

MONTESSORI MATTERS

MONTESSORI ACADEMY OF LONDON

EXPECT MORE FROM EDUCATION

Issue 18 – February 2018



Assessment Matters

A message from Tina Sartori

One of the biggest misconceptions with Montessori education is that there is no form of assessment. This couldn't be further from the truth. The difference is that we look at assessment through a different lens. Most of us who experienced a conventional education system think of assessment in terms of tests, exams or grades – a number given on something we produce. But this type of assessment is more focused on memorizing content to gauge how well we are doing (external motivations) versus really understanding what you are doing, and finding the joy in the discovery (internal motivation). We prefer the latter.

How do we know how our students are REALLY doing? We look at it from a blended approach. It is important to offer authentic feedback to students and share it with parents, and we do this in multiple ways: standardize testing, progress reports, observation and parent conferences. This method also supports two of our *Strategic Priorities: Educating Students, Fostering Citizens; and Building School Community & Supporting Our Families.*

Our students take the Canadian Achievement Test (CAT) in Years 3, 6, and 7, and the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test (CCAT) when they are in their last year of Casa and in Year 4. These standardized tests provide a comprehensive and continuous measurement of growth in the fundamental skills: vocabulary; reading and the mechanics

of writing; methods of study; and mathematics. A periodic, reliable measurement of the development of these skills provides a tool for the teachers and a guide for the school in identifying strengths and weaknesses, which may require us to adapt more precisely to individual needs and abilities. These are not psychological or I.Q. tests – the child cannot study for them. It is the daily work they do and their ongoing discoveries that motivate them to learn the "how" and "why" because they are genuinely interested; not because they are striving for a particular mark.

Progress reports (or report cards) tend to be one element of assessment most parents can relate to; we send these reports home three times a year. Truthfully though, progress reports are not the best method of understanding your child's growth in a program. It is only one piece of the puzzle. They are literally only a snapshot of that moment in time, and your children are constantly evolving with their findings and abstraction of concepts. Our grads boast that they are self-aware, adaptable, engaged, community minded and innovative – these are not easily discernable on a report card, but are more relevant to their everyday lives than something you will see checked off on a progress report.

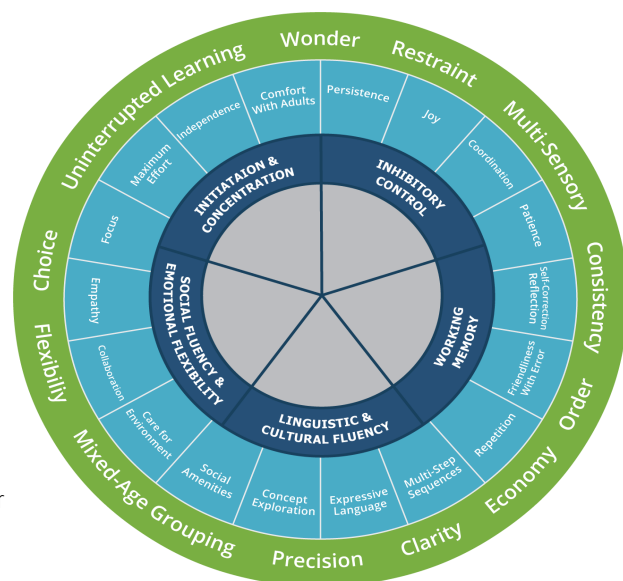
A more effective form of assessment is

observation and personal feedback, which is something we commonly experience in our professional lives. When training to become a Montessori teacher, there are hundreds of hours of observation that must be completed.

Observation is so important because it was through observation that Maria Montessori developed not only the philosophy for her method, but specifically designed and created the materials she felt would be the most beneficial to children at different stages of their development.

This is a key element that is

Continued on page 2



This chart details the scope of the Outcome Domains in the Development Environmental Rating Scale (DERS) that the school will begin using in the spring.



50
1968 2018

Montessori
ACADEMY OF LONDON

A Clearer Picture

Parent perspective: Observation and feedback help parents follow their children's development.

It didn't take much for Rachael and Trevor Noye to decide on a Montessori education for their sons, Graeme and Blair. Rachael says she recalls a Casa information night really striking the right chord with them. "All I needed was one parent information night at Casa to know this is where my children would come to school. My husband, Trevor, and I were so impressed with the child-centred philosophy evident throughout all aspects of the school, and Maria Montessori's approach made so much sense to us. Most importantly, Montessori House of Children (as it was then known) was simply the most nurturing environment we could imagine. I have to say that – through all our years at the school – we have been happy every day to be part of the Montessori family."

