



MSS & WAABINY OSHC EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM POLICY



PURPOSE

To describe the process of planning, evaluating and curricula programming for children at Montessori Stepping Stones (MSS).

SCOPE

All stakeholders involved in the evaluation of programmes/curricula at MSS including educators, employees, parents, families and children.

DESCRIPTION/GENERAL

MSS follows the philosophy and educational method of Dr Maria Montessori. In contemporary terms MSS' philosophy and educational method can best be described as combination of an emergent, project, activity-based, thematic, integrated and inclusive curriculum.

Montessori education offers children the opportunity to realise their potential and seeks to promote:

- self-confidence and self-esteem
- a sense of responsibility for themselves and their actions
- independence
- co-operation with others and a sense of community
- initiative and self-motivation
- a joy of work and a love of learning
- creative intelligence and imagination

For the purpose of this policy, 'child' or 'children' is any person(s) aged from birth to eighteen years (UNICEF).

The success of care and education for the child will to a certain extent depend on the degree of consistency and co-operation between the family home/community environment and the MSS early learning centre. Parallel with the development and learning of the child can also be a process of growth for families, custodians as a greater understanding of their role in their child's care and education develops. As described in the governments Early Years Learning Framework (ELYF) is the fundamental view that children's lives are characterised by belonging, being and becoming. From before birth children are connected to family, community, culture and place. Their earliest development and learning takes place through these relationships, particularly within families, who are children's first and most influential educators. As children participate in everyday life, they develop interests and construct their own identities and understandings of the world.

Both at home and at our centre, a child is treated with the same respect that adults would accord to another adult. Self-confidence is encouraged through showing appreciation and acknowledgement of attempts and achievements but without judging. Through the order and routine of both family home and centre environments, the child will acquire a sense of security.

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In Montessori settings, groups have a vertical age structure, generally spanning three years. Younger children have the opportunity to learn by observation and absorption of the work of older children, while the older children also have opportunities to teach the younger ones, thereby acquiring a greater depth of understanding as well as greater confidence and competence. The room environment is a society in itself, fostering equal opportunity for all where the child can develop socially.

Children work with concrete materials which isolate important concepts and skills. Many of these materials are self-correcting. Activities are self-directed so that children have a sense of control over their own learning and are able to follow their own interests.

The Montessori approach is child centred and allows an unfolding of each child in an atmosphere of co-operation rather than competition, according to his or her own true nature. The role of a group/room director is in constructively guiding children in their learning rather than teaching them.

The Montessori program is an integrated one where all aspects of a child's learning (e.g. music, writing, reading, mathematics, science, art, craft, culture, physical activity) are presented as part of an interrelated whole. Many of the activities performed by the children at an earlier age are an indirect preparation for a later skill and the environment allows the discovery of new and exciting things about material often worked with throughout their developing years. The embedded Reggio Emilia based approach enables an extension of the prepared environment into child, parent, culture and/or community 'directed' creative and art based programmes.

The Montessori program is a flow experience; it builds on the continuing self-construction of the child--daily, weekly, yearly--for the duration of the program. Although the centre is divided into multi-age classrooms--the prepared environments introduce an uninterrupted series of learning passages, a continuum.

The prepared environments, along with their physical dimensions, desired outcomes, and documented results, carefully reflect the natural learning characteristics of the child at each stage of development. In Maria Montessori's metaphorical language, *"the successive levels of education must conform to the successive personalities of the child."*

The prepared environments and the role of the educators in the classroom distinguish Montessori from other educational approaches. For example, independent activity constitutes about 80% of the work while "directed" activity accounts for the remaining 20%. The special environments enable children to perform various tasks which induce thinking about relationships. The prepared environment also offers practical occasions for introducing social relationships through free interaction. The logical, sequential nature of the environment provides orderly structures that guide discovery: Theorems are discovered, not presented; spelling rules are derived through recognition of patterns, not merely memorized.

