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## President's Corner

Dear Montessorians,

As the school year comes to an end, I hope you will all be able to take time think about new beginnings.

We tend to think of the end of the school year as a closing to our professional year; summer vacations, the flexibility of warm weather and summer events, the ease sets in quite readily and well deserved after a long winter. This cycle helps us recharge our batteries and draw renewed inspiration towards our craft.

The Michigan Montessori Society is a dynamic organization that offers various opportunities for professional growth throughout the year at an incredible value of just \$15. You may already be a member, and if so, you will soon have the opportunity to renew your membership. You will receive a packet in the mail in mid-June with all of the necessary forms for renewal.

The membership is valid from July 1, 2015 through June 30, 2016. If you are not a member, it's time to consider joining your network of Montessori professionals by going to <http://www.mmsoc.org/> to download the membership application. The cost of your membership will pay off when you attend either the Fall or Spring Workshop.

As always, the governing board of the Michigan Montessori Society is happy to serve you.



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**Mary Lamos, President**  
[Montessori Center of Downriver](#)  
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**Shawn Gasiorowski, Secretary**  
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 (248) 476-9660 (school)

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 248.646.1535

**Kirsten Dusseau**  
 Children's Place Montessori  
 (248) 476-9660

## Montessori School of Downriver

The Montessori Center of Downriver, located in the community of Southgate, is celebrating its 25 year anniversary this September. It is owned and operated by Mary Lamos. This well respected Montessori program began in a church basement with one preschool classroom. Their second home was a vacant elementary school in Southgate. Chormann Elementary offered much needed space where they grew to four 3 - 6 classrooms. During their time in this location they partnered with the Southgate Community Schools to transition their kindergarten graduates from Montessori into the public school multi-age program. They were able to offer placement to special needs children from the school district's Early Childhood Development program and transition them into the Montessori 3 to 6 year old classes. This partnership continued and the Montessori Center of Downriver prospered. When the school district disbanded their multi-age programs and transitioned Chormann



into a traditional public school, it was time to search for a permanent home for our growing school. A decision was made to build a school to meet our needs and construction began in March of 2007. With many hours of hard work by the entire staff, the school opened its doors in their new location at 15575 Northline in March of 2007. We are now able to offer a toddler class and three 3-6 classrooms. Currently, in addition to an authentic Montessori curriculum, the school offers sign language, music and art. Special activities like Grandparent's Day and Parents' Night help the families learn what Montessori is all about with the children as their guides. This school presents a joyful atmosphere which has led to a high staff retention rate providing a stable, secure environment for the children. The Montessori Center of Downriver continues to be a vibrant and ever evolving school.



## Normalization, Executive Function and Mindfulness

Our recent workshop featuring Cheryl Smith gave all in attendance a glimpse into the life of a devoted Montessori advocate. She shared stories, offered insights and encouraged us all to take pride in our chosen profession. She also spoke of Executive Functions and the connection with Montessori. The following articles were published by the North American Montessori Center. Their three part series offers information on Normalization, Executive Function and Mindfulness.

### Montessori Perspectives on Normalization - Part 1 of 3

Normalization "is the most important single result of our whole work." ~Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*, (Chapter 19)

I was looking at our local Montessori preschool's website today and noticed that they advocate parent involvement in the classroom after the children have "normalized". This got me thinking: parents who are familiar with the term 'normalized' would understand this, but new parents will not. It is a term that can cause confusion or unease if you are not sure what it means.

Normalization is the term Montessori used to refer to children who are able to concentrate and work freely in the Montessori environment, exercising self-discipline and peace. It is in no way meant to suggest that

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## Grandparents' Tea



In an attempt to reach out to our families, our school conceived of an event that has become a very popular occasion. Our Grandparent's Tea combines an opportunity for grandparents to visit the classroom, with a pleasant moment to enjoy a small snack with the "apple of their eye".

Preparations for our Tea begins with an invitation for grandparents to choose a 20 minute time slot during the morning class to come and visit. We found that allowing



two groups of grandparents per classroom per time slot is manageable. Our sign up sheet allows six visits per hour (2 for each 20 minute slot) which more than accommodates the number of grandparents able to attend at our school. The children whose grandparents will be visiting then meet with their teachers to choose three of their favorite activities to share with their grandparents. A plan is made and written down. The children are encouraged to choose tasks they enjoy and have a satisfactory degree of proficiency. During the week of the event, all the children participate in cookie making. The cookies



we have chosen are stamped cookies with a teapot on them. We have experimented with different recipes and different stamps, and found that the recipe found at the end of this article works well for us. We make many more cookies than are necessary for the grandparents as those without grandparents in attendance enjoy an afternoon tea with their teachers.

