

# School Wide Reading Assessment

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#### Abstract

AMS accreditation standard 4 states that quality Montessori programs:

- · use an effective assessment system that monitors and documents outcomes
- · use those outcomes to improve learner outcomes and program

What is an effective assessment system for a Montessori School that holds to the child-centered principles of the philosophy?

This poster reflects portions of a complete study addressing the design of a classroom-based reading assessment system for Wilmington Montessori School (WMS) that provides:

- 1. evidence of children's progress across the developmental milestones of reading.
- 2. proactive information about children at risk of later reading difficulties.
- 3. a framework for teachers to monitor children's progress
- 4. for the collection of information across the school

### Research Review as Applied to Montessori Philosophy

Teachers who successfully support children's reading development use daily classroom based assessment tools and observations to inform instructional decisions (Wharton-McDonald, R., Pressley, M., & Hampston, J. M., 1998). Logically, such a child-centered assessment design should support the teacher and child in the Montessori Classroom.

The following points from the research informed the development of a survey to learn how teachers at Wilmington Montessori used classroom based assessment providing data for future

- 1. Montessori and other progressive educators use a variety of formal and informal assessments including anecdotal records. observations, portfolios, checklists, informal reading inventories, running records, work samples, journals, written summaries, conferences, oral and written retellings, internet tools, and journals (Bauer, 1999; Hodges, 1997; Johnston, Guice, Baker, Malone, & Michelson, 1995; Paris & Hoffman, 2004; Paris, et al., 2002; Roemer, 1999).
- 2. A primary use of classroom assessments is summative. providing information for the preparation of report cards. preparing for parent conferences, and for referral processes, (Baker & Hall, 1995; Hodges, 1992; Paris & Hoffman, 2004; Paris, et al., 2002; Roemer, 1999; Stiggins, 1991, 2001).
- 3. In general both Montessori and progressive mainstream teachers see assessment and instruction as two separate activities (Sheppard, 1997; Roemer, 1999)

Review of Montessori as compared with current research on

Consistencies between Dr. Montessori and current research:

1. Montessori defined universal sensitive periods of growth for language development (Montessori, 1964). Current research emphasizes early oral language development and later reading success (New Standards, 1999; Snow Burns and Griffin, 1998).

- 2. Reading / Writing Connection Montessori observed the interests of young children in writing and reading as well as the connection between writing and reading development (Montessori, 1964, 1965; New Standards, 1999; Snow, Burns,
- 3. Montessori's focus on teachers as observers is consistent with the best practices of reading teachers (International Reading Association, 2000; Pressley, 2002; Pressley, et al., 2001; Pressley, et al., 1998; Wharton-McDonald, et al., 1998).
- 4. Observation that impacts learning requires systematic record keeping (Gipps, 1994; Montessori, 1964, 1965; Valencia, 1997).

## Gaps between the Montessori Philosophy and Current Reading

- 1. The development of children's reading beyond 6 is not clear in Montessori's writing, Montessori (1964; 1965) implies that children will be readers by the time that they enter the first year of school if they have an environment that supports their early interest in literacy. Research identifies the ongoing development of reading beyond age 6 (Snow, Burns, and Griffin 1998)
- 2. Research Identifies specific indicators of future reading failure which Montessori did not clarify (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998).
- 3. Research identifies benchmarks for typical reading development that were not identified beyond age 6 by Montessori (Adams, 1990; Snow, Burns, and Griffin, 1998).

Excellent teachers are always informally assessing their students, monitoring where each student is and what each student needs. The excellent teacher acts on that monitorina, providina appropriate instruction or direction to each and every student in the room.

**Michael Pressley** 

#### Research Questions

- 1. How does the recent research on reading assessment inform the development of an assessment system at Wilmington Montessori School that will inform instructional decisions for children, support communication with parents, and inform program
- 2. How does current practice at Wilmington Montessori reflect the research on reading assessment?
- 3. What is the effective implementation model for a reading assessment system at Wilmington Montessori School?