Every aspect of the curriculum involves creative invention and careful, thoughtful analysis. In viewing learning outcomes at each level, it must be emphasized that **why** and **how children arrive at what they know** - is just as - **if not more important** - as **what** they know.

Therefore planning and evaluating children's experiences is unique and reflects MSS values, knowledge and skills of its children, families and educators.

Documenting information about our children and their interests, beliefs, questions, discoveries and ideas assist educators to plan for routines, transitions, excursions and play based learning experiences. This information, together with knowledge and an awareness of child development, builds an understanding of the 'whole' child.

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There is not one prescriptive method of gathering information about children's development and interests, or planning and evaluating children's experiences. MSS' practice reflects our philosophy (and aims) about how children play, learn and develop. The information gathering supports the role educators to help children determine who they are and their place in the world (Belonging, Being, Becoming).

Our continuous strategy for planning and evaluating children's experiences is an effective self-reflection tool. Through written or visual evidence, our educators can assess and compare children's growth and development over time. Similarly, when new theories or strategies emerge from research, educators have the opportunity to re-evaluate their observations. This becomes a professional development opportunity for educators to improve their skills and knowledge.

MSS recognises and acknowledges that educators and families have varying knowledge and skills regarding children's play experiences, and that all stakeholders' opinions, ideas and comments are respected and valued.

Educators have a range of qualifications, skills and knowledge which can affect how we plan and evaluate children's experiences and are mindful that children and their families, parents, custodians are vital sources of information about their interests and abilities.

MSS is committed to maintaining open, positive lines of communication when collaborating with children, families, educators and external agencies to meet the needs of children.

It is understood by educators, children and families that there is a shared responsibility between MSS and all stakeholders for the planning and evaluation of children's experiences as a high priority.

For the purpose of this policy, 'external agencies' can include the child's: medical practitioner (or doctor of medicine); allied health professional, such as a speech therapist, nutritionist or child psychologist; school teachers, inclusion and support facilitators.

PRINCIPLES AND STRATEGIES

MSS recognises that the individual abilities and strengths of children and families, parents, custodians are important factors when our educators plan and evaluate children's experiences.

Documenting information about our children and their interests, beliefs, questions, discoveries and ideas assist educators to plan for routines, transitions, excursions and play and learning experiences is a continuous process. This information, together with knowledge and an awareness of child's development, builds an understanding of the 'whole' child.

This policy outlines how MSS educators gather information about children's development and interests, and plans and evaluates children's experiences. The policy assists educators to consider, respond to and plan for children's:

- interests, strengths, ideas and opinions;
- relationships and interactions with their peers, families, educators and the community
- ability to acknowledge and confidently express their emotions
- need to investigate, negotiate, problem solve and think critically
- perspective of diversity, inclusion, social justice and equity

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- sense of identity and self-worth, and their relationship with the world
- physical, social, cognitive and linguistic development and learning needs

Maria Montessori believed the purpose of education is to be an aid to life. It should go far beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge in various areas of culture.

She believed further that the child on whom this "burden of education" falls has a nature quite different from that of the adult. While the adult has reached the norm of the species, the child is a being in a constant state of metamorphosis, creating for her/himself the person s/he is to be. And the environment in which the child evolves will shape her/him just as surely as her/his genetic inheritance.

