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**Assessment Guidance**

(Elementary Community & Young People’s Community)

DEVELOPMENTAL EDUCATION

‘And so we discovered that education is not something which the teacher does, but that it is a natural process which develops spontaneously in the human being. It is not acquired by listening to words, but in virtue of experiences in which the child acts on his environment. The teacher’s task is not to talk, but to prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity in a special environment made for the child.’

Dr. Maria Montessori, *The* *Absorbent Mind*

‘Developmental education’ describes an approach to education that takes, as its starting point, the distinct psychology of children at different stages of their growth. Our Montessori work is centred on preparing environments ideally suited to the these stages, and helping the child to connect to the carefully curated experiences these environments offer. There are three planes of development that we support at The Montessori Place. The first plane from 0-6 years, the second plane from 6-12 years, and part of the third plane from 12-16 years. In each of these periods there are characteristics universal to all people of that age, for example a special sensitivity towards language in the first plane.

Progressive Independence

The characteristics of each period help the developing child to acquire new capabilities of body and mind and allow them to become progressively independent. To become independent is to become a free individual in society, ready to play a full part in the human life. At different stages of development that drive for independence takes a different form, and each form of independence builds on the independence previously acquired.

These are the types of independence that we support and respond to at each age:

Age Form of independence we focus on

0-6 years Functional/practical independence

6-12 years Intellectual & Moral independence

12-16 years Social and Economic independence

A different environment supports each type of independence. The reason why we group the children by these ages is because they share the same development drives which can be met in the same environment. The role of the Montessori Guide is to ‘prepare and arrange a series of motives for cultural activity’. That means to set up the environment, designed to support specific independences, and then to connect the child to the materials and other activities available.

The Work of the Child

Having got to know each child well, the art of the Guide is to offer the right experience at the right time to induce maximum effort. This may involve responding to an existing interest or it may be that the lesson sparks a new interest. The goal is always to support the natural process Montessori describes, drawing out the child’s passion and love for the world and guiding them to see the contributions he or she can make.

We call the child or young person’s developmentally appropriate activity ‘work’. Work expresses a relationship between a human being and their environment. Adult work transforms the environment to meet their physical and spiritual needs, and those of their dependents, as efficiently as possible. By contrast, children ‘work’ the environment to transform themselves. Adolescence is the time when this work shifts from the transformation of oneself to the transformation of the world. Through purposeful work the child’s developmental drives are fulfilled resulting in transformation and growth. Sometimes we can see these changes as they happen, othertimes the effects are internal and unconscious, only apparent at a later time.

The ultimate independence the child is working towards - becoming a free individual in society – has two parts; the development of the self and the self *in* *society*. Work is the means by which the child builds up him or herself. Carrying out that work in a mixed age community is the means by which the child prepares to be in society. A collaborative, cooperating community, led by the Guide, is as much the ‘prepared environment’ as any of the materials or activities available within it.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Throughout each day the Guide observes and notes the nature of each child’s being and work. In presentations and conversations and through observations the Guide continually assesses behaviour and understanding. Sometimes immediate feedback is given, othertimes the Guide will prepare a needed experience for the child at some later time. Feedback given in this way is known as ‘formative’ assessment or assessment *for* learning. It refers to the suggestions, pointers and nudges the Guide offers, that directly help the child grow and develop.

In the Elementary Communities and Young People’s Community the Guide also meets with each child individually, usually on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. These One to One meetings function similarly to a ‘supervision’ meeting in a workplace. The child brings their ongoing and recently completed work, the Guide brings their own notes. The Guide helps the child to positively reflect on their recent work and, where appropriate, supports them to identify useful future directions or further follow up needed to clarify a concept or develop a piece of work. Through these meetings the Guide assists the child in the management and organisation of their work, indentifying priorities and setting goals. This precious one-on-one time also provides a space to talk about the child’s life more widely – the things they feel are going well or not so well. These One to One meetings are the second component of our formative assessment.

The third component of our formative assessment comes at the end of the year in an extended personal letter that the Guide writes to each child in their community. In the letter the Guide considers the year from the perspective of the child or young person. They reflect on his or her achievements, the challenges they have overcome, and bring to mind other moments that are likely to have had a lasting impact on their

life. The letter summarises the main areas of work they have covered but the emphasis is on their journey towards the independences characteristic of their plane of development. Above all it aims to show the child him or herself in the best possible light.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT

The Guides at The Montessori Place undertake another kind of assessment on an annual basis. This is a summative assessment, an assessment *of* learning and development. It takes place in two parts. The first part is a broad assessment of the child’s development. The second part is a narrow assessment of learning in maths and language.