#### Study of School Practices - Methods

#### Ouestions explored in a study of the practices at the school:

- What was the preparation in Montessori Training for assessment?
- · What assessments do Wilmington Montessori Teachers use?
- · How competent do the teachers feel in matching the goals for reading and their program level?
- · What beliefs do they hold about assessment?
- · Are teachers confident in their ability to recognize developmental benchmarks?
- . Do the continuums used in the school match the goals for

#### Survey - See Handouts for survey sample

- · Voluntary requiring about 20 minutes to complete
- · Administered at close of 2005-2006 school year.
- · Construction based on Your Opinion Please: How to Build the Best Questionnaires in the Field of Education (James Cox, 1996)
- · Administered to:
  - · 9 teachers of 3-6 year olds
  - · 6 lower elementary teachers (6-9 year olds)
  - · 4 upper elementary teachers (9-12 year olds).

#### Teacher Training Album Review

- · Language albums reviewed for evidence of instruction in
  - · articles provided, notes taken by the teacher and samples of the assessment tools described in the literature review.
- Included evidence of checklists identifying benchmarks for reading development that might guide teachers as they

Review of Reading Continuum (Hill, 2001) used at WMS against the New Standards for Reading

#### Findings Synthesis of Data (See Handouts)

#### Album Review - Evidence of Teacher Training in Assessment:

- 1. Little evidence of any preparation in classroom-based reading assessment in WMS teachers' language albums.
- 2. Three-fourths of the teachers indicated disagreement with the survey statement: "My Montessori training center emphasized classroom assessments in reading."

#### Survey Findings:

- 1. WMS teachers reported using the following assessment tools:
  - · mental observations of students.
  - · recorded observations of students.
  - · reading journals or response logs,
  - · student portfolios, and
  - · teacher-made assessments
- 2. Lack of consistency and continuity within or across programs regarding tools used
- 3. Early childhood teachers less likely to view assessment as compatible with Montessori philosophy.
- 4. WMS teachers are interested and motivated to learn more about classroom-based reading assessment.
- 5. Teachers believe assessment should be embedded in instruction.
- 6. Concern that classroom-based reading assessments take away instructional time.

#### Alignment of Continuum to Current Standards:

There were clear gaps between the recommendations of the New Standards Committee (1999 and 2001) and Hill's (2001) continuum

- 1. lack of emphasis on phonological and phonemic awareness
- 2. lack of early emphasis on comprehension, accuracy and fluency, and vocabulary development.
- 3. lack of developmental consistency across the levels on the
- 4. lack of specificity allowing teachers to form a common interpretation of their meaning across classrooms and program levels.

### **Recommendations and Implications for** Montessori Schools

Montessori Schools will be well served by developing systems for class-room-based assessment that:

- support the pedagogical stance for the Montessori teacher.
- 2. provide reliable and valid information about children's reading
- 3. enhance clear communications with parents, and
- progress and next steps for instruction. 4. serve as a method for program evaluation.

#### Based on the research review and study of WMS, such a system will include

- 1. banks of commonly used assessments including combinations of formal and Informal classroom assessments for screening, progress monitoring, diagnosis, and evaluation.
- 2. sets of clear goals and benchmarks for Literacy including a clear understanding of "off track" descriptors.
- 3. a collaborative learning community for teachers to grow in their use of classroom assessments.
- 4. development of teacher's skills in the use of informal progress monitoring tools such as:
  - Anecdotal Records a special focus on anecdotal records to inform instruction and as a match to Montessori Philosophy
  - Portfolios
  - Phonological Assessment Tools
  - Measures of Narrative understanding
  - Running Records
  - Think Alouds
  - Interviews
  - Retellings
  - Reading Logs
  - Reading Attitude and Motivation Inventories
- 5. adoption of continuums to be used within and across program level to enhance communication between teachers and communications with parents about a child's progress

The teacher must derive not only the capacity, but the desire, to observe natural phenomena. The teacher must understand and feel her position of observer: the activity must lie in the phenomenon.

Maria Montessori

#### References

Please see References in Handouts

#### For Further Information

Zankowsky, L. (2006). School-wide Reading Assessment in a Montessori Program. Unpublished Doctoral, University of Delaware,

(http://www.amshq.org/research/zankowsky\_Montessori\_reading\_as sessment.pdf)

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