



PARENT CORNER: 4

March-April 2019
Montessori Education and Testing

Dear Parents,

For this Parent Corner, I'm going to talk about testing and the need for *authentic testing* to show us that a student has acquired and assimilated knowledge. As you well know by now, Montessori schools generally don't conduct traditional testing on students. Now, this does not mean to say that we do not test students' knowledge, in fact, nothing could be further from the truth, but we 'test' students in a different way to what we might have experienced in our school experience as children.

Before I explain this rather illusive topic (in Montessori) to you, I want to talk about a well-known researcher and consultant on school reform issues, who is also a widely-known advocate of authentic assessment in education. I'm taking my information from an article based on materials that Mr. Wiggins prepared for the California Assessment Program.

AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT, ACCORDING TO WIGGINS IS:

When we directly examine student performance on worthy intellectual tasks. Traditional assessment, by contrast, relies on indirect or proxy 'items'--efficient, simplistic substitutes from which we think valid inferences can be made about the student's performance.

Wiggins asks: Do we want to evaluate student problem-posing and problem-solving in mathematics? experimental research in science? speaking, listening, and facilitating a discussion? doing document-based historical inquiry? thoroughly revising a piece of imaginative writing until it "works" for the reader? Then let our assessment be built out of such exemplary intellectual challenges.

Wiggins also shows the differences between authentic assessment and traditional assessment methods:

* Authentic assessments require students to be effective performers with acquired knowledge. Traditional tests tend to reveal only whether the student can recognize, recall or "plug in" what was learned out of context. This may be as problematic as inferring driving or teaching ability from written tests alone. (Note, therefore, that the debate is not "either-or": there may well be virtue in an array of local and state assessment instruments as benefits the purpose of the measurement.)

* Authentic assessments present the student with the full array of tasks that mirror the priorities and challenges found in the best instructional activities: conducting research; writing, revising and discussing papers; providing an engaging oral analysis of a recent political event; collaborating with others on a debate, etc. Conventional tests are usually limited to paper-and-pencil, one- answer questions.

There is much more to this article, but I believe you get the picture. So, how does this relate to Montessori Programs and specifically to what we do at Claire's Montessori School within the concept of our 21st Century Education?

Like all Montessori schools we value the procedures and the understanding of the methods of how to get from point A to point B. In other words, the process is more important than the end result, but we do expect the end result to be accurate.

We do this in various ways. In the Preschool classrooms three-part lessons are the norm in ascertaining a child's knowledge. What is a three-part lesson, you might ask? We show the child say the continent shape for Europe and then show them 2 other continent shapes naming these as we show them. We then ask the child, "What is this?" while pointing to a specific continent shape. The child will respond. We then ask the same for each of the other continent shapes. Then we ask the question, "Show me, Europe and so on." This is called the three-part lesson. This is one example of how we 'test' out students even as young as 3-year's old.

In our Elementary programs we have a variety of methods to ensure that students are ready to move on to the next level concept. Some of these include: physical tests, integration of written and oral expression, creative expression, collaboration, and analytical thinking.

In the next installment about testing, I'll dive even deeper into how we approach learning and testing in our school.

In conclusion, these forms of testing would be considered essential elements in a superior 21st Century Education and as you are now discovering, these are found at our school.