where she taught for 4 years. She moved back to Michigan in 1998 and began teaching at Montessori Children's Academy where she currently teaches. She has just completed her AMI training at the Montessori Training Center of St. Louis.

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Cursive Handwriting:

How Important Is It?

Cursive Handwriting: How Important Is It? Many of us would answer: "Very important!" While Montessorians have deliberated for years whether children should learn to write first in cursive or print, we've all thought cursive was an essential skill. Now there is a lively debate occurring in the field of education about whether, in this age of technology, cursive handwriting is necessary at all.

Cursive is not required by the national educational Common Core Standards. Many states across the country are removing or reducing cursive instruction from the curriculum while only a few states have deliberated and decided to keep it. What's the best way to respond when parents ask why handwriting is a key component of the Montessori environment? Montessori discovered the importance of learning through movement and the senses. Research corroborates the vital hand/brain connection, proving that new pathways in the brain develop as children use their hands to explore and interact with the world. Of course it doesn't need to be an either/or decision: children can be computer literate and learn cursive.

Research Shows the Value of Learning Cursive Fascinating new research points out the benefits of cursive writing for cognitive development. One study concluded that elementary students need at least "15 minutes of handwriting daily for cognitive, writing and motor

skills and reading comprehension improvement." A recent article in *Psychology Today* cited research which shows that:

- Students "wrote more words, faster, and expressed more ideas when writing es says by hand versus with a keyboard." This study included second, fourth, and sixth graders.
- "Cursive writing helps train the brain to integrate visual (and) tactile information, and fine motor dexterity."
- The regions of the brain that are activated during reading were "activated during hand writing, but not during typing."

Learning to Write: Cursive or Print?

"Written language can be acquired more easily by children of four years than by those of six. While children of six usually need at least two years to learn how to write, children of four years learn this second language within a few months."

—Maria Montessori

Observers of Montessori schools are often astonished by the beautiful cursive hand of four- and five-year-old children. Montessori noted that the straight and oblique lines of printing were more difficult for children to form than cursive. The uninterrupted movements of the hand may make cursive letters easier for children to form, and for this reason, some Montessori primary classrooms introduce children to cursive sandpaper letters first. Other Montessori schools wait to teach

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cursive to lower elementary students. Some non-Montessori reading experts have begun teaching cursive before printing, because they find that cursive instruction improves literacy outcomes for many students and that “the connections between letters required in cursive writing may reduce letter reversals.”

Whether we begin by teaching print or cursive, it’s clear that it is a very different process to touch a key and see a letter appear on a screen, than it is to develop the skills and brain/hand connections necessary to be able to write that letter yourself.

“We directly prepare the child, not only for writing, but also for penmanship, paying attention to the beauty of form (having the children touch the letters in script form)...”

—Maria Montessori, *The Montessori Method*

In the Montessori primary classroom, children trace the Sandpaper Letters with their fingers and often draw letters in a sand tray or on an easel or chalkboard. As they progress, children can copy onto paper the words and sentences they build with the Movable Alphabet.

In the 1950s, my aunt in Nebraska had never heard of Montessori. Searching for a way to help her struggling students form letters, she poured sandy cat litter into a box and encouraged the children to draw letters with their fingers in this material. They loved it!

Handwriting across the curriculum is encouraged in the Montessori classroom. Older children write their own poems, stories, and research reports. One of the best ways for children to learn geography, history, science, and even math, is to work with the materials and write about it (with a pencil!)

Older children are also fascinated with learning to write with a quill pen or Chinese calligraphy

brush. Teaching elementary-age children different scripts, such as italics, and showing them illuminated manuscripts with decorated capital letters can inspire students to view handwriting as an art form. Teachers have reported that their students’ own cursive writing improved after working with calligraphy pens and different scripts.

“We Are Writers!”

I once had the pleasure of teaching at a Montessori school in an extremely diverse community where over 30 languages were spoken. One day during recess, two eight-year-old boys from my class - one whose mother tongue was Tagalog and the other whose first language was Mandarin - were perched at the top of the jungle gym waving sticks in the air and tapping them on the highest bar with great enthusiasm.

