Literature Review

Research has shown (Doer, 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. Doer (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 linguistically 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 two-fold:
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

| Stage | Expected Action | Minimal Assistance | Independent of | Independent of
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sensorial</td>
<td>Use spoon incorrectly to move food</td>
<td>Spills can be cleaned without assistance</td>
<td>May be able to grasp material correctly</td>
<td>Progressing through stages of holding the material correctly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May be able to use spoon independently and from different surfaces</td>
<td>Independent grasp which are all rotation, and pincer</td>
<td>Development of</td>
<td>Independent of</td>
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<td>Can use spoon independently and from different surfaces</td>
<td>Development of</td>
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Toddler Sensorial Example

| Stage | Expected Action | Minimal Assistance | Independent of | Independent of
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Comparison of parental responses reporting on how the two types of progress reports explain 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.

**Topical comparison**
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

**Response received**
“Before seeing this new Progress Report, I was happy with our current report. I felt I had a good understanding of the impact and reasoning behind the classroom activities, but the report gave very clear picture into 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 couldcover all these areas of development on my own at home with my precociously. 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.

**Response received**
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

**Response 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 mis-cite 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 they teach children towards “paper and pencils” activities.”

Contact Information

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Research Method, Findings and Results

Survey 2

Parents in two Montessori schools were asked to complete an anonymous inquiry form to assess their school’s current progress report.

**Some responses received**
1. How the parents felt the current report helps them to understand the alignment between the Montessori materials and child development, 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 washing, in a Montessori classroom and child development and if they would or do find it helpful

**Some responses received**
99% of parents claimed they understood the link between child development and the Montessori activities and materials, but their comments told a different story.

1. “As parents, many of us rely heavily on this type of assessment. It seems much of Montessori education is expressed increasingly. In a parent, it is difficult to appreciate the often subtle nature of this type of progression. It would be helpful if we could have more series of charts, showing a child’s progress and that a parent can also be enlightened on how best to recognize any progression unfolding before them…”
2. “...would be more helpful if there was clarity around “progressing”, meaning it is difficult to assess if your child is progressing slowly and how effort might be put in to “well developed.”
3. For example: “golden beads – “…

Discount/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 teacher 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 child’s growth their children exhibit. According to the Child’s Aid Society (2000) 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.

References


St. Catherine University

Aligning State Developmental Standards to Toddler and Early Childhood Montessori Practical Life and Sensorial Materials

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