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A Work Day Full of Smiling Faces

They call her Mrs. K. She buzzes them through the door weekday mornings, some sleepy eyed, others bunny hopping, and all happy to see her.



These expressive little people are her children, the 60 or so three, four and five-year-olds of the Early Childhood Center (ECC) at Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute.

Mrs. K., short for Jamie Karagatsoulis, has greeted children at the center since 2009 when she started as a lead teacher. By 2011, she rose to assistant director and by 2012 to director, helping to lead the ECC to its highest ratings and accreditation. With success comes sacrifice. "I do miss being in the classroom and directly involved with the students," she said. "But as the director, I help with lesson plans and deciding what projects the children work on. If teachers are stumped, we brainstorm ideas. It is a balancing act. I call it the many hats."

Jamie knew from an early age she wanted to work with children. She earned a B.S. in elementary education and an M.Ed. in early childhood education from Wayne State, with endorsements in language arts and early childhood. She presents at professional development conferences and workshops. She also prepares the next generation of early childhood educators as an adjunct faculty member at Baker College, yet another hat.

Positive changes mark much of Jamie's time at the ECC, including accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Executive Director Anna Miller, M.Ed, who oversees both ECC's on Wayne's campus, was instrumental in successfully navigating the complex process. Jamie was involved in the accreditation process twice, first as a teacher and years later as the director. NAEYC requires accredited centers meet

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Better Classroom Experiences for African American Youth

Olivenne Skinner knows from personal experience that all schools are not created equal. She grew up in a low income community in New York, traveling more than an hour each way to attend a high school that could challenge her with honors and



It was clear to me that my school was failing to adequately educate a lot of students who looked like me . . .

– Dr. Skinner

advanced placement classes. A diverse mix of students attended – Asian, African American, Hispanic, white – but only three African Americans took the honors and AP classes. "Me and two other girls," Dr. Skinner said. "It was clear to me that my school was failing to adequately educate a lot of students

who looked like me, but I didn't understand the systematic nature of educational disparities at that time."

Dr. Skinner came to MPSI from Penn State to complete her post-doctoral fellowship. Her research project, Youth's Experience in School Study (YESS), will include approxi-

mately 150 metro Detroit high school freshmen and sophomores. Students will complete online surveys about their experiences in math and English classes over 15 school days. These classes are traditionally gender typed domains. "I'm interested in

knowing how girls' and boys' experiences differ in these courses, and how their race and gender identities might shape their experiences," Dr. Skinner said. The daily diary design will deepen understanding of academic engagement, because it captures

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more than 400 criteria, observing classrooms for evidence.

"The first time we pursued accreditation was challenging," Jamie said. "We didn't really know what to expect." They worked hard and did well. Both ECC classrooms ranked high under observation, with Jamie's classroom meeting 95% of the criteria. The ECC also carries Michigan's highest 5-Star Great Start to Quality rating, one of only four such preschools in Detroit.

Donning the director's hat at the ECC means managing a diverse group: teachers, student assistants, parents, grandparents, administrators, and of course the children. "I stay open to everyone's side of the discussion and pull out the important issues. Then we work together to find the best solution." Listening may be the most critical skill. "Parents have so many pressures and stressors. They often need someone to listen to them," Jamie said. "It might not even have to do with the ECC, but I'm happy to be the person they can talk to."

The past decade has brought other changes to the preschool environment. Technology is ever-present in children's lives, so the ECC puts care and thought into its use in the classroom. iPads enhance learning, for instance, by connecting children to people and places they can't easily access. "This semester a parent is traveling overseas. Our teachers are planning Skype sessions to incorporate this parent's rich travel experiences into learning for the children," she said. The ECC uses technology to project enriching scenes, like a campfire and burbling brook on the wall as the children pitch tents to "camp." As Jamie says in her tips, play is the key to learning. Use technology to ignite other forms of play.

Parents Tips: How to Find a High Quality Preschool Program



High-quality programs **scaffold learning**. Teachers build on base information to progressively move students toward greater understanding and independence in the learning process. They provide materials and experiences that stretch children's thinking, and set individual goals based on the child's age and development stage.

Play is the key to learning! Young children learn by engaging in hands-on activities. The more actively engaged the children are, the more they can make connections to build on their interests and expand their knowledge base.