They shouted to me: “Guess who we are? Guess who we are? “

Expecting that they were pretending to be gun-wielding superheroes, I walked over to get a better look. Before I could speak, they called out: “We are writers! And we are writing the next Goosebumps book.” (At that time Goosebumps books were as popular as Harry Potter.)

Again the boys flourished their sticks and now I could clearly see their proud faces, fingers holding their sticks in the proper pencil grip, the cursive writing flowing across the top of the monkey bars.

— **by Irene Baker, MEd, Montessori Educational Consultant at Montessori Services.** *She holds both primary (ages 3-6) and elementary (ages 6-12) Montessori certifications and has taught at all three levels. For over 15 years, she has served as a Montessori teacher-trainer for both primary and elementary levels and has presented workshops for teachers at schools and AMS national conferences. Her work with both students and teachers is infused with the knowledge she has gained from her passions: history, social justice, non-violent (compassionate) communication, nature, meditation, music, and poetry.*

Alphabet Soup – LMNO.....PQA?

Karen Lumsden

The state of Michigan, along with most other states, is in the process of putting in place a QRIS (Quality Rating Improvement System) for all licensed preschools. These rating systems are designed to assess programs that serve young children with the aim of improving those preschools thereby providing high quality early childhood educational experiences. These QRIS programs use a rating instrument to score the quality standards of classrooms and practices. While they purport to evaluate ‘Best Practices’ from an objective position with regards to the wide variety of philosophies (Montessori, Regio Emilio, Waldorf, Head Start, High Scope, etc), some instruments do not sufficiently take into consideration the various manifestations of the quality indicators in these other philosophies. Unfortunately, the current

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Alphabet Soup, continued

instrument being used in Michigan, the PQA, is not entirely Montessori friendly.

The PQA (Preschool Quality Assessment) was developed by High Scope. Their web site includes the following information:

“The Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a rating instrument designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs.

The Preschool PQA is reliable and valid and is appropriate for use in all center-based early childhood settings, including but not limited to those using the HighScope educational approach.

The Preschool PQA is an all-in-one program evaluation system with the following features:

- Assesses key aspects of program quality
- Reflects research-based and field-tested best practices in early childhood education and care
- Can be aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards
- Provides reliable, scientifically validated assessment proven in a wide range of early childhood programs and settings
- Can be used as a basis for program accreditation, reporting, monitoring, and training”

A few of the problems an authentic Montessori program might encounter with the PQA are as follows:

Materials in the environment must be labeled to promote literacy. Having the children labeling

those materials does not satisfy the requirement. The materials must be “open-ended.” If the child is shown how to use the materials and expected to do so in the prescribed manner, they are not “open ended.” Providing duplicates of materials is considered a quality indicator. One pink tower is not sufficient for the highest quality rating.

The children must participate in a “planning” and “review” sessions to verbalize what they will work with that day and what they accomplished. The highest scores will be given for snack procedures done in groups with the teachers conversing with the students. Individual snacks where the children converse with each other is not as desirable.

Adults should participate with the children in their outside and indoor play.

Home visits are required for high quality scores. The Michigan Montessori Society board has recognized that there are inherent problems with this instrument and has taken steps to speak on your behalf with the powers that be in Lansing. In January of this year, a letter was sent to the GSQ (Great Start to Quality) Committee, the group that oversees and is funding this process, and a meeting with the GSQ core team was held. The team was very impressed with the presentation given by the MMS representatives and they were happy to have the additional information provided. We were encouraged to move forward. To that end, the Michigan Montessori Educational Advocacy Network (MMEAN) was formed from a core group of board members and other Montessorians acting on your behalf. An Alignment Comparison was created between High Scope PQA quality indicators and the Montessori philosophy highlighting the areas of concern. Another meeting in March resulted in the High Scope backers delivering a document bolstering their position with regards to the appropriateness of the PQA’s application in Montessori programs. Unfortunately, the document was not made available to the MMEAN prior



According to the PQA, snack tables aren't desirable within the classroom.

to the meeting and so we were unable to immediately address our problems with their alignment document.

