



October 2010

South African Montessori Association

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Message from the President:

Dear Fellow Montessorians

With the advent of spring I am sure that many of you will have felt that renewed sense of energy and fresh vigour for life. If you are not a winter person, you will be especially glad of the warmer days and longer hours of sunlight. And, if you ARE a winter person, you will still be enjoying the change of season with all the gifts of new life nature blesses us with.

This is a good time to spring clean our environments. Most schools are already busy with their intake interviews for next year, and the planning and preparation for 2011 have begun. This is always a busy time where we imitate nature, naturally beautifying our classrooms with blossoms, and mentally abounding with ideas and intentions. Spiritually this is an uplifting time of year, as we let go of the layers of winter and enjoy our freedom!

It is also the time of year, where we will start to contemplate the year that has passed. Our planning will benefit from hind-sight. Our preparations will build on what we have already accomplished. Reflections on the children's year will also become more directed now as the end of year reports need to be compiled.

This month's newsletter focuses on authentic assessment and will give you some ideas to consider in your evaluation of the children you work with. Consider where you will draw the information from in order to compile the feedback in the report. Record-keeping, observation notes or journals and discussions with fellow staff members to get a holistic view of each child are a few avenues that can be explored. Remember that we are reporting on the whole child – the physical, social, emotional, spiritual and intellectual child. Each aspect deserves attention and comment in the report. We are all taught in our training about the importance of objectivity, but we are only human after all – how can we ever be truly objective? The answer to that is that I guess we can't – but, we can question our assessments and make sure that they are fair, unbiased and provide the parents with an open and honest reflection of their children that is both constructive and helpful.

Heidi van Staden

SAMA President

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Direction

No authentic record keeping or planning can take place without the bigger picture. Planning ahead for the year I would surmise would begin with the complete teaching team and support staff. Here would be the time to setting collective goals for the school as a whole. Are all teachers on the same page and are they all working together for the same vision as laid out by the mission statement of the school? If not then the head of school has some tasks set out for her or him.

Right, once that is cleared up and we are all on the same page then it comes down to the individual planning of each teacher (who keeps the whole constantly in mind).

Do we know our purpose for record keeping? Is it to please the head or does it give real guidance to your purpose with each individual child. Is it just because you have to or is it meaningful to you and the children?

How do we record? Only when the child has 'mastered' something and yea, we can tick the box?! Or is it because we have seen repetition and meaningful application of the new concept learnt. And what does that really mean, "mastered" when next week the child shows absolutely no sign of recollection of that particular activity. The trap of just having a simple check list of all the Montessori materials and the children's progress through these, over three years, would definitely not constitute what I would call authentic recording.

What about the child's psychosocial development. How do they manage tension, fears, joy and community participation adult interaction? What amazing and complex thoughts do they share, how do they think, initiate, reason and learn? What of their cultural or ethnic background, have you planned for the individual who may need a completely different approach and does not fall into your well planned matrix. Know your child.

I think being well planned ahead of time allows for flexibility and spontaneity. Methods of recording could be: video recordings (with permission) sound recordings, photographs; daily anecdotal recordings; weekly checklists; timelines or time samples; work samples; peers reviews and conversations; and lesson plans. Whatever it is be mindful, take time to just observe, watch, hear and listen and always record objectively what the child **is doing**, not what **you think** the child is doing.

Time management would be a very important factor in record keeping and planning. Do we give ourselves or our staff enough time at the end of each morning/ afternoon to review and transfer our presentations into the children's files?

Jacky



Photographic sample of art.

You can unobtrusively photograph any of the children's work.



Management of cutting skills



There are no mistakes. The events we bring upon ourselves, no matter how unpleasant, are necessary in order to learn what we need to learn; whatever steps we take, they're necessary to reach the places we've chosen to go.

Richard Bach

Assessment

Assessment – that ‘oh-so-traditional’ word...

