As we strive to improve our contact with members, the MMS Board has decided to use the services of Constant Contact, a company that provides email service to small businesses, schools, and non profits. The MMS email list will only be used by the Society to send notifications of events, workshop notices, newsletters, and any other pertinent information to its members. Many of our affiliated schools use this service to keep in contact with their parents. We hope that our members will find this a helpful and efficient way to communicate.

At this time of year, schools are looking of ways to show parents that Montessori is the best education for their children. MMS is excited that our speaker for the spring workshop will speak to this very topic.

Dr. Steven Hughes is speaking on Why Montessori Works on Saturday April 17 at MSU’s Management Educational Center in Troy Michigan. Dr. Hughes is an assistant professor of pediatrics and neurology at the University of Minnesota Medical School. He also serves as Director of Education and research for the Tova Company. Dr. Hughes has spent most of the past year, traveling around the country speaking on Montessori and its benefits for children. His thesis is that Montessori children are good at doing things due to their Montessori education. This talk will be presented in the afternoon. Referral Assessment and Treatment of the School Aged Child is the topic for the morning session. Dr. Hughes will “review common disorders present in childhood that impact the emotional, development, or learning status of children.” Learn when to refer children for outside evaluation, and about the kind of results that are typically obtained.

More information available at GoodAtDoingThings.com and our web site.
Meadow Montessori 9th – 12th graders returned to Michigan transformed after spending eight days in Belize. Meadow partnered with the World Leadership School (click the banner below for more information), whose mission is to empower young leaders to find new and innovative approaches to the world’s pressing problems and to build long-term relationships with partner schools around the world.

Meadow Montessori students went to Belize with the intention of seeing first-hand the effects, if any, of global warming on coral reefs and tropical rain forests. They returned to us with a new understanding of the science behind climate change, as well as new friends, greater competence, and a deeper understanding of the world in which they live.

That understanding came not just as the result of seeing what life is like for our neighbors to the south, who share borders with Mexico and Honduras, but also through the hands-on getting-involved of project work. Meadow students interacted with their Belizian peers at St. Matthew’s School. The group tackled a grounds clean-up project, got their feet wet in the classroom with a little tutoring, and built a sidewalk to ensure that the kids have a clean and safe learning environment during the rainy season.

These are only some of the comments received from the 800 students and 400 teachers and parents that attended the fourth annual Montessori Model United Nations, February 28-March 3, 2010 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Students from as far away as Europe, the Middle East, the Caribbean, Canada, and Alaska joined to participate in this year’s MMUN. Ambassadors from the Dominican Republic, Benin, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe spoke to the delegates about global issues and social action.

Don’t miss MMUN 2011. Register for Teacher Training at www.montessori-mun.org or email us for more information.
It is important for all Montessorians in Michigan to know how other people are thinking ahead and making the kind of forward changes we need for Montessori to not only survive but thrive!

Last year, South Carolina became the first state to recognize Montessori certificates granted by MACTE accredited institutions.

In 2009 the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE) met the criteria to be added to the list of accrediting organizations that the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accepts as attesting to the quality of a specific education field.

NCATE is the professional accrediting organization for education schools in the United States.

With the acceptance to NCATE, the South Carolina Department of Education announced that it plans to recognize MACTE certificates in 2010.

The proposal was introduced to:
• Recognize the specialized training that current public school Montessori teachers have completed
• Establish an alternative pathway to obtain Montessori certification for persons with a bachelor’s degree who have completed a Montessori teacher education program approved by Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (MACTE).

The intent of the second part of the proposal is to increase the pool of applicants eligible to apply for Montessori teaching positions in public schools in South Carolina.

With legislative approval, the certification changes will take effect for the 2010-2011 school year.

For more information on the initial proposal, go to www.MACTE.org. Find the State Recognition section; find State Issues and then South Carolina Proposal.

All Montessori programs want to thrive and therefore implement some basic but essential requirements; the first being the hiring of credentialed Montessori teachers. All graduates of Michigan Montessori Teacher Education Center (MMTEC) and Adrian Dominican Montessori Teacher Education Institute (ADMTEI) hold MACTE accredited certificates.

However, the State of Michigan does not currently recognize these certificates. It’s time for Montessorians in Michigan to inform our government of the high quality education that children receive by attending Montessori. Go to www.MACTE.org for more information on the State Recognition Task Force.

Information from the South Carolina Montessori Alliance.
Steve Hughes is an enthusiastic Montessori parent, one who’s eager to talk at the drop of a hat about Montessori and the benefits it has provided his daughter and his family.

Hughes is also a pediatric neuropsychologist specializing in brain development, and that credential gives this proud dad’s enthusiasm a big boost in credibility with his steadily growing audience of parents, educators and policymakers.

When we say Hughes is ready to talk Montessori at any moment we’re serious. The 45-year-old University of Minnesota teacher, researcher and—until recently—clinician has spent much of the last year on a one-person campaign, traveling and talking about Montessori and about brains and their healthy development.

The message that Hughes puts at the heart of his talks is simple: Montessori children are good at doing things.

But underlying that simple statement is a deep neurological understanding of why it’s true. Montessori children are motivated learners and effective hands-on participants in their world, Hughes says, largely because of Montessori’s curriculum—a curriculum that precisely triggers brain functions that are the building blocks of learning and personality.