The Montessori Network (MMEAN) met again in July where other rating systems were discussed. It was found that the ECERS (Early Childhood Education Rating Scale) is a much more Montessori friendly instrument and is the one used in most states. In fact, Michigan is the only state utilizing the High Scope PQA. Among the systems discussed were PAS (Program Administration Scale), the CLASS (Classroom Assessment Scoring System), which evaluates the relationship between teacher and child and the MEECRS (Montessori

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What are “Groundrules?”

... and what purpose do they serve? Montessori people do lots of talking about groundrules, and children new to our programs have to learn about them. Parents are especially curious about what we require of their children to help them become “normalized.”

When children begin in a new school or even with a new teacher in the same school, their first task is to master the culture of the place—to find out what is expected of them in and out of the classroom, and to become comfortable with the routines. This is what groundrules are all about.

Classroom groundrules are the guidelines for behavior that serve as the foundation for the children’s activities in school. Their purpose is to provide the children with a secure world—one in

which all children (usually) adhere to the same “code of conduct” and in which the consistency makes them feel safe. Groundrules also protect the children from doing things which are harmful to themselves, to their friends and teachers, or to the classroom materials.

Groundrules are conveyed to the children in a variety of ways. They are sometimes discussed (for example, how we treat our friends); sometimes demonstrated to the group (showing how a completed activity is returned to the shelf); and sometimes rehearsed (practicing walking around rugs spread on the floor). Reinforcement is especially consistent at the beginning of the year when children are still forming their classroom habits. There is a lot to learn, and parents should respect the effort involved. It is not unusual for children to experience some stress during the acclimation period, but they quickly become comfortable, with a real sense of mastery.

Interestingly, most groundrules are the same for all school levels. Two-year-olds and twelve-year-olds alike have a similar structure, and their mini-society is much like our larger one. These “rules” are really guidelines for life.

Logistical fundamentals are often learned first. Getting into the building; managing coats and other possessions; using the toilet; and practicing such classroom basics as rolling and unrolling rugs and carrying trays occupy the orientation period. Children also learn to move through the building in safe fashion, and (gradually!) to take turns and listen when others are speaking.

Other typical groundrules for Montessori classrooms follow:

- Sound and speed levels should fit the location. “Inside voices” and “slow

feet” are right for the indoor environment; shouting and running are reserved for the playground.

- Children select materials from the display shelves, but do not work on the shelves; this would obstruct the other children’s access to things on the shelf. Activities may be done either on a rug (on the floor) or on a table—whichever is most suitable to the particular item.

- Children are free to choose materials from the shelves, and to use them respectfully. Materials may not be used in ways that are disturbing to other children, or that damage the materials themselves.

- When a child is finished using an activity, s/he returns it to the shelf, ready for the next user. This process might also involve wiping up spills (with a sponge that is provided with the activity) or replenishing supplies on the tray. The children also put away their rugs or mats, and push in their chairs so others don’t trip.

- Children may not touch or interfere with another child’s work. This rule provides every child with the security that will allow him or her to continue an activity to completion, to repeat the activity (thus lengthening attention span) or to leave the area temporarily with the confidence that s/he can return and resume working.

- Sharing is never forced. Rather, a child’s knowledge that the activity can be used indefinitely often leads

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A quiet walk at line time

“Groundrules,” continued

to a more natural sharing, and children who ask to be included usually are. (The appeal of working with friends is often greater than the pull of the activity when concerns about possession are eliminated.) However, the child’s right to work uninterrupted is protected, and s/he may choose to continue working independently. Generosity develops naturally as children mature and become more self-confident.

- Children are encouraged to join in group activities, but are not coerced into participation. They may observe the activity without actively participating, but they are not allowed to disrupt the other children.
- A child has the right to watch, so long as s/he is not disturbing the activities of others. Much learning takes place while observing others working—this is one of the special advantages of a mixed-age-group class.
- Children are expected to treat each other and their teachers with respect, both verbally and physically. Abusive words or actions are not acceptable. (Adult staff are role models for appropriate behavior.)

Parents who can remember their own school days and the sense of unrest when a substitute teacher was present will have some sense of the importance of groundrules to the children. A substitute usually meant a disruption of procedures (groundrules). Children in Montessori classrooms are very secure; they can trust the teachers to safeguard their rights by seeing that groundrules are observed.