We see these words in our training courses, they are used in the National Curriculum Statement – but what do they mean? And, why couldn't they just keep it simple? Over time I have realised that in fact they are simply using other words and processes for things that we do naturally with our children every day. Here's what I figured out:

The **baseline** assessment – this is an assessment designed to ‘test’ what the student already knows on a topic before you do a presentation ... this is like the first period of the three period lesson where you introduce new concepts to the child. If they already know the concepts they will be very quick to tell you and you will not have to present the rest of the lesson as they have already grasped the necessary information.

The **continuous** assessment is like the second period where we assign the child to pointing or showing. During this assessment the directress keeps the child occupied by directing her to perform certain tasks manipulating the materials. It is the part of the lesson where the child is gaining experience of the concepts. The directress is a keen observer during this time – assessing whether the child is ready to move on to the next stage – or whether they need a bit more time with exploration.

The **summative** assessment is the third period where the child feeds back the information and shows his understanding of it. This summation is the ‘evidence’ that the concepts have been mastered.

And there you have it – three assessment terms translated into Montessori!

School Assessment

Because assessment is not only about checking up on the children and recording and reporting on what they have done, I spent some time looking into assessments that schools could do as self-evaluations. I found the following website to be very informative and thought that the following points could be explored in staff meeting as a help to the self-reflection process:

- **The three-hour work cycle** – do you have this in place? If yes is it working well, if no, why not? Could a three-hour work cycle be phased in over time do you think?
Note: For more information on the "three-hour work period" see the chapter "My Contribution to Experimental Science" from *The Advanced Montessori Method, Volume I*, by Dr. Maria Montessori, or contact the Michael Olaf Montessori Company at michaelola@aol.com for reprint GB850
- **Multi-age grouping - do you have the Montessori age groupings** according to the planes of development – 3-6 years, 6-9 years etc.
- **Work centres** – does your school have clearly defined areas that are ordered, at the child's height and with clean, complete materials in a good condition?
- **Teaching method - "Teach by teaching, not by correcting"** Is the method of instruction about introducing new concepts and then standing back and allowing the child and the material to ‘work together’?

- **Teaching Ratio - 1:1 and 1:30+** - I found this excerpt from the website very intriguing!
- Except for infant/toddler groups (Ratio dictated by local social service regulations), the teaching ratio is one trained Montessori teacher and one non-teaching aide to 30+ children. Rather than lecturing to large or small groups of children, the teacher is trained to teach one child at a time, and to oversee thirty or more children working on a broad array of tasks. She is facile in the basic lessons of math, language, the arts and sciences, and in guiding a child's research and exploration, capitalizing on his interest in and excitement about a subject. The teacher does not make assignments or dictate what to study or read, nor does she set a limit as to how far a child follows an interest.
- **Learning styles** – are all kinds of intelligence recognized, respected and accommodated?
- **Assessment** – are your records up to date? Do you keep observation journals?
- **Character education – is this aspect of the child's development given the attention it deserves? Montessori said that ‘character building is the child's own achievement’ – but are we providing the right environment?**

I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn. - Einstein

Condensed from <http://www.montessori.edu/info.html>, and added to by Heidi van Staden

Fly on the Wall

Geometric solids, colour tablets, botany cabinet, life skills area, nomenclature cards, binomial cubes – Montessori three-year-olds respond to this terminology day in day out. Small fingers tentatively feel outlines of geometric planes, clumsy unskilled fingers drop material. Water spills and is wiped day in day out by overzealous ‘scientists’. Time after time tenacious children repeat these tasks in order to master the skills. Hopefully this strictness will have its desired effect of introducing an isolated ‘sensorial’ concept (weight) to these young ones so hungry to classify and make sense of their world. Given to them at the ‘sensitive period’, they will forever hold these experiences in the ‘muscular memory’ as they become foundations to ‘open a door’ into the vast world of knowledge.

