



Middle School Developments

December



Greetings!

Welcome to our second Middle School Newsletter, written by our Middle School Program Director Peter Oviatt. If you didn't catch the first one, be sure to read about Sam Hall, our Music and Digital Media Guide, [here](#). This month we will continue with staffing, and discuss our second full-time guide, Jennifer Ryznar!

Housekeeping

Thanks to those of you who reached out and showed gratitude for the first newsletter! I always welcome your thoughts on this newsletter: What do you like about it? How can I make it better? Also, please [contact me](#) if you know others who would like to be on this list.

Calendar

- **Jan 13:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **Jan 27:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **Feb 10:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **Feb 24:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **March 9:** Middle School Campus Tour
- **March 30:** Middle School Campus Tour

[Learn More & Schedule Your Tour](#)

Our Second Full-Time Guide

I cannot write this with more excitement. As many of you know, Jennifer is the embodiment of a life-long learner, she's incredible with students, and is filled with love and humility. Jennifer will be instrumental in creating an environment where adolescents feel safe and ready to take the risks necessary to form their adult identities. Within such an environment, adolescents can tap into deep learning, and prepare themselves for academic success.

With Jennifer and Sam now on staff I would like to discuss the broader scheme of staffing at our middle school, and then move into Montessori theory on the “role of the adult.”

Staffing

Full-Time Guides

Math & Literary Arts: Jennifer Ryznar

Sciences & Humanities: Peter Oviatt

Part-Time Guides & Visiting Practitioners

Music & Digital Media: Sam Hall

Spanish & Physical Education: TBA

Ceramics & 3D Arts: TBA

Dance & Movement: TBA

Publishing & Creative Writing: TBA

Textiles & Fashion: TBA

While our core staff will remain constant, many of our part-time guides and visiting practitioners will be joining us for shorter periods of time. A Montessori middle school is only as strong as its family community and network of practitioners. Visiting experts and practitioners might work ten or three hours a week; some may come in for a three-part workshop; others just for the day. When warranted, students will travel to a practitioner's workspace, in other cases an interview will do. As our middle school grows, so will our list of practitioners who have agreed to share their expertise with our students. We rely on these practitioners to meet and engage the unforeseeable interests of our student body.

Now onto the core staff...



Jennifer Ryznar

As the second full-time guide, Jennifer was not chosen for her amazing qualities alone. We also considered how her qualities fit within the whole team. As we grow our staff and advisory team at the middle school, we seek adults who are approachable in different ways. All our students need an adult with whom they can deeply connect. Moreover, Jennifer and I will set the culture of our

campus— aside from the physical safety of students, no task is more important. Click [here](#) for Jennifer's bio, and [here](#) for my own.

The Role of The Adult

Let's get into some Montessori philosophy. In many ways, how Montessorians see adults, in relation to the child, lies at the very heart of the pedagogy. I find it illuminating to start with what an adult *should not* do.

Laurie Ewert-Crocker is a highly respected Montessorian, and an advisor for my diploma course on adolescent education. During a lecture, she said with conviction: “The adult ego is the number one challenge of our job.” It is too easy, she stressed, for us adults to “judge ourselves through the work and behavior and action of the child.” Whether we feel frustration, disappointment or pride in our students, these are all reflections of our own ego.

What was Laurie getting at? After the lecture I asked her to elaborate. She reminded me that *the child* (or the adolescent) is at the center of what we do. It's not that having pride in our students is a bad thing; she asked me to note what shifts when instead of pursuing pride we explain what is important to us as Montessori guides. As we do this, the *process* of education comes into focus, rather than an arbitrary endpoint.

We can distill that process, or the job of a Montessori guide, into two components:

- 1) To prepare the environment
- 2) Not to interfere with or obstruct the child's work

These are not easy to do well. As you can imagine, an adult ego running the show violates the second point. The antidotes: (1) humility, (2) an understanding and acceptance of one's own past (especially one's adolescence!), and (3) open and honest communication with colleagues and parents.

To know when not to interfere is also to know when to assist. Such knowledge requires careful and on-going observation— of each student! For this reason, observation is *the* cornerstone of what we do as Montessorians. Really, it's all about observing well.

We also prepare environments. This too has to be flexible, not an extension of our ego, and adaptable to individual personalities and group dynamics. I will discuss the prepared environment in another post. For now, know that we prepare the psychological environment just as much, if not more, than the physical environment. The psychological environment includes how people talk to each other, how they respond to their own needs, the needs of others, and of the environment. It is the culture of our school.

The Role of The Adult, in an Adolescent Program

Let's narrow in on the role of the adult when adolescents are around. Arguably, in an adolescent program, the adult becomes even more important than when students are younger. Adolescents are actively becoming adults. As such, adolescents are especially watchful of how adults interact with each other, how they express themselves, and how they contribute to society. Moreover, adolescents take huge benefit from being around adults with whom they can work, side-by-side. This process of working alongside adults allows adolescents to build their own adult identity.

When it comes to educational guidance, the adult must give clear and concise instruction, while providing each student with the space they need to convert this instruction into a deeper level of learning ([Bloom's Taxonomy](#) is the classic infographic on levels of learning. [John Hattie's](#) work provides an important contribution). As a thoughtful aspect of the prepared environment, that instructs only when necessary, the adult helps bring the adolescent to the outer ring of their capabilities- intellectually, socially, emotionally and otherwise.

Coming full circle, I can confidently say that Jennifer is well practiced in the art of observing students and remaining humble as she chooses when to engage and when to disengage. Welcome aboard, Jenn! I can't wait to learn from you.

Stay Tuned!

Thanks for reading. Stay tuned for next month's newsletter, which will include more Middle School developments and Montessori pedagogy for adolescents

A background featuring the Instagram logo, which consists of a camera outline with a flash, set against a gradient of orange, red, and purple.

Follow us on Instagram!

A red rectangular background with a white play button icon in the center, pointing to the right.

Watch us on YouTube

Two overlapping circles: a blue circle on the left and a pink circle on the right. The text "View us on Flickr" is centered across both circles.

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Our Vision:

Our vision is a community of intellectually curious, independent, and compassionate lifelong learners.

Our Mission:

Sunstone Montessori School develops the whole child by providing an academically strong, emotionally nurturing and, socially supportive environment in accordance with AMI guidelines for Montessori education.

Commitment to Diversity:

Sunstone Montessori School welcomes students and staff of any race, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, color, nationality and ethnicity, religion, and family constellation, to all programs and activities at the school. The school does not discriminate in its educational hiring, admission, or school-administered policies. It is our goal that Sunstone Montessori School reflects the rich diversity of our community, including varied cultures, economic status, and individual or special educational needs.

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