

Literature Review

Research has shown (Dore, 2014; Vandergrift, 2003) that parents of children in the Montessori Early Childhood and Toddler programs want to understand the relevance of the Montessori materials and activities but struggle to understand how some of the activities foster development. Dore (2014) and Vandergrift (2003) depict parents' general confusion about the Montessori method and highlight activities that, to someone not familiar with this method of education, may seem to be mundane and even irrelevant to child development and learning.

Damore, (2004a), Dunn, (2000), and Turner (2000) argue that it is time for Montessori to develop a standard of measurement. The vital first step in the development of a Montessori educational accountability system is articulation of learner outcomes. Creating this type of standard is an unprecedented opportunity for Montessori schools to be perceived as publicly accountable with the power to direct content that reflects developmentally appropriate teaching and learning (Damore, 2004b). Schools need authentic assessments in both cognitive and social/emotional development (Damore, 2004a) that are presented in a systematic and credible manner (Turner, 2000). Dunn (2000) suggests that Montessorians must be able to verbalize and document, in a language universally understood by educators, the program strengths and how it is unique.

There is some concern that rubrics or scoring guides that define learning expectations and criteria for mastery of those expectations may compromise the values of Montessori by eliminating self-direction. However, the use of a systematic scoring guide for student work "brings the look of 'standardization' to our assessments without sacrificing our principles of teaching. They help communicate clear learning outcomes and results to parents, students and others outside of Montessori" (Turner, 2000, p. 32).

Research Question

Would having a standard measurement of developmental progress in the Montessori Toddler and Early Childhood levels help teachers consistently evaluate the children's progress and help the parents to understand the progression of a Montessori education?

The objective of the progress reports in this action research is twofold:

1. to educate parents on the developmental aim behind the Montessori Practical Life and Sensorial activities and how they align to state developmental standards (NJ & PA standards were used).
2. to offer Montessori teachers a tool to track the skill progression of the activities from beginning to independence.

Early Childhood Practical Life Example

Practical Life: Transfer	Materials/Activities:	Beginning	Progressing	Advancing	Independent	Leads to:	Level
Purpose: Transferring is a fundamental activity for a Montessori classroom. Child learns fine motor skills, concentration, coordination, and directionality (moving from left to right and vice versa).	Grasping, Spooning, TONGING, Dry pouring, Wet pouring	Beginning to transfer material to and from some containers with some implements.	Can transfer material to and from some containers with some implements.	May be able to transfer material to and from different containers with any implement. Minimal spills can be cleaned up entirely.	Able to transfer material to and from many different containers without spilling or if spill occurs, correct grasp.	Development of hand-eye coordination, wrist rotation, and pincer grasp which are all pre-writing skills.	Fall: Spring: Notes:
State Standards: 2.4. Children develop competence and confidence in activities that require fine motor skills		Spilling occurs and needs teacher direction to clean it up entirely. Correct grasp may be developing. Focuses on task until completion with teacher assistance.	Spilling occurs and needs teacher direction to clean it up entirely. Correct grasp developing. Focuses on task until completion.	Minimal assistance needed.	Independent of teacher assistance.		

Toddler Sensorial Example

Kinesthetic Discrimination - Size/Weight	Materials	Beginning	Progressing	Advancing	Independent	Leads to:	Level
Description: Materials are used to develop the sense of size and weight. Develops associated vocabulary.	Cube Tower, Broad Stair, Red Rods	With adult assistance the child brings objects to mat and sequences them while the adult vocabulary enumerates the description.	The child brings the objects to the mat and usually sequences them in order. While doing so, the adult cues the descriptive language.	The child brings the objects to the mat and usually sequences them and enunciates the descriptions correctly.	The child sequences the objects correctly and independently while reciting the description.	Fine Motor Development and Motor Planning Coordination	Fall: Spring:
State Standard: 2.3.OT.MP Use mathematical processes when creating and composing shapes. 2.4.YT.A.1 Engage in measurement experiences. 2.4.OT.A.1 Use basic measurement vocabulary.							

Research Method, Findings and Results

Survey 1: Parents in two Montessori schools were asked to complete an anonymous inquiry form to assess their schools' current progress report.