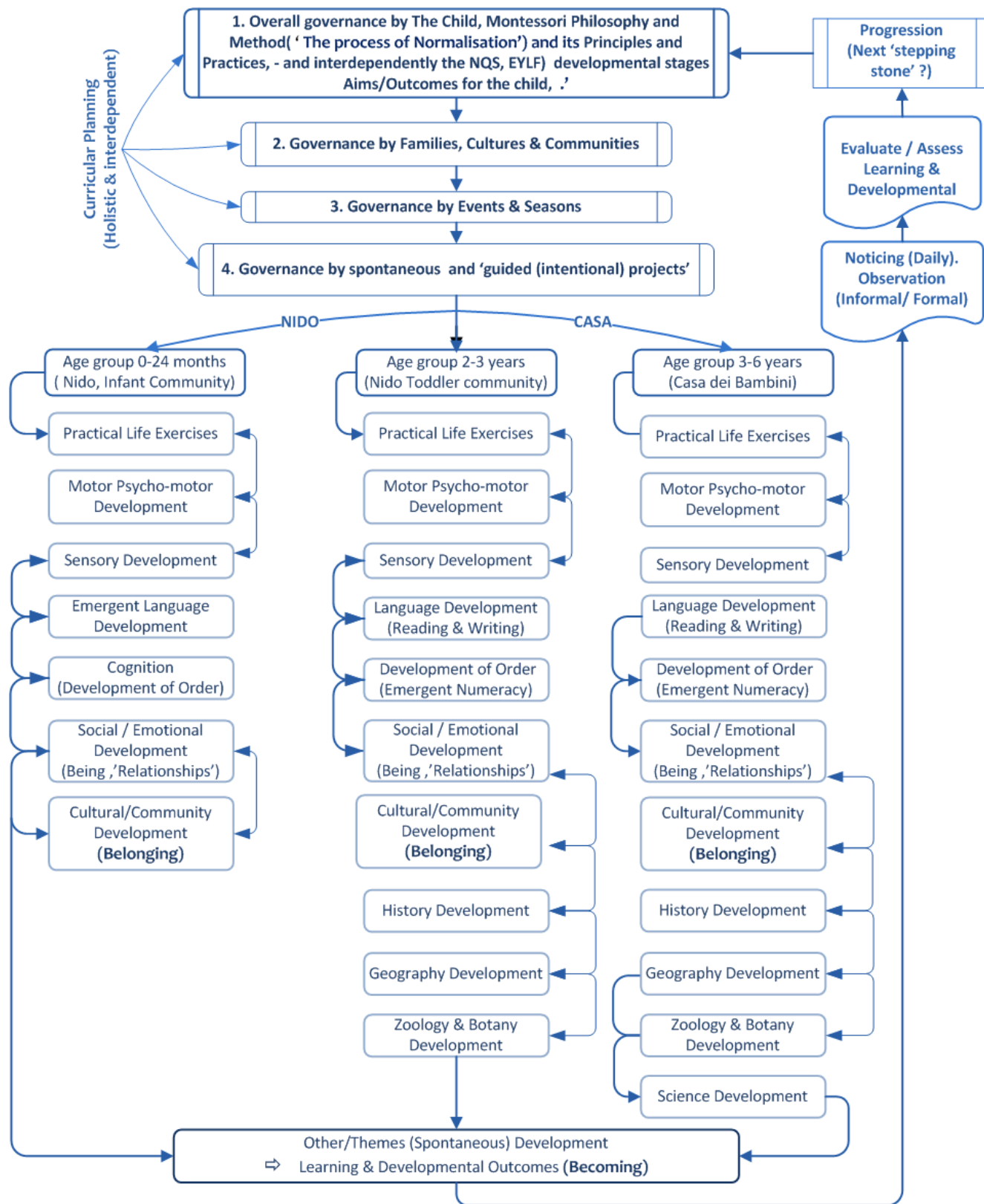
While Sigmund Freud was doing research on the abnormalities of behaviour, which have their roots in early childhood, Montessori approached the problem of the child's psyche by suggesting that the ideal environment be prepared for each developing human being, that a child's needs at every stage be studied, and that a way be provided for these needs to be met.

Next page shows a diagram of the governance of a child's curricular planning, noticing/observation and associated assessment/evaluation and progression (scaffolding of learning and developmental outcomes) under the Montessori Philosophy and educational method under the NQS and ELYF Framework.

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PLANNING A CHILD’S CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

At MSS “Planning” is defined as follows:

Planning is the process of gathering pedagogical information (valuable information gathered by the educators about/for a child presenting learning and development –steps for reflection and ongoing and intentional teaching) about a child, establishing the child’s emotional, social, physical, cognitive and spiritual/cultural development stage together with parents/family or custodian(s). This is initially performed during enrolment interviews and then on an ongoing basis

This planning process is divided into a ‘static’ and a ‘dynamic planning’ part.