Watch the **interactions** between teachers and children. Do teachers look relaxed and welcoming? Are children engaged and able to express themselves and be heard? Teachers help children feel safe, cared for and secure. Children who feel cared for and safe can learn and grow across all developmental domains.

Learning Never Stops

Jamie's top priority is making sure her staff is caring and qualified. "We have a good team of dedicated professionals who collaborate and work well together," she said. Regular training is the bedrock on which success builds. A recent staff training explored STEM learning. They collaborated to create a new juice, using fruits, hand-held juicers, plastic bags, measuring cups and cutting boards. "A simple problem," Jamie said, "but it generated so much open discussion, creative thinking

recreationally. Jamie's been more of a dry land girl, running several half marathons but rarely ice skating. So for Christmas, her husband bought her hockey gear and enrolled her in a beginner's league. He joined her for the first session and the league signed him as a coach. "Imagine being coached in ice hockey by your husband," she said smiling. "My skating has definitely improved."

Directing a high quality early childhood center requires knowledge, patience, compassion, joy and more patience. Some students have challenging behaviors. Some need social emotional support counseling. Others need accommodations for hearing loss or autism spectrum disorders. The ECC partners with families to ensure children receive the services they need, including therapy from WSU's speech and language department. All children are offered a language and hearing screening to determine need; students receive services during the school day. Parents have the ease of knowing their child is getting extra support as part of the normal school routine.

"We have such a rich community here at the center. We are a wonderful melting pot of cultures, diversity, friendship and fun. I come in every day with the attitude that it's going to be a great day," Jamie said. "And it always is."



From left: Jamie, son Khristos, husband Steve

NEWS & HONORS



Support for Adolescent Sexuality Research – Davia Steinberg, a MPSI fellow and clinical psychology graduate student, won a grant from the International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health toward her dissertation research. Davia is working to understand the onset of "sexting" in adolescent girls. Sexting is sending sexually explicit photographs or messages via mobile phone. Davia also won WSU's award for best Graduate Student Research Poster last fall.



Right on Track – Tenure track, that is. MPSI postdoc Dr. Marion van den Heuvel, will return to the Netherlands this spring to accept an assistant professor tenure track position in cognitive neuropsychology at Tilburg University. Dr. van den Heuvel achieved much during her time at MPSI. She contributed to more than nine papers, mentored several students, submitted a competitively scored NIH grant, and helped design a childhood assessment. *Goed gedaan!*



How Memory Functions and Malfunctions – Dr. Noa Ofen has been elected to membership in the prestigious Memory Disorders Research Society (MDRS). Dr. Ofen is a cognitive neuroscientist working on lifespan issues through MPSI and the Institute of Gerontology. MDRS professionals study memory and memory disorders, through a range of basic and clinical research, to determine how memory works and how it malfunctions.



A State Plan for Early Childhood – Michigan's first Early Childhood Policy Summit will include closing remarks from MPSI faculty member Dr. Carolyn Dayton. Dr. Dayton researches early parenting with a focus on the father in urban settings. For more than 20 years, she provided clinical interventions for families of infants and young children in homes, centers and hospitals. The April summit will outline short and long-term goals for childcare and education in Michigan.



Speaking at the U.N. – MPSI postdoctoral fellow Dr. Jennifer Gomez flies to Vienna this spring to address the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs. She will discuss institutional betrayal, a key area of her research. Dr. Gomez was also appointed to the editorial board of the *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation* and the student editorial board of *Child Maltreatment*, where she will work with MPSI faculty member and consulting editor Dr. Valerie Simon to review up to four manuscripts per year.



APA Dissertation Award – MPSI trainee Laura Crespo won a monetary 2017 dissertation research award from the American Psychological Association to help with the costs of her project. This competitive award recognizes outstanding graduate students whose work shows extraordinary scientific promise. Laura studies how fathers and other caregivers in low-income families promote their children's regulation of emotion, behavior, thoughts and attention.



From left: Shine, Irani and Rivera

Stellar Student Research – At Lifespan Alliance Research Day, students at both MPSI and the Institute of Gerontology explain their latest research projects and compete for prizes. This year's projects looked at corporal punishment, sexuality, controlling diabetes, neuroscience networks, natural disasters, adolescent delinquency, financial exploitation of older adults and more. Judges awarded Best Paper Presentation, Best Graduate Poster and Best Undergraduate Poster. "It was an impossible task to pick just one," admitted one judge. "The quality of everyone's work was outstanding." MPSI board member Ann Nicholson presented the awards.