When the stakeholders in America’s schools recognize that linkage they’ll help move Montessori closer to the educational mainstream and into the lives of more children, he hopes. “This educational approach just makes so much sense from a cognitive developmental standpoint,” Hughes says. “I spend an inordinate amount of time thinking about brain development, and I’ll tell you, Montessori is the original brain-based method of learning.”

Most Montessorians already share that view, based on the outcomes they’ve seen in classrooms and students’ lives. Hughes delivers science to back them up, adding to the small but growing body of developmental analysis provided by researchers like Angeline Lillard.

His roadshow presentation—first delivered to the 2006 AMI international conference in Amsterdam—starts with a brief, animated survey of how brain function grows.

Then comes an enumeration of the precise ways that Montessori activities match those developmental steps, a pattern he first observed watching his daughter’s Montessori experience, then by studying the curriculum and quizzing teachers and trainers about their methods and observations.

The more he looked, the more he recognized that each Montessori lesson prompts neurological activity that builds cognition and stirs the intellectual confidence, joy and curiosity that children feel as those capabilities grow.

For instance, the act of reading relies on three separate areas of brain activity—“nuggets” Hughes calls them. The brain apprehends visual symbols, decodes the sound of those symbols and assigns them each meaning.

When children use Montessori’s familiar sandpaper letters and moveable alphabets—looking at the letter and its shape, tracing it with their fingers, speaking its sound—they’re putting each of those nuggets to work and establishing neurological networks that coordinate the activities.

His research interests include measurement of attention and executive functioning in children and adults, the effects of living in poverty on child development, and the neurodevelopmental benefits of classical Montessori education.
With repetition, those functions grow stronger and faster and eventually enable reading and more complex activities.

“We’ve come up with very good ways to remediate a child with a reading disorder,” says Hughes, whose research and clinical work focused on children with disabilities. “Those remediations are strikingly similar to Montessori. This is a way of reading development that’s really strong, really good, and Montessori kids have been doing it for a hundred years.”

Hands-on learning is another of Montessori’s developmental insights, Hughes says. The brain area that links to our hands is by far the brain’s largest component—indicating that we’re designed to explore and acquire intelligence through hands-on learning.

Montessori’s emphasis on very early hands-on activities in the practical life curriculum creates a crucial opportunity for each child, Hughes says. “You look at practical life and it looks like its about wiping down tables, cutting up celery. They look like chores until you look at them from a developmental perspective.”

From that perspective practical life emerges as the foundation for success at all the activities that follow.

“We learn simple tasks such as motor movements and sequences and we store those in our brain as templates,” Hughes says. Those templates grow secure and multiply, giving the child a jumping off point for each new developmental step.

“Montessori gives children a rich, rich opportunity to develop the inherent skills of laying down templates for activities. Those come in a way, a sequence that’s never available in a conventional school environment.”

If Hughes’ developmental antennae gave him an early indication of Montessori’s value, his experience as parent and citizen helped him appreciate the moral life that grows in the Montessori environment —maybe Montessori’s most important contribution, he believes.

“Children come out of Montessori environment understanding there’s a richness and diversity to human culture and there’s also a sameness. We all want love, we have families, we care about people, we don’t want to live on a barren plant and we need to respect everyone’s pursuit of those things. That’s a basic but critical lesson of socialization, and it’s something children get very well in Montessori.”

**OBSTACLES FOR MONTESSORI...**

While Hughes has been learning everything he could about Montessori’s developmental genius, his travels and contacts have also given him insights into the hazards the movement faces today.

“Branding is a problem,” he says. “Montessori conjures all kinds of images in people’s minds,” many of them inaccurate and not attractive.

That results in part from a lack of standards that allows untrained teachers and poorly run schools to carry the Montessori name.

It results from a movement that at times alienates parents, he says. An article by a mother in the online magazine Slate last year endorsed the outcomes in Montessori education, but then went on in a sinister tone to wonder what went on behind the school’s doors. “She said ‘it’s like a black box, parents aren’t welcome there, and nobody wants to tell me what’s happening.’”

And it’s a result of Montessorians failing to tell their own story effectively.

An example: The Montessori Training Center of Minnesota—run by Molly O’Shaughnessy, one of Hughes’ friends and Montessori mentors—was rejected for a recent grant because an educator who reviewed the submission said Montessori fails to support language development, especially for children who need special language help.

“That couldn’t be further from the truth, but that gets traction because Montessorians haven’t done a good job of telling people what it is.”

Hughes hopes to play a part in correcting that in the next few years. He left clinical work last year to lead TOVA, a small St. Paul test-publishing company, and his new job provides him flexibility to travel and speak about Montessori, and about the development of the new, expanded Minnesota training center.

Hughes hopes to play a role there as an advisor and research partner with O’Shaughnessy, adding to the educational and developmental case for Montessori.

One project they’re considering would follow up on Lillard’s research on Montessori outcomes in Milwaukee, targeting this time successful programs like the East Dallas Community School in Dallas.

That program has built a long record of high academic and social performance with an enrollment of mostly low-income, Latino and African-American children.

“That are fantastic success stories that have never been reviewed in the scientific literature,” Hughes says. “From a scientific standpoint, that means those outcomes don’t even exist.”

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