The first part of planning is providing for the established developmental stages and needs of the child within the prepared environment (In a Montessori the prepared environment is ‘a curriculum’ as it provides for all the child’s developmental stages and areas). This is the static part where the planning is based on knowledge that is provided from experiences gathered from parents/families or custodians. The static plan will then involve noticing (observing) the child within the prepared environment with guided (intentional) as well as spontaneous activities. The collaborative assessment of noticing/observations of a child’s learning and development and the then following building on (scaffolding on) the child’s learning an development to then further guide and direct the child’s developmental towards desired outcomes– and in the terms of the EYLF – do this over 5 years is where the static plan merges over to the dynamic plan. This static plan merges with the dynamic plan as the child normalises in the prepared environment, into her or his respective group and into a self-directed plan.

The dynamic planning is based on the concept that by observing and listening to the child the educators are able to respond appropriately to an individual child's emerging knowledge and understanding. The plan is constructivist in nature; that is, the educators, the child and the parents or custodian(s) work collaboratively reflect and plan experiences that sustain, challenge and expand the child's understandings. Planning is carried out by educators collaborating gathered pedagogical information with each other, the child where possible and the parents and families to then further reflect and document planned (intentional) as well as spontaneous an ongoing process of learning and development.

The curricular activities are based on the principles of developmentally appropriate practice and active learning that is child-centred and child-directed. The ‘plan’ ‘emerges’ from child's, family’s, community’s and educators' knowledge of child development and MSS’ curricular approach (see diagram on previous page). The dynamic planning is characterised by:

- Child/family/culturally initiated experiences based on individual interest and questions. For example, a child who shows an interest in workmen laying concrete may be given the opportunity to explore this interest through dramatic play, or using blocks to build with clay.
- Apparatus, activities, materials and resources that are selected by the children who are free to experiment without the restriction of adult directions or predetermined outcomes. Materials are chosen because the child displays a natural interest and curiosity – and they offer a range of open-ended possibilities; for example, clay and painting are child-directed, and there is no requirement for the child to produce an end product, building blocks to construct from the mind.