Dimensions of Observable Growth Assessment

Observation is the primary tool through which we carry out the broad developmental assessment. Human growth takes place in more dimensions than we can count and therefore our assessment – any assessment – will always be incomplete. Despite the impossibility of covering all aspects of growth, we can name and describe a limited number of observable human attributes, the development of which are of significant interest to us.

The Montessori Place uses a behavioural assessment by proxy, identifying certain observable behaviours that can be accepted as valid stand-ins for the trait under consideration. The format we use, Dimensions of Observable Growth (DOG) identifies five dimensions that collectively are proxies for whole-person growth:

* Concentration & Work
* Purpose & Will
* Self Planning
* Social Integration
* Spiritual Integration

The first three dimensions refer to the child or young person’s work. The last two dimensions refer to his or her relations with society. Within each of these dimensions we have identified attributes that are proxies for each dimension. Finally, we have identified four stages of growth that are proxies for the stages of the maturation of that attribute. At each stage of this process we have necessarily made value judgements. When the Guide makes the judgement as to which stage of growth for a particular attribute best describes the person at that time, the aspiration is that this judgement is guided by the intelligent love with which the Guide considers the child.

Stage 4 of each attribute expresses behaviours that lead to full independence at each plane of development. For example, below are the statements for Stage 1 and Stage 4 under the heading of ‘Challenge’:

Stage 1

I am most comfortable choosing work that I know I can easily succeed with. I feel a little intimidated by difficult work.

Stage 4

I consistently take myself into work that is challenging to me. I enjoy the feeling of working at the limits of my capabilities. I encourage and motivate others towards challenging goals.

Because these statements refer to the child’s work or relation to society – rather than subject knowledge – they are comparable across all ages, whether 6, 16 or 60. It is possible that a child’s ‘score’ may go down for a period, instead of up. Such a change may come when they transition from being the oldest in one community to the youngest in another, or it may reflect a difficulty elsewhere in their life. Through their time at The Montessori Place our hope and goal for every child is that they move towards ever-greater maturity and growing independence, which really means freedom.

As well as being completed annually by your child’s Guide, older children, from around the age of 10 will also complete their own copy of the document and compare their assessment with that of their Guide’s. This comparison adds a further insight into their developing self-awareness.

Maths and Language Assessment

The second part to the annual summative assessment is a narrow assessment of learning in maths and language specifically. For pupils in the Elementary and Young People’s Community this takes the form of a criterion-referenced[[1]](#footnote-0) level assessment in Maths and English, based on the historic National Curriculum levels. The levels articulate a gradual development of skills in those subjects and identify the expected level of attainment at the end of each school year.

Although these levels are no longer a statutory requirement for mainstream schools, many schools still use them as a useful benchmark. The National Curriculum levels relate directly to the content of the National Curriculum. As an independent school The Montessori Place is free to follow the Montessori curriculum and Montessori approach. We do not use the National Curriculum levels as our assessment tool for other subjects, and there are large areas of the Montessori maths curriculum – for example squaring and cubing – that are not covered in the National Curriculum levels assessment. Nevertheless we consider the process of monitoring the children’s progress within the measure of these two key skills as a useful aid in our service of the child and our accountability to parents.

Moderation

In order to ensure that all the Guides at The Montessori Place are forming judgements in a comparable way we moderate the DOG development assessment and the maths and language levels assessments internally. When a child transitions from one community to another, for example from the Children’s House to the Elementary, the two Guides meet to review the child’s work or behaviour and the stage or level that it reflects. This may lead to one or other Guide subsequently revising assessments of other children. This process ensures that there is a common interpretation of the assessment statements amongst the Guides and that we are closely aligned in the value we attach to a specific piece of work or behaviour.

In addition, the National Curriculum level assessments for maths and language naturally allow us to benchmark the children’s learning in these areas against an external national standard.

1. Criteria-referenced assessment grades against knowledge whereas norm-referenced assessment grades students against average attainment for that age, that year. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)