Three year old tantrums. Yet again, I get up from a presentation to calmly yet firmly place the kicking, pouting, resistant individual on the ‘thinking chair’, and hover nearby to replace the defiant person five or six times. I am watched by nineteen pairs of hawk eyes to see who emerges as the ‘Alpha’ of this pack. In the back of my mind, the maxim repeats itself: ‘A patient man captures a city’, a necessary chant, knowing the propensity of a three year old to extricate himself from the chair in order to test the boundaries. I have sufficient time to meditate on the wonder of this ‘thinking chair’. Never is the dignity of the child infringed by harsh words or frustrated adult ‘attitudes’. He knows that there are boundaries to his behaviour (our class rule: Don’t damage people or equipment). He is free to come out of the chair once he is ready to confirm to these norms. And so I wait, only returning to the presentation when I am sure that the child is in a state of ‘thinking’ rather than ‘passion’. I am always rewarded with a big hug, smile and a very compliant toddler, who immediately seems to work with great concentration and joy. Another triumph for a ‘normalized’ classroom.

“RING RING”

Our bell calls them to immediately become ‘statues’. The silence is not always immediate, this one has to finish snipping her volcano booklet and

that three year old fellow just has to run to imitate the position of his ‘hilarious’ five year old hero.

Dramatic closing of eyes, shuffling, “shhh, shhh”, “How would you like to go for a walk?” In unison, perfectly echoing my tone, they sing out: Oh Yes!

“Now remember how to stand and walk in line.” We particularly pride ourselves (totally false of course) on having the straightest, quietest most compliant line in the school.

We head off past the boom gate and into a world whose secrets only young eyes can teach. Two workmen paving the road become our instructors; pouring out cement and explaining to a mesmerized group how it holds the bricks in place. Thorn trees are discovered. A little self-appointed guard waits to warn all and sundry of this danger. The ever popular sticks are discovered. Little folk dash around picking up leaves, filling bags with pine cones and little insects are displayed in grubby palms. Little girls pirouette, boys run up the leafy incline, little faces are alive and radiant.

And then we all lie on our backs, listening – cars, dogs, birds, and yes, we even hear the grass blowing in the wind. The nature bags are full. “Oooh Hannah, we nearly forgot, some have Playball soon.” And so this joyous little group winds its way back to lay out their treasure on the classroom floor.

As I watch them later at break time with the other classes, I observe a group with some of their leaves doing leaf rubbings with the other children at the outside art table. One child comes up to me with a fallen leaf and asks if she can match it to the botany cabinet inside, she is sure it is triangulate...

This is the magic I watch unfolding each day, I am like a mother who is overjoyed to watch her child take a first step. Only I have this delight each day. The joy is always overwhelming and I give thanks for the privilege.

Antoinette Wood - Knysna Montessori

*Education is the kindling of a flame,
not the filling of a vessel.* - Socrates

Houdini and Twist.

The grade 6 and 7 girls of Maria Montessori House in Chartwell, elected to build a “snake box” in technology class. They did this with a little guidance and added the lady’s touch – a thatched cottage for the snake, inside the glass cabinet.

As there was no snake, we visited a herpetologist of note – Dr Allen Liebenberg of the Broederstroom Veterinary Clinic. He had many cages with huge and exotic snakes from all over Africa. He was all legal and licensed to keep snakes. That day we met Twist a little brown house snake that had been injured on the road. Dr Allen had nursed him to good health again and was about to release him. “Please can we keep him?” came the cry. So Twist’s new home was an up-market cabinet, with a warming light that was controlled by a timer to come on in the cool early hours of the morning.



He frolicked up and down the driftwood stairs, and made a huge nest from the paper towel on top of Twist’s box. He then proceeded to block the snake’s only entry with a mound of sawdust and paper towel. He was always active and thrived on the cheers from outside.

To cut a long story short, Twist was obviously not hungry and never ventured out the living room. Houdini was in his element with the new house. Some girls however were collapsing under the strain and begged to rescue Houdini. So it was that Houdini found a new and loving home.



Problem: Twist had not eaten for a fortnight and we were cautioned by Dr Allen, that Twist only ate LIVE mice. So the next day, extra saw-dust and Carlton towelling covered the floor and Houdini was gently dropped into the cage. Twist was inside his cottage and very immobile. The whole school was plunged into a prolonged anxiety attack with every child and staff member popping to see if the murder had been committed or not. Houdini, who had come from a very decrepit pit of dirty saw-dust and dead mice, was having none of this. He was delighted by the comfy surroundings and was determined to make it his home! No matter that his arch enemy was lying in wait in the living room.

