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Newsletter for Parents of SAMA Member Schools

Dear Parents

The theme of our National newsletter this month is 'Authentic Assessment'. I thought that it may be valuable for parents to have some insight into how we assess children in a Montessori environment.

Observation is probably the most commonly used form of assessment. We watch the children while they are working. We observe to see whether they are achieving the purposes of the exercise. Purposes are 'direct' – i.e. *what is the child doing?* In the case of the water pouring exercise – the direct purpose would be to pour the water successfully from one jug to another. This is relatively easy to determine and simply require a directress to watch. The indirect purposes of an activity are a little more complex, but just as important. For example, once a child (through repetition) is pouring effectively, do we observe that he is pouring his own drink more confidently and independently? Do we perhaps notice that his wrist and hand muscles are strengthening as a result of pouring from a bigger jug? The directress will now look at opportunities where this child can use his stronger muscles to perform other tasks such as scrubbing a table or washing cloths – both of which include the skill of pouring water.

The assessment tools that are used here are observation by the directress who then records her findings, and uses the information to determine exercises that the child can move on to.

The control of error inherent in most Montessori materials is a 'message' to the child that something needs to be re-looked at in the way he is working with the material in order to complete it successfully. The control of error eliminates the need for the directress to be correcting the child, and because the child is discovering the mistake for himself, he learns from it without feeling incompetent or 'shown-up'. As adults – I am sure that you can appreciate the value in learning best from your mistakes when you have identified them yourself and had the chance to correct them without outside interference!

Montessori directresses are trained to observe the whole child. It is not enough to simply report on the intellectual development of the child. The spiritual, social, emotional and physical aspects of development are just as worthy of careful observation and assessment in order to ascertain the needs of the child and provide the best environment for further development.

In the book, 'Basic Ideas of Montessori's Educational Theory' G. Schulz-Benesch writes, "Let us comply with her (Montessori's) wish and pay attention to the child, to the human beings that she loved with such devotion. In our era of uncertainty in education, it is on this basis that we should be concerned with Montessori's work..."

Let me conclude by urging you as parents to pay attention to your children. Like the directress in their environments, take time to just observe them. You will be amazed by what you see!

If you are holidaying in the next week with your children, enjoy the spring weather!

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