When the grandparents arrive, they are given an information sheet explaining what they will be seeing, questions they may wish to

ask, and giving guidelines that will make the visit pleasant for everyone, including the children's fellow students. The child then comes and invites his/her grandparents in to the room where chairs have been set up for them to allow an optimal view of the classroom as well as their own grandchild's work space.

They are able to sit and observe their grandchild working with his/her favorite activities. After the classroom experience, the children escort their grandparents to the lunch room where the Tea is set up. A cup of tea, a glass of milk and some tasty cookies are shared while conversation about the morning's activities ensues. At the end of the visit, the grandparents bring the child back to the classroom and depart.

We are lucky enough to have a collection of English bone china tea cups for this event, but if you don't, they can be found at garage / estate sales frequently.

If your school has a special event you would like to share with us, please do!



## MMEAN UPDATE

The Michigan Montessori Education Advocacy Network is steadily making headway toward our goal of making the Great Star Rating more Montessori friendly.

The last meeting was focused on the task of obtaining a significantly higher rating for Montessori credential. Currently, a Montessori certificate is rated the same as a CDA. The vast difference in time required between the two is the most significant factor in the argument for increasing the status of the Montessori certificate. We have decided to approach the problem from two fronts, through licensing and through legislation. If you know any state legislators that you believe may be willing to either sponsor or support a bill to increase the value of Montessori certification, please let us know. Our committee members are working on language we would like to see implemented. We currently are collecting information from other states to see how the Montessori Credential is treated elsewhere in the country. As several colleges in Michigan offer college credit for Montessori training, we will be contacting them to determine exactly how many credit hours each institution permits.

On another front, two representatives from MMEAN will be meeting with representatives from High Scope on May 13 to try to sort out some of the areas of disagreement with regards to how

Montessori schools are evaluated. The discussion will hopefully focus on the PQA portions that are incongruent with Montessori standards of quality and also examine the possibility of Montessori trained PQA classroom validators. It is hoped that we can show that our programs meet the goals through different means. If we can come to an agreement regarding our unique approach, it would most likely result in requiring additional training for evaluators, or possibly hiring evaluators that are already Montessori trained. Untrained evaluators have already visited some Montessori schools with unsatisfactory results. This problem has made the representatives from Great Start keenly aware of the problems that exist with the current PQA evaluation. We will keep you up to date on the progress as it develops.

On June 19, we will be meeting with Dale Hull who is a lobbyist advisor to determine the best direction for our group. Our efforts to align the state standards with Montessori activities is ongoing and we welcome anyone that would like to help with that effort.

The Michigan Montessori Education Advocacy Network is working to help keep authentic Montessori programs available for the children of the future. It is a crucial time. We must make our voices heard now or Montessori education as Dr. Montessori envisioned it will become a thing of the past.

## Cookie Recipe

### Ingredients

3/4 cup butter, softened  
1/4 cup sugar  
3 tablespoons honey  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon baking soda  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 1/2 cups flour  
1 cup oat flour

### Directions

- 1) Beat together the butter, sugar, honey, salt, baking soda, and vanilla until well combined.
- 2) Add the flour and oat flour, mixing to combine.
- 3) Divide the dough in half, flattening each half slightly to make a disk, then wrap in plastic. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
- 4) Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly grease several baking sheets, or line them with parchment.
- 5) Take one piece of dough out of the refrigerator, and turn it out onto a lightly floured surface. Roll the dough 1/4" thick.
- 6) Stamp and cut the cookies. Transfer the cookies to the prepared baking sheets.
- 7) Bake the cookies for 8 to 10 minutes, until lightly browned around the edges.
- 8) Remove the cookies from the oven, and let them cool on the baking sheet for several minutes, or until set.
- 9) Transfer the cookies on parchment to a rack to cool completely. Repeat with the remaining dough.