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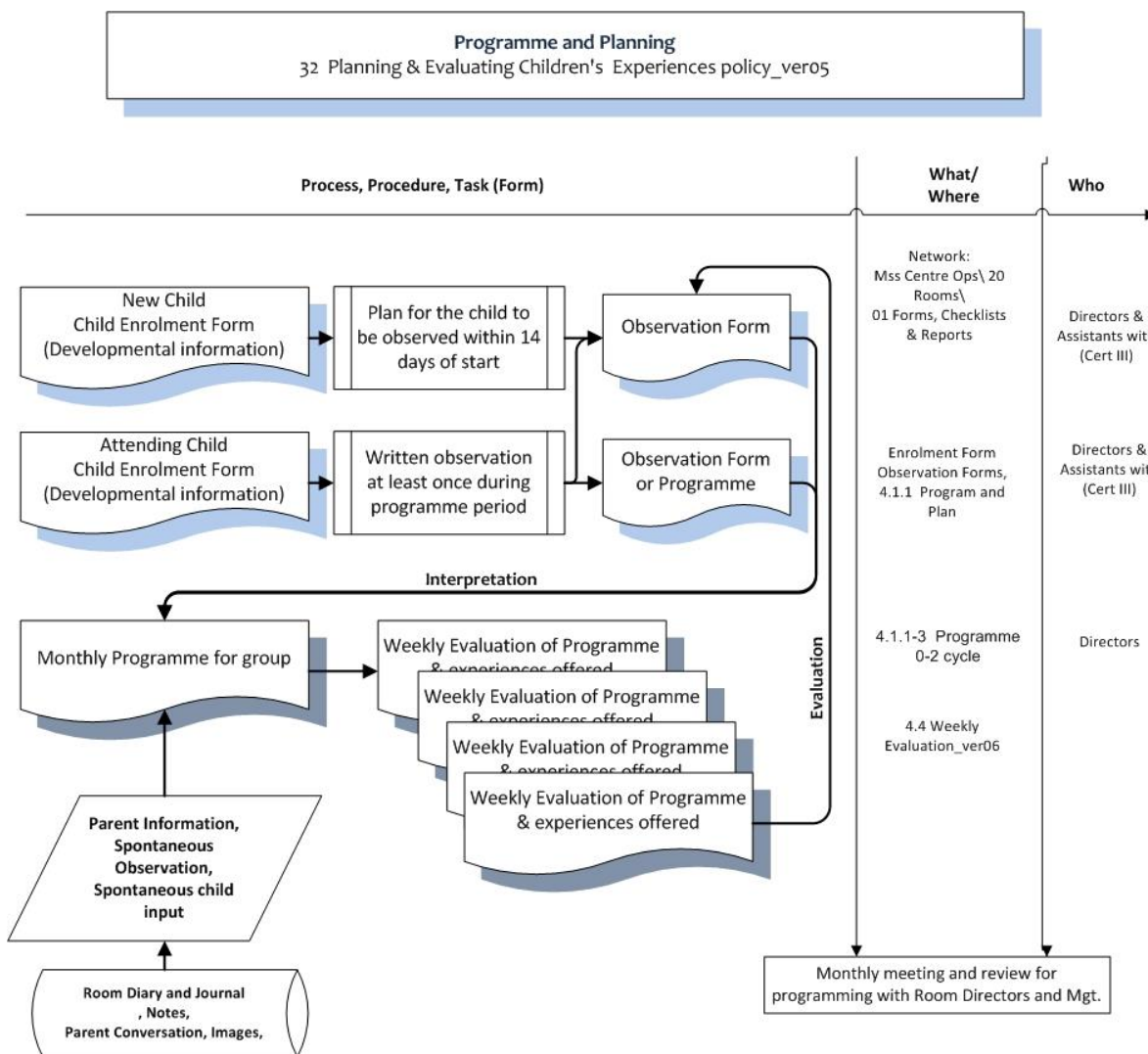
- Active encouragement of exploration of apparatus materials using all of the senses. For example, children are free to add water to the sand or digging patch and there is no unnecessary concern about mess, sand tray for letter tracing, juicing of fruit.
- Children being encouraged to discover relationships through exploration and trial and error. Educators ask questions and pose problems, for example 'I wonder what would happen if you added more water'.
- Freedom to manipulate and transform materials through active exploration. Children combine materials in different ways in order to support or extend play; for example, children are able to take dress-up clothes outside, or use blocks in the home corner, combine pink tower and brown stairs, red and red-and-blue counting rods
- Access to a range of activities and equipment (age appropriate for the 'approx 2½ year old onward), for example, collage resources such as paper, sticky tape, masking tape, staplers, hole punch, are freely accessible at all times, (age appropriate for the 6 month onward,) for example mobiles, manipulative materials for hand-eye coordination, puzzles, colour and shape matching and combining, blocks for construction.
- Physical activity - there are many opportunities for children to use fine, gross and psycho motor skills.
- educators who encourage children to verbalise what they are doing and enter in discussion or conversation about what they are thinking.

Maria Montessori's view of learning, with its focus on interactions and relationships, requires observation, interpretation, reflection, evaluation, validation and documentation of children's learning that incorporates 'background' information such as discussions and interactions, which further contributes valuable information about how individual children construct knowledge.

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It is up to the individual educator to choose the most appropriate method of observation.

The focus for observation should be towards developing an understanding of how children use strategies to strengthen their learning; develop, interact and form relationships; and think critically. Observation should also acknowledge the importance of children's interests and strengths, and the value of interpersonal relationships such as family, culture and community – belonging, being & becoming.