Graeme, who is now in Grade 10, started in Junior Casa at Oxford and graduated from Year 8. Blair, who will graduate from MA in June, started in the Toddler program. The Noyes' foster daughter, Mina, also attended our school for Year 6.

Rachael reflects the school's belief that the most valuable assessment of a child's progress is observational and individual.

"What I love about the Montessori approach is the feedback and how I received it changed over time based on the children's ages. When the guys were little, I loved the observation and having them show me their work. In Elementary, Trevor and I would meet with each boy's team of teachers periodically to understand how they were doing and to ask questions. As they got older and more responsible for their school experience in Junior High, we transitioned to the boys hosting parent-teacher conferences," Rachael says.

In Junior High, the students organize the day and time and prepare discussion points about their goals, etc. "If there was an issue, my son would be at the table with us talking about the challenge and potential options. This breeds a sense of responsibility in the

student, and treats the student, parents and teachers as a cohesive team. I love the Junior High conferences with the kids; they have always been the most enjoyable and meaningful because you can see how far the kids have come in their personal development."

And Mina, Rachael says, benefited from the feedback they received from her teachers because it helped paint a picture of the development of her academic progress and social skills. "The

support she received from her teachers was one of the highlights of her time with us. Because we had frequent feedback on how she was doing, we could more easily celebrate successes with her."

The three-year age groupings that are quintessential to traditional Montessori provide teachers the opportunity to truly get to know each student – and their parents. This quality of the school's assessment process combined with regular interactions with families make that picture of the child's progress through his or her Montessori education that much more vivid.

The feedback they have received over the years reflects the individual child, Rachael adds. "This was critical for our family because our children are so very different, each with a unique personality, interests and learning style. The personalized approach of the Montessori method—where kids can explore and learn at their own pace—was a great fit for our family. Then, in Junior High the approach is modelled more closely to high school so kids learn how to navigate the next stage of their education."

She adds that the written reports she received are "far more nuanced than one might expect," and try to reflect that learning is a process that happens over time. However, ultimately, she says "the most valuable communications have always been personal, whether by phone or in person. I have always found our teachers to be prepared for our conversations, to be extremely knowledgeable about my children, their strengths, behaviours and needs." ×



The Noyes: Graeme, Rachael, Mina, Trevor and Blair (left to right).

The Legacy Circle — Planned Giving

Planned giving is a meaningful way to give to a charity. A planned gift is a donation made as part of your estate and will planning – it's a charitable gift you plan to make in the future to an organization you feel strongly about. There are a number of ways to make a planned gift, the most common is to leave a bequest- or a gift in your will. Anyone can make a bequest – supporting a cause you believe in and leaving a legacy makes an incredible impact and leaves a lasting impression in your community.

If you have left Montessori Academy of London a gift in your will, please let us know so we can acknowledge you now and register you for our Legacy Circle. Legacy Circle members are donors who have identified that they have committed a gift to Montessori Academy of London in their will – gifts that have not yet been realized. As a Legacy Circle member you will receive updates throughout the year on what the school is doing and how

community donations are making a difference in our school.

Margaret Whitley is one of our first Legacy Circle members. Although she has moved on from her role as Executive Director with the school, Montessori Academy of London is still in her thoughts. We recently chatted with Margaret to talk about why she chose to name Montessori Academy of London as a beneficiary in her will.



The Whitley family: Mark, Emma, Mark, Katie Berkelmans, and Margaret (left to right).

MA: What inspired you to make a bequest or leave a planned gift for Montessori Academy?

MW: I think because it's just been such an intrinsic part of my whole life and the life of my family. Recently, when my husband and I finally sat down and made some plans around our estates and what kind of legacy we wanted to have, there was just no question in my mind that I wanted to name Montessori Academy of London as a

recipient of whatever I could, to continue to support the work that I know the school is doing.

MA: What kind of impact do you hope the gift will make?