He frolicked up



and down the

loose in the veld and huddled under a big rock gave an approving wink and said, “This is where I belong” and slithered off. The only mark left by his ordeal was a little black patch halfway down his slender body which was in effect a tire-burn from the day he was injured in the road. All things worked together for good – this time at least!

Chris Liebenberg
Maria Montessori House
Chartwell. 18 Sep. 2010

Members Pages

Newberry House Montessori School springs into action!



Newberry House Montessori School in Somerset West has grown to 100 children and blossoming! Many families came to the Spring Work Day on Sat 11 Sept to help with various projects at the school. Creating a climbing wall, building a jungle gym, planting flowers, herbs and vegetables in barrels donated by neighbouring farms. Pathways were paved to help keep the classrooms and toilets clean, which involved levelling, sand stamping, watering, planning and much hard work. Working together on a day like this builds the community. There is nothing like hard work and building up a good sweat to help bond friendships! As well as hands on experiences for the children.

Sharon Caldwell has a matrix on an Excel spread sheet where the recording of your observations goes straight into a set matrix on your computer. If anyone is interested in this she has offered to share. You can contact her directly through her email address: sharoncaldwell@montessori.org



Olivedale Montessori celebrated its 10th birthday on Saturday and the photo shows myself and Lana Player with some past pupils, who joined us in celebrating our birthday. A great day was had by all!
Chantal Ross

Regional Meetings

Gauteng North regional meeting which took place on Saturday 11 September at Village Montessori

Sunette Wagner from Minimax productions presented a very exciting and pro-active morning.

She got everyone moving and encouraged us all to find our inner creative sides. We all learnt a lot and walked away with great ideas for our end of year productions. Sunette showed us how to identify basic beats, counts, tempo and dancing steps.

Minimax Productions, services and DVD's are very convenient and useful for any school. Their DVD's are great and can be used across all the age groups. They even offer services and dancing steps that would benefit each song individually.

Noleen

Gauteng South regional meeting which was on Saturday 18 September, with 20 members attending
Topic: **Preparing the Psychic Environment.**

Laurie Parr from Little Star Montessori – the host school - gave a very informative introduction to the discussion.

- She looked at the dictionary meaning/interpretation of psychic.
- Maria Montessori used the term psychic and spiritual interchangeably throughout her work.
- This preparation is not measurable in real time as it comes out in the behaviour of the child – often only after the 3 – 6 period.
- It has to do with the link – triangle of the child; the material and the directress.
- Montessori’s work on the spiritual embryo, the nebulae, the horne and mne me also fitted into the discussion.
- The Formation of Man was discussed and referred back to the reading of the book.
- We were encouraged to go back to the preparation of the directress – not just placing material on the shelves but really put thought into what you are placing, where you place it, as well as the purpose it needs to serve.
- We also looked at information that is necessary for the directress, such as how pregnancy and birth, siblings, circumstances at home play an important part in the child’s development and personality.

Ina Smith

Western Cape Heads of Schools Lunch

Over our fabulous heads of schools lunch (thanks to SAMA) a discussion arose about 2 early childhood practitioners and their input on **reflective teaching**. *Reflective teaching is a metacognitive approach that encourages teachers to think critically upon their classroom experiences, in helping or guiding you to have a deeper understanding of your role as facilitator in the classroom, as well as guiding you to question what you do and why.* Further research allowed me to find that not only do they practise the art of reflective teaching, but also strongly advocate beautiful or aesthetically pleasing environments for children. 2 books worth taking a peek at are

Designs for Living and Learning ISBN: 978-192961029-7
The Art of Awareness: How Observation Can Transform Your Teaching ISBN: 978-188483484-4 Redleaf Press

I have used the following excerpt from *The Art of Awareness*, which illustrates reflective teaching.