Britta Shine's study of a brief screening measure of dysregulation in teachers in Early Head Start programs won Best Graduate Poster. The 24-item Teacher Care Patterns Questionnaire predicted teacher's emotions, coaching and mindful awareness. It can provide valuable information to inform effective professional development.

Zenaida Rivera won Best Graduate Paper Presentation for her 10-minute talk on Sexual Subjectivity in Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Emerging Adults. Her research found that the Sexual Subjectivity Inventory, long used to measure sexual self-concept in heterosexuals, was also a valid and reliable measure for lesbian, gay and bisexual persons age 18-25.

Sanaya Irani, in the Ofen Lifespan Cognitive Neuroscience Lab, won Best Undergraduate Poster for finding that larger hippocampal volume related to increased ability in spatial navigation in childhood through young adulthood.

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its dynamics across place and time.

The Winding Road to Research

By her own admission, Dr. Skinner was slow to realize that a career researching the intersection of race and gender in young people would be her calling. She majored in Africana studies and psychology at New York University. In a class on Black psychology, certain voices in the literature sounded identical to her own. "People spoke of experiences in high school that sounded exactly like mine and highlighted the disparities in our school systems," she said. Curious to learn more, she soon found herself double-checking transcriptions from research interviews with students. The principal investigator was Professor Niobe Way, a giant in the field of applied psychology. This was a turning point. "Hearing those voices, those stories of urban students of color was compelling. In my senior year, I knew I wanted to go to graduate school."

First, she needed research experience. She became director of the Camille Cosby Girls program in Boston that offers a wide array of enrichment opportunities to improve girls' resilience, well-being and academics. The program is part of the Judge Baker Children's Center, a free-standing mental health center affiliated with Harvard Medical School. As luck would have it, Dr. John Weisz a clinical psychologist at Judge Baker, needed a research assistant, and Dr. Skinner got the job. She worked on two projects in clinical psychology there, enough experience to enter grad school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Dr. Skinner is recruiting 9th and 10th grade African American students who reside in metro Detroit to join YESS, the **Youth's Experiences in School Study**. For more information please call: 313-664-2508 or email o.skinner@wayne.edu

The community is the foundation of Dr. Skinner's research. "I am dedicated to including the perspectives, ideas and interests of the community in my academic work. Wayne State, especially MPSI with its emphasis on outreach, offers the ideal environment for community engagement. "My work can speak not only to other researchers, but to residents. The community informs the work and the results give back to the community," she said.

The YESS project excites her because of its potential to improve academic achievement for Black youth. The diaries will reveal if boys and girls have different experiences in math and language arts classes. Do they feel connected to their teachers and peers in those classes? Do they subscribe to the traditional stereotypes that boys are better at math and girls are better at language arts? "We know that behavioral, cognitive and emotional engagement are tied to academic outcomes like grades and test scores," Dr. Skinner said. "Engagement is malleable. If we can pinpoint where engagement is weak, it is a perfect target for easy, low-cost interventions. Change engagement and you can change achievement."

Early responses to the diary method have been positive. Students enjoy the chance to reflect on their day. "Parents can

be busy and not have time to talk about school," Dr. Skinner said. "The diary gives teens a chance to think about their experiences and learn from them."

Crossroads and Mentorship

As her career advances, Dr. Skinner wants to continue to study the intersections of characteristics like race, gender, sexual identity and socioeconomic status that cannot be fully understood in isolation. "We must broaden our research to include this intersectional perspective," she said. "I would love for the work I do to lead the way."

Part of leading is mentoring the next generation of scholars, a role Dr. Skinner embraces. "I've had great mentors," she said. "And I know it can be more impactful to have a mentor who looks like you. My goal is to train upcoming scholars and provide opportunities they may not have otherwise." She worked with a transfer student in her Penn State lab who had no research experience, but was a motivated and hard worker. With Dr. Skinner's guidance, the woman became a McNair Scholar, the competitive federal award program for first generation college students. "The journey was difficult, but she got into graduate school. It's one of the things I'm most proud of," Dr. Skinner said.