The planning documents used reflect the beliefs and values that underpin the approach adopted by MSS, which enables us to:

- effectively plan, implement and evaluate the provisions we make for the care, education and the cultural development of children
- comply with requirements and guidelines for documentation of programs

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Documenting planning, validation and evaluation is an important process within the context of the Early Years Learning Framework, and the emphasis in planning should take into account:

- the physical environment, equipment and materials;
- interactions and direct engagement with children, families and the community;
- the way time is structured;
- the way opportunities are offered;
- daily living experiences and routines;
- special events or experiences; and
- communications and relationships among educators in the early learning services.

MSS' planning framework includes the following general guidelines for documentation, planning and evaluating the provision of experiences for children:

- A good experience for children emerges from informed critical reflection and careful planning - the most effective child experiences emerge out of careful planning and preparation and a willingness to alter or even drop what is planned. One of the reasons for documenting plans and experiences is to have a record for children and professionals to use to reflect and make future plans, and also to share the experience with families. Having accessible information not only informs parents but invites them to contribute ideas and perspectives. Parents particularly are given the opportunity to reflect on and review what has happened, offer constructive criticism, and offer suggestions (see room journals).
- Planning formats change over time to meet the unique needs of MSS and the group/room. As a group of professionals we work together to develop our own effective ways of planning and evaluating the provisions for children.
- Several different ways of collecting information and planning used simultaneously are likely to produce better results. As educators we must be truly open to children's meanings and to the possibilities presented by families and the community, use planning formats as a basis for planning, but do not restrict their thinking about possibilities and opportunities.

DOCUMENTING EXPERIENCES FOR CHILDREN

MSS uses a web-based system called "Xplor" to manage the documentation of the children's learning journeys, as well as creating and administering the program/plan. It is meaningful for educators and families, parents and custodians, not too time consuming to complete and uses language clear to the stakeholders involved. These plans:

- allow educators to plan ahead
- help educators to think about what they do and why
- ensure all children who attend our centre are planned for
- assist educators to use resources effectively
- ensure staff/educator consistency with individual children

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- help educators evaluate whether group as well as individual needs and goals were achieved and whether the experiences were suitable (if not, why?)
- to ensure there is a documented journey of discoveries and development for each child
- assist in maintaining accountability to the child, to the families, parents/custodians involved at MSS

DOCUMENTING MONTHLY PROGRAMME PLAN

At MSS we begin the planning process by considering the overall monthly/weekly plan that outlines the 'big picture' for 4 weeks. The programme takes into consideration the previous' weeks observations, reflections and evaluations as well as parent & family and community input/events.

The monthly programme documents what activities are planned for and also how they link to the Early Years Learning Framework outcomes.

This plan is available to view through the Xplor platform, and also displayed for every group/room on the whiteboard for all parents and families to view and participate in.

The programme provides a structured view, but is flexible enough to allow for changes as necessary. Using Maria Montessori's curriculum model, it allows for experiences to evolve based on the interests of the children. The plan is in fact "re-arranged" over the days as a result of interactions with the children.

Often the decisions about daily experiences will be a collaborative process, and in that sense will be quite open-ended.

The programme maps the experiences that may be offered each day, how the environment will be set up and any special events for the week, i.e., if we plan a picnic lunch or a work on an outdoor activity such as the composting.

The programme shows how learning opportunities and other components of the program 'flow' and link in a meaningful way - documenting a planned learning and development journey over a specific period of time.

The resulting planning ensures that all areas of the program are considered when decisions are made about experiences. In relation to children, the program sets out;

- the range of experiences
- the types of experiences
- the way the environment is to be set up
- ways of interacting with the children
- the role of the educator/staff/parents and families
- opportunities for evaluating the program

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The programme describes the experiences planned (or experiences that evolve) for the small, large group as well as the individual child. The following issues are considered when planning the day:

- Providing a balance of child-directed experiences and educator-guided experiences based on children's current interests and developmental level
- Providing a balance of active and passive experiences both indoor and outdoors
- Providing opportunities for children to work independently and within a variety of small groups
- Ensuring there are long uninterrupted periods of play time
- Allowing a degree of flexibility to accommodate children's changing interests and needs
- Ensuring transitions are part of the learning process and are relaxed and unhurried
- Deciding what influence attendance patterns will have on the range and duration of experiences to be offered

The planning process provides a framework and structure for both children, parents and families, educators and staff. It takes into account staff rosters, meals and the general aspects related to the physical care of children.