## Successful Classroom Gardening

Getting the children outdoors in spring is a joyful time for Michigan teachers. Early spring planting choices like lettuces, radishes, and peas can go directly by seed or seedling plant into an existing bed or outdoor container in May and provide harvest options before June graduation. Kids readily eat the pickings as a food prep work, washing and tasting while learning taste words like bitter, spicy, sharp. Pea pods are great to dissect and eat while learning about life cycle of a plant.

Kids love to discover edible flowers and leaves; many are easy to grow. Picking a flower and popping it in your mouth creates a surprise, and many kids are eager to try it. Pansies, violas, nasturtiums, and marigolds grow well in beds or containers.



*Violas are great for candying. Using a small paintbrush, brush both sides with egg white made from meringue powder. Then dip in superfine sugar and dry on parchment. A great practical activity.*



*Last year's lettuces went to seed and are coming up!*

An added bonus is that the seeds are easy to harvest and use for reseedling. Show the children how to pinch a ripe (dry) seed head and sprinkle the seeds around the plant to help it spread.

Perennials that are integrated into the landscape make for no maintenance opportunities to offer tasting and harvesting experiences. Berry plants will spread and grow well for summer harvest. Chives, mint, lemonbalm, lavender, and winter savory are easy to grow. A note of caution: lemonbalm and mint spread like crazy! Matching chopped or dried herbs with fresh makes a good activity for the sensorial shelf.

Many vegetables can be planted to be picked and enjoyed during a summer program, and most will still be flourishing when school starts in the fall. If children start seeds indoors they can be nurtured indoors till they

sprout, then transferred outdoors as soon as possible. The increasing hours of daylight and the strength and distance of natural sunlight help seedlings develop sturdy stems. I like to use peat pots (or they can make newspaper pots) then the children can place the filled pots in a window box with soil. The sprouts can go outside or inside with the weather, and then transfer outdoors permanently when weather allows.

While Michigan weather does present its challenges, gardening is still a viable option for your students. Plan ahead and give your children the joy of nurturing plants for food.

*Inch by inch, row by row,  
Gonna make this garden grow,  
Gonna mulch it deep and low,  
Gonna make it fertile ground,  
Inch by inch, row by row,  
Please bless these seeds I sow  
Please keep them safe below,  
Till the rains come tumbling down*

If you don't know the tune to this Pete Seeger song, check it out on the internet and teach it to your kids.



*Our asparagus is just beginning to appear.*

## *Normalization, continued*

children who are not able to do this are not normal. It simply means they are in a different stage of their development and personal journey.

Montessori said there were three stages each child goes through on the way to normalization. The first stage is when children do something because they want to. This is typical behavior of toddlers and two year olds. As the child matures, they move to stage two and do things when they are asked of them. The third stage is when the child does something because they know it is the right thing to do.

### **Stages of Normalization**

1. The child does something because they want to.
2. The child does something because he/she is asked to do it.
3. The child does something because they know it is right.

Children who are normalized not only know the ground rules, they follow them because doing so leads to peace and harmony in their environment. They are patient with themselves and others. Normalized children are respectful of all things, living and non-living. They exercise self-control and self-discipline. In short, normalized children are independent which leads to greater learning. "In the normalized child, his freedom to take an interest in all kinds of things, leads to his focusing his attention... on the knowledge he derives from them." *The Absorbent Mind*, (Chapter 22)

The Montessori environment is structured to lead the child naturally and gracefully through the stages of normalization. Normalization can neither be forced nor coerced. Each child is a unique individual with a unique timeframe of development. The Montessori materials were developed to help the child develop these necessary skills by presenting learning challenges incrementally. With repeated practice and built-in self-correction (also known as "control of error"), the child learns to develop his focus and concentration as well as developing a curiosity for what comes next. The Montessori teacher and parent is a gentle, loving presence who uses positive guidance and redirection to help the child acquire independence.

### **What is Executive Function? Montessori Perspectives - Part 2 of 3**

There appears to be a lot of talk about 'executive function' in children these days. In fact, Adele Diamond and Kathleen Lee have said that the executive functions of a child are better predictors at school readiness and success than IQ (Diamond and Lee). So, what is executive function and more importantly, how does it relate to Montessori?

Executive functions refer to those qualities that make people successful: self-control, discipline, flexibility, and creativity. Individuals with high levels of executive function have increased periods of concentration and working memory and are able to solve complex problems by implementing reasoning and good planning skills while those with low levels of executive function are impulsive, lack persistence, and

have poor attention spans.