Choosing a mat

Visitors to Montessori classrooms often remark about the comfortable atmosphere, the peaceful tone, and the industriousness of the children. Typically, visiting children are welcomed and assisted by the class. All of this comes about naturally when groundrules are followed consistently.

Ground rules, like many experiences in the Montessori classroom, prepare children to move comfortably into the world. Children that are secure in their classroom and understand that there is a time and place to delay personal gratification are welcomed into the larger society. Children that are able to invite others to join in and know how to withdraw gracefully create a comfortable environment for themselves and their peers. While Montessori education is often thought of primarily as an excellent academic program, the concept of ground rules assures that the children will not be challenged by the demands of the real world, but will be a part of the community that helps to move society to a more peaceful, accepting place.

Ground Rules for Camera Use in the Classroom

Kirsten Dusseau

Using digital photography and video in the classroom is a great way to document children’s work and share their learning with parents. A classroom camera or tablet device makes it easy to capture curriculum sequences, record reading samples, make running records, show focus and effort, and record a child’s progress over time. When working with older children, involving them in the documentation of their work can be quite productive, but in preschool the introduction of a camera or i-Pad can be disruptive to the cycle of activity. It is important to preserve the child’s sense of personal accomplishment and satisfaction. These are the guidelines I have developed in my classroom over the years.

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MMS Workshop – Nov. 2 – It’s Almost Here!



There’s still time to register for this fall’s MMS Workshop featuring Dr. Dee Coulter speaking on How Brain Science Supports Montessori Wisdom. This lecture combined with a panel of representatives from all Montessori levels will provide the audience an opportunity to learn

and have their questions answered. Early registration ends October 24. This workshop satisfies 5 hours of your continuing education requirement.

Camera, continued

- Bring out the camera sparingly at first, use it to quietly document from a slight distance during class.
- Keep the camera low so you can maintain eye contact with the room, put it down if a child stops working. Waiting until they resume work to pick up the camera will help them understand how to behave when being “documented”.
- When curious children ask, tell them you use the camera for pictures of children’s work because it is part of your job. Following the classroom rules of “watching” helps reinforce the dispassionate role of the camera.

Once children become accustomed to having their work documented, it is easier to get closer and choose your angle without causing a distraction.

- The presence of a device with a screen can be overwhelming to some preschoolers, so I do not share my screen to let them look at pictures or encourage chatting about their experience with apps and games. If I need to check through photos I do so privately at my rug, or at another time.
- Do not encourage children to pose for pictures as it tends to induce attention seeking across the room. I (almost) never photograph work upon completion, the almost-finished work better shows the process and allows the child finish independently.
- If a child repeatedly requests I come to their work with the intent of posing for me, I tell them to please



do keep working and I will be sure to document it when I get a chance. I gently state that I am taking pictures of children at work. Be sure to come back after the child has refocused, take a quick photo, then go back to documenting others without engaging or distracting the child. Try and give extra support or attention without the camera.

- Once the children realize it is their work you are watching, not them, they lose interest in the device and begin to again focus on what is in front of them. It then becomes possible to bring out the camera more frequently, and to observe the children more closely without causing any disruption to the classroom.

Alphabet Soup, Continued

Environment Early Childhood Rating Scale). We have also been in touch with AMS and have solicited their help in working toward a solution.

This topic is of vital interest to all of you. The MMEAN will meet this October to plan our next step in moving our state toward a rating system that will recognize the qualities we encourage in keeping with the Montessori philosophy. Please keep yourself informed about these developments and support your state organization as we seek to create a fair evaluation system that will recognize the wisdom and foresight that Maria Montessori shared with us. Shortly, MMS will be sending a survey to all Montessori schools in the state. The data gathered in this survey will help the advocacy group with their efforts in Lansing with the Great Start to Quality committee because it will show the number of employees, children and families affected. The Montessori Advocacy group hopes every school will answer the survey. It is critical to our effort to have the backing of everyone affected by this issue. It is up to each of us to work toward a regulatory system that does not require us all to produce a ‘one size fits all’ preschool program that ultimately will fit very few.