



FACT SHEET:

MONTESSORI ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING

The Montessori approach to assessment and reporting derives from the nature of Montessori philosophy and pedagogy. It is based on the belief that each child is a competent learner, born ready to learn from the people and the cultural and material environment around them. The Montessori approach facilitates targeted and personalised learning and development experiences for each child, the timing of individualised lessons determined by the detailed observations of each child by the teacher.

Children work in three-year age cohorts, in specially prepared environments which contain materials specifically designed to foster the achievement of appropriate developmental milestones, and the sequential mastery of skills and concepts across the range of disciplines. The materials provide feedback to the child and teacher as to where the child is at any time on these developmental milestones and in mastery of skills and concepts. There is a strong emphasis on individual choice and individualised teaching, based on the understanding that children do not achieve those developmental goals, nor master those skills and concepts, in lockstep, but rather need to work at their own pace, benefiting from the opportunities the three-year age range provides to learn from and to teach each other, to be inspired by others, and to value helping others.

Montessori education is specifically non-competitive and eschews rewards and punishment in favour of encouraging the development in children of intrinsic motivation for learning. Activities are open-ended, encouraging exploration and creative thinking, and as such do not lend themselves to grading. Children take ownership of their own progress through their daily work journal, weekly individual conferences with their teacher, by requesting specific lessons as the need arises, and by maintaining portfolios of work completed. These materials, and detailed daily observations of each child by the teacher, form the basis of reporting to parents.

Such reporting is individualised, highly detailed, and focused on the strengths of the child as well as areas where further development is needed. Using a scale is less useful, and certainly less detailed. Nor is comparative reporting, which ranks a student's achievement against the performance of other members of the class, compatible with either Montessori philosophy or practice. Not only is comparative reporting often misleading for parents, and a cause of unwarranted anxiety, it is discouraging for students who score "poorly", detrimental to both their self-esteem and their willingness to persist, as well as potentially negative for those who do "well" by encouraging the valuing of high scores over the inherent satisfaction of learning.

In Montessori multi-aged classrooms, all students are aware of each other's' abilities and are comfortable with working at their own pace. The achievements of others are not seen as threatening, but rather as something to which to aspire. Children are able to see that it is normal for individuals to achieve mastery in certain areas at different times and in different ways. As a result, they are encouraged rather than discouraged, and ready to continue to tackle, rather than to avoid, learning challenges.

Moreover, comparative reporting is not achievable in practical terms in Montessori schools, given the three-year age cohorts with which we work, and our often small class and school sizes. Comparing children for a particular year within that three-year age range will, in most cases, be statistically insignificant as the numbers in each "year" are small and children within each year are not all learning the same concepts at the same time.

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