Ann Pelo is a preschool teacher-author and she describes her evolving pedagogy of listening, observing, and documenting in the book she co-authored with Fran Davidson:

“When I first began the practice of taking notes about children’s play and making recordings of children’s conversations, I didn’t really understand how to use all the documentation I gathered. I did it because I’d read about it being the Right Thing to Do. I’d carefully transcribe a recorded conversation among children, then go on with the plans I’d already made. I mostly thought of the notes and conversations as ways to capture on paper the sweet and appealing thinking of young children. I’d share my transcriptions with parents, inviting them to “listen in” on conversations that they would otherwise miss. As I grew into the practice of supporting emerging projects,

I learned more about how to use the documentation that I collected. I noticed myself wishing to understand if my guesses about the children’s interests were on target or way off base, knowing that it mattered deeply to the success of an emerging project. I began to turn to my carefully collected notes for guidance. When I studied my notes and transcriptions alone or with a co-teacher, I could see “underneath” the children’s words to the themes and issues undergirding them. I noticed when ideas were repeated, or when a theme showed up over and over. I began to see through to the heart of children’s play. And with that understanding, I could respond in meaningful ways, taking an active role in shaping an activism project. I could better supply the classroom with props that would sustain children’s play. I could plan trips or invite visitors to the classroom. I could ask provocative questions of the children. I could develop strategies for the children to represent their thinking. Listening to the children is my best guide for supporting emerging projects; the documentation I collect while the children play and talk deepens my listening”

(That’s Not Fair! A Teacher’s Guide to Activism with Young Children. St. Paul: Redleaf Press, 2000).

People often say that motivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing - that's why we recommend it daily. Zig Ziglar

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**Focus for November issue:
2010 Deadline for submissions: 20 October
The Essence of Creativity**

All articles are contributed by SAMA members. We would love to hear from our readers. Please send interesting snippets, valuable insights and amusing anecdotes to share with others and help make this newsletter an exciting and interesting one. If you feel you would like to contribute, please send to Irmgard via: admin@samontessori.org.za

Vacancies

Western Cape:

2 Montessori Assistants position available in Southern Suburbs for January 2011. Montessori tertiary experience is essential. Send CV to bluemoonmontessori@telkomsa.net

Eastern Cape:

Kat River Valley Montessori School, Fort Beaufort
Position available for an experienced 3 - 6 years Director/ Directress. To start January 2011. Tel/Fax: 046-6451442 email: montessori@fortbeaufort.co.za

Gauteng

Monaghan Montessori in Lanseria is looking for a 2.5 -6 yr Directress with experience and passion. Position available immediately. Please email CV's to bestfamily@telkomsa.net or call Xanthe on 082 455 4802

Village Montessori School is seeking a qualified and experienced Montessori Directress in our 3 to 6 year environment. January 2011. Contact Liselle on 012 664 2944 or send c v to montessorivillage@gmail.com

Mauritius

Experienced Directress/School Principal required to manage a new Montessori Pre-School in Mauritius, due to open in January 2011. For further details please contact: Claudia Husenbocus: melisa-clody@hotmail.co.uk."

Montessori Little Children has a brand new Nienhuis Puzzle map of world parts (planispheres) for sale, if you are interested please contact Heidi Leonard on cell: **084 504 7351**.

If you would like to advertise in the SAMA Newsletter, please send the relevant information through to admin@samontessori.org.za

Available SAMA Products:

- **The SAMA Recommended Curriculum** – an integration of A Montessori Recommended Curriculum with the Revised National Curriculum Statement. For queries and to order, contact the SAMA office. The curriculum is printed and bound, and is available to paid up SAMA Organisational Members for R250.00 and to all other categories of membership for R1000.
- **SAMA Policies and Procedures CDs** – a comprehensive compilation of government laws, acts, and policies on CD 1 and examples from various Montessori schools and resources to use in school management on CD 2, at R50.00 each. These prices are for organisational members only. All other categories of membership may purchase the CDs for R500 per set.
- **SAMA Parents Handbook** – a full colour, beautiful publication, useful to parents as an introduction to Montessori Education. This booklet covers basic Montessori philosophy and is the ideal starting point for parent education. These handbooks are available to SAMA Organisational Members only at R25 per copy. For orders of 30 or more, additional postage will be added.

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