According to Diamond and Lee, they are also more likely to experience health problems, earn less as adults, and have higher incidences of criminal behavior. (Diamond and Lee)

The description of executive function sounds very similar to Montessori's term "normalization". Children who have high executive function are able to work independently. They are respectful and demonstrate awareness and empathy.

Children do not generally just "become" normalized or demonstrate high executive function. These traits must be nurtured in an environment that is created to develop these desirable traits. The Montessori prepared environment is calm and orderly, and encourages patience and self-control. The Montessori learning materials facilitate careful sensorial dexterity and often involve a multi-step process. The built-in control of error in Montessori materials has children focusing intently on the task at hand. The Montessori materials gradually increase in difficulty, requiring the children to remember the process that came before as well as apply the next series of steps. In addition, the Montessori environment has only one of each Montessori learning material on the shelf at a time. This encourages children to plan ahead and develop patience while waiting for a classmate to complete and return the work to the shelf for others to use.

The Montessori teacher must know how and when to guide the child in his own development. Montessori warned of the ill

effects of unwanted adult intervention and told her teachers not to help children if they were capable of success on their own. While it may be difficult to watch a child struggle to tie his shoes or complete a complicated Montessori sequence, to intercede is to weaken the child's self-confidence and self-worth. With unnecessary intervention from the adult, a child may learn to depend on the adult in challenging situations rather than on him or herself. The Montessori teacher and parent must exercise extraordinary patience and their belief that the child will succeed. Many "A ha!" moments happen only after periods of challenge and frustration. A Montessori teacher should only intervene if the situation is dangerous, destructive, or disrespectful.

The Montessori environment is specially prepared to develop the necessary skills not only to succeed in school, but to be successful throughout life.

### **Works Cited**

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### **What is Mindfulness? Montessori Perspectives - Part 3 of 3**

Another term that goes along with Montessori's idea of normalization and the current idea of executive function is that of 'mindfulness'. Psychology Today states that "Mindfulness is a state of active, open

attention on the present. When you are mindful, you observe your thoughts and feelings from a distance, without judging them good or bad. Instead of letting your life pass you by, mindfulness means living in the moment and awakening to experience."

The Montessori method of education is consistent with the idea of mindfulness. The flow of the individual presentations requires the attention of the child and the adult to be focused on the immediate present. The built-in control of error in the Montessori materials and activities consistently bring the child's focus back to center. The three-hour Montessori work cycle supports the development of increased periods of focused concentration.

Being mindful requires the child to be fully aware sensorially. The Montessori sensorial lessons and activities serve to isolate each sense so that it might be fully explored and internalized by the child. The terms 'rough' and 'smooth' or 'sweet' and 'sour' take on different meaning in the Montessori environment as the child explores and makes fine distinctions in gradations of sensorial exercises. (Lillard)

Beyond the immediate preparation of executive function, Montessori education is preparing the child not just for school, but also for life. Exercises such as 'The Silence Game' and 'Walking on the Line' help the child to focus his thoughts inward and be aware of his body within the space of his environment. It helps the child become fully conscious of his surroundings. This consciousness of self and others develops into

Montessori's lessons of Grace and Courtesy. Through modeling and proactive guidance, children become mindful of how their actions directly affect those around them. (Lillard) In fact, "Every exercise involving movement where mistakes can be corrected...is of great assistance to a child...Our children become agile by learning how to walk around various objects without bumping into them." (Montessori)

Walking on the line also teaches purposeful movement, not unlike the practice of Yoga or Tai Chi. In fact, many Montessori classrooms incorporate either yoga or Tai Chi into their daily routines. The simple movements of both practices incorporate the ideas of self-monitoring and planning. The focus is on the behavior of the individual and comparisons are only made to the movement towards a goal, not to the achievements of others. Through repetition of movement, improvement is made. These same statements about non-judgmental behavior and repetition can said about the Montessori environment, exercises, and materials.

Those who are interested in incorporating mindfulness into their teaching practices would be well served by considering those practices found within the Montessori environment. (Lillard) Meaningful, conscious work that incorporates both mind and body with increased periods of profound concentration provide a child with a grounding that prepares him well beyond the classroom walls and sets him on his way to a purposeful and fulfilled life.

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