In addition to adolescents, research and mentoring, Dr. Skinner loves hiking ("but not in the winter") and volunteering in her church. In graduate school, she helped develop her church's children ministries program and directed two children's musicals. "I like volunteering because I can apply the things I research to a real-world setting," she said. "I enjoy giving something back."



**MERRILL PALMER
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Share Your Memories

In 2020, MPSI becomes a centenarian. We plan to celebrate with an exhibition of historical highlights and a symposium on child and family issues. We'd also like to compile assorted MPSI memories, and hope you can help. Were you a visiting college student who interned at Merrill Palmer for a semester? A faculty member who taught here?

Were you a teacher in our Early Childhood Center or one of its preschoolers? Did your experiences at Merrill Palmer impact the person you became? Why was your time here special?

SEND TO: Cheryl Deep, Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute,
71 East Ferry Street, Detroit, MI 48202.

You can also email cheryldeep@wayne.edu or phone her at 313-664-2607.





Author and Curator Visits Freer House



The Freer House was honored to receive a visit recently from Lee Glazer, curator of American Art, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian, shown visiting Freer's new courtyard garden. Lee is author of a new book, *Charles Lang Freer: a Cosmopolitan Life*. She also supervised the recent reinstallation of the American art collection at the newly renovated Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.



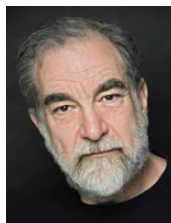
Freer House Supporters Win Accolades

Two long-time friends of the Freer House and stalwarts of Detroit history and preservation received high honors from the Michigan Historic Preservation Network (MHPN) this fall. Thomas Brunk, Ph.D., and J. Douglas Peters were honored for their significant contributions to the preservation of the Freer House and the adjacent Hecker-Tierney House. The duo was recognized at the annual MHPN benefit with 125 statewide leaders, professionals and supporters of historic preservation in attendance.

Dr. Brunk received the Lifetime Achievement Award for his 40 years of research, documentation and advocacy on behalf of the preservation of the historic Freer House. Dr. Brunk has also contributed extensively to the scholarship and preser-



BRUNK



PETERS

vation of Detroit history and architecture, including the Indian Village neighborhood, Pewabic Pottery, the Scarab Club and the Masonic Temple.

Doug Peters received the Citizen's Award for championing and leading the preservation and restoration of the Frank J. Hecker House (today's Hecker-Tierney Alumni House at WSU). The house was purchased by the Charfoos & Christensen law firm as offices in 1991. Doug, now retired from the firm, managed the more than \$1 million the firm invested in renovations.

Doug also made outstanding and significant contributions to the preservation of the Freer House and the Scarab Club, serving for years on the Freer House board, and volunteering with the Detroit Institute of Arts conservation department, and Preservation Wayne (now Preservation Detroit).

The Freer House and Merrill Palmer Skillman Institute join MHPN in congratulating and thanking Doug and Dr. Brunk for their years of invaluable support of the historic Freer House.

Once-in-a-Lifetime Art Exhibit

A unique one-day "pop-up" exhibition of art was hosted by the Freer House last November. The exhibition marked the first time in 100 years that original art has been displayed in the building.

Artist in Resonance: Hiroko Lancour at the Charles Lang Freer House, featured more than 30 works by Japan born, Detroit based artist, Hiroko Lancour, who received her master's in fine arts from WSU. Inspired by Freer's interest in traditional Japanese and contemporary American art, Hiroko installed her art in each of the home's former gallery rooms. The exhibition attracted more than 250 visitors of all ages and backgrounds, including a special group tour for members of the Japan Business Society of Detroit.

Japan Cultural Development co-sponsored the exhibition, which the Detroit Institute of Arts designated an official "community partner event" in conjunc-



LANCOUR

tion with the opening of their new Japan Gallery the same weekend.

The Freer House
71 E. Ferry St.
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Help a Teen Attend Giant Step

Giant Step is the oldest, continuously run teen conference on diversity and inclusion in Michigan, reaching about 300 students each year. Trained facilitators foster discussion on topics like bullying, social status, acceptance, similarities and future plans. Within hours, prejudice and bias start to vanish. **And It's free!** Would you like to help a teen attend? \$50 sends one student to the conference held October 23 on Wayne State's campus. The more money we raise, the more students we host.

For more information email cheryldeep@wayne.edu or visit <https://mpsi.wayne.edu/outreach/teen-conference>

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