MW: I'd like to see the gift do a couple things; I'd actually like to see the gift do exactly what I think you are planning on doing and that is: be an inspiration for others to do the same. It's kind of "seed money" or "seed legacy". I also wanted to do it because, for me. It is not going to be

Continued on page 4

Assessment Matters — continued from page 1

continually honed in practice as a teacher and generally provides the most information on the development of the student. It is through observation that teachers collate this information and find a time to share it with parents through a conference. Observation of the students continues year-round as well, as well as the teacher's ongoing discussions with the students as they work through the curriculum at their own pace.

This is a dedicated assessment opportunity to not only hear about your child and their ongoing development, but also a time as a parent, to share your observations of what you see at home. This dialogue is a key element in your child's education. And, here is a secret: you will learn far more about your child in a conference meeting than you ever will in a report card, so take advantage of this opportunity!

Recently, we discovered a tool to help further refine our observations skills and will begin to implement it in our classrooms in the spring. It is called the Development Environmental Rating Scale (DERS) and it objectively measures the quality of learning environments offered in classrooms for ages 2.5 to 12.

It is from the National Center for Montessori in the Public Sector (US) and was developed over four years of classroom-based research and comprehensive review of literature on cognition and pedagogy. The purpose is to provide a detailed and multi-dimensional view of what actually goes on inside classrooms which are directed towards supporting optimal human development in a one hour observation. It is utilized through an app on an iPad that walks us through 60 related items and provides a report and tracking mechanisms when observation is complete. Again, training was required in order to be able to use this observation tool.

The DERS aligns environmental design and implementation with desired outcomes related to executive function, deep literacy and social-emotional development. The DERS will provide a focused, consistent and analytical approach to monitor potential and growth in the in classrooms and in our school. (For a look at the breadth of the qualities observed, see the 'Outcome Domains' chart on Page 1.)

We look forward to using the DERS as another form of assessment to support world-class Montessori education. x

Celebrate with us!

We are proud to announce **Cornerstone Architecture** as our Presenting Sponsor for all of our Golden Anniversary Events on June 1 & 2. Thank you, Cornerstone!



Friday, June 1, 2018

ARTexpo & Reception

Drop by the Mercato Room at Brescia University College for our ARTexpo Reception to view some fantastic artwork made by our students, and help us kickoff our Anniversary weekend!



Saturday, June 2, 2018

Join us from 10 am-2 pm on Saturday as we open the school's doors for an Open House and a Family Fun Day in Piccadilly Park. Saturday night is our Golden Anniversary Gala.

Open House 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Stop by our Elementary locations on Waterloo Street for a visit and to see how the buildings have (and haven't) changed over the years

Family Fun Day 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Over in Piccadilly Park Big Game Roadtrips will host our all-ages activities! A \$2 donation is appreciated. There will also be food available for cash purchase in our Elementary Courtyard.



Our Golden Anniversary Gala! Saturday, June 2, 6-10 p.m.

*Dinner, Dancing, Live Entertainment,
Paddle Call, Silent Auction*

Be sure to join us on Saturday, June 2, at the Mercato Room for our golden celebration! Hosted by Layne, the Auctionista, and featuring music by Kevin's Bacon Train! This is an Adults Only Event. Tickets are on sale now — www.montessori.on.ca/gala ×

The Legacy Circle — continued from page 3

the dollars that are going to transform the world, I am not in that position. I wanted to also model for our own children the importance of leaving legacies when you are young and able to think about those things and I hope that my own grandchildren can attend Montessori wherever they are and that other people have done the same so they can do that.

MA: *Do you have any advice for others who are considering leaving a bequest or gift in their will?*

MW: I guess my advice to anybody is I think the choices we make every day are part of the legacy we leave. I'm in my mid-50s, but I constantly think about legacy and so I'd encourage other people to do the same thing.

MA: *Is there anything else that you would like to share with me while we are here talking about legacy gifts and Montessori?*

MW: As somebody who has been profoundly impacted by Montessori, I think we underestimate the power of education, the power of Montessori education in particular. And if more people understand that power, I think it can do nothing but improve the trajectory of our world.

If you have identified MA in your will, please let Tonya Dendrinis know: tdendrinis@montessori.on.ca or 519-433-9121 ext. 233. ×

711 Waterloo St. London, Ontario, N6A 3W1 × Tel: 519-433-9121 × Fax: 519-433-8941
info@montessori.on.ca × montessori.on.ca

Facebook: @MontessoriAcademyofLondon

Twitter: @MAofLondon

50th Anniversary info: sites.google.com/montessori.on.ca/mhcma50 #mhcmaLDN50