• **Topics covered:**

1. How the parents felt the current report helps them to understand the alignment between the Montessori materials and child development, in what ways they found it helpful and in what ways it could be changed to make it more helpful
2. Whether parents understood the alignment between their child doing activities, such as table washing, in a Montessori classroom and child development and if they would or do find it helpful

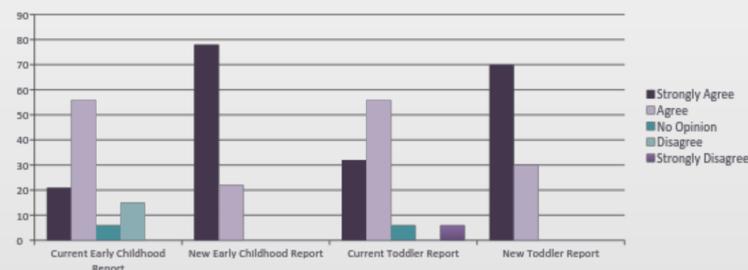
• **Responses received:**

91% of parents claimed they understood the link between child development and the Montessori activities and materials, but their comments told a different story.

"As parents, many of us rely heavily on this type of assessment. It seems much of Montessori education is expressed incrementally. As a parent, it is difficult to appreciate the often subtle nature of this type of progression. It would be lovely to find a more artful means of conveying a child's progress such that a parent can also be enlightened on how best to recognize any progression unfolding before him/her..."

"...would be more helpful if there was clarity around "progressing", meaning it is difficult to know if your child is progressing slowly and will have difficulty getting to "well developed..."

"Any explanation of or details on Montessori materials, even as a glossary, would be helpful. For example "golden beads = ..."



Comparison of parental responses reporting on how the two types of progress reports explains the Montessori Practical Life and Sensorial materials progression as well as alignment to State Developmental Standards

Survey 2: Parents in the same two Montessori schools were asked to complete an anonymous inquiry form on the prototype report that created a developmental continuum across skill sets in the Practical Life and Sensorial areas of a Montessori classroom and aligned it to state developmental standards.

• **Topics covered:**

1. If the new report clarified the link between developmental benchmarks (state standards) and the Montessori curriculum, if parents felt more knowledgeable about this link as well as the purpose of the materials
2. Whether this report caused them to place greater value on the Montessori curriculum and their child's work

• **Responses received:**

"Before seeing this new Progress Report, I was happy with our current reports. I felt I had a good understanding of the insight and reasoning behind the classroom activities, but this report gave a very clear picture into a child's world and progress in the classroom. I also think this would be a great tool to include in promoting the Montessori philosophy to increase enrollment."

"As I was reading it I thought to myself, there is no way I could cover all these areas of development on my own at home with my preschooler. It makes me value their time at school even more. Thank you!"

Survey 3: Teachers in the same two Montessori schools were asked to complete an anonymous inquiry form on the prototype report after completing the report for 3 children in their respective classes.

• **Topics covered:**

1. Length of time to complete, what was found to be beneficial or confusing
2. Whether teachers found there to be a clear alignment between the state developmental benchmarks and the Montessori materials and whether they believed parents would find this type of report helpful to more fully understand the Montessori curriculum

• **Responses received:**

"... especially for new teachers and teachers in training, the report describing the different evaluation criteria for Practical life is very beneficial. I sometimes think new teachers and even seasoned teachers miss the importance of this area and how much it creates the foundation for all future learning in the classroom. Seeing it may help them stop and rethink how quickly they push children towards 'paper and pencil' activities."

Discussion/Future Implications

This project has created a path to achieve a formative authentic type of assessment. It is the objective of the researchers that this progress report format will:

1. Offer both parents and teachers a clear alignment of the developmental value of the Montessori materials and the language to explain both.
2. Offer a consistent tool for the whole Montessori community to report, in a systematic and credible manner, a way to measure students' progress.
3. Offer teachers guidelines as to developmental benchmarks addressed with the Montessori activities and materials, thus improving their ability to assess a child's progress and meet their student's educational needs. This can improve their practice and their ability to communicate with parents.
4. Organize the progression of the Montessori activities and materials in a way that parents can understand the incremental growth their child exhibits. According to the Children's Aid Society (2003) and Edutopia (2000), parental involvement is widely believed to be critical to children's early academic development (Arnold et al. 2008 p.75) therefore the ability for parents to understand their children's development is significant.
5. Give teachers and parents a consistent vernacular to discuss how the children are performing in class currently and how they will continue to grow.

This research was limited by the sample size of the parent and teacher population. In future research, it would be beneficial to survey parents and teachers nationwide to gain the clearest picture of understanding and awareness. Additionally, the feedback gained would allow a tool such as this to be refined to meet the needs of the Montessori community nationwide.

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