EVALUATION

At MSS evaluation is defined as follows:

“Evaluation is validating planning data gathered against planned and unplanned outcomes”.

Ongoing evaluation of planned experiences for both individuals and the group is an integral part of the planning framework. Without opportunities and effective methods for reflection and evaluation, educators are unable to determine if the goals and aspirations for children are being achieved or if practices and strategies are appropriate or effective. The evaluation of the program allows educators to discover future directions to take in planning, both for individuals and groups of children.

MSS programmes are reviewed in light of research and accepted theories. Broinowski (2002:118) uses the analogy of a house design. None of us would dream of building a house unless the design was *‘tested against credible engineering theory, materials examined for their suitability, foundations checked for depth and strength etc. . . .’* He suggests evaluating the overall program design by considering:

- vision - rate how well you think the programme reflects MSS' philosophy;
- child development - check that the program reflects the principal elements of MSS vision about children and rate the programme on how it reflects professional knowledge and best practice about children and their development
- families' perspectives - enlist families in evaluating the service; it is a good idea to learn what families think about the programme - after all, they know their child better than anyone
- peer assessment - feedback and comments from everyone involved with the programme and from other professional colleagues can be very valuable

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- children's own assessment - children's feedback should be sought and their responses to provisions should be carefully evaluated
- Regular reflectional and evaluation of all aspects of the programme is essential to measure the effectiveness of the programme against broad goals for the group as well as specific objectives for individual children

Note: It is most important that all stakeholders are involved in the evaluation of programme models and any decision to introduce changes.

INFORMAL AND FORMAL EVALUATION

Without both formal and informal evaluation, educators cannot determine the effectiveness of the planned programme in meeting the needs of children. Ongoing, purposeful reflection and evaluation is necessary in the provision of good quality services. Educators are continually evaluating programmes as they go about their work. Informal evaluation occurs when educators spontaneously reflect on activities, experiences, routines and children. Educators may take immediate action to adjust the programme or it may result in making a mental note to add to or change the programme for the following day.

Formal evaluation is recorded and describes what has happened during the day/week in relation to the group, individuals, activities or experiences.

Written evaluations should be meaningful and informative.

Evaluation should include all areas of the programme, for example:

- Evaluation of group goals occurs at a formal and informal level. As educators work with children, they are constantly 'tuned-in' to how they are responding to the programme. Adjustments can be made throughout the day to ensure that the day flows smoothly and that the needs of the children are met.
- On a more formal level it is essential to take time to think about the child's goals, the goals you have for children and evaluate their value(s). This form of evaluation needs to occur on a regular basis so that the programme can be fine-tuned as necessary. For example, if you have as a goal 'for children to develop age-appropriate conflict resolution skills' you would need to list the ways in which you expect this to be demonstrated by the children. Writing a series of questions is often a good way to get started on this type of evaluation. For example, ask '*How do children resolve arguments?*', '*How do the children respond to frustration?*', '*Do children ask for help when needed?*', '*How well do children share equipment?*'. Answering these questions through observation and reflection is an ongoing evaluation process.
- Evaluation of routines, resources and physical space requires educators to think about what works well and what doesn't, how children respond to routines and how resources and equipment are used. This is an ongoing task requiring continual fine-tuning as necessary.
- Evaluating the educator's role is also essential. Understanding and knowing what things you do well and what areas need improvement should be an ongoing process of review. Again, it is important to focus on different elements of your role as educator and review each one in turn. Knowing about yourself as a professional allows you to continually grow and develop.
- Evaluation is used as strategy for continuous improvement. The process of evaluation encourages critical reflection by educators and includes input from parents and children. It is not necessary to evaluate all aspects of the programme at any one specific time, rather the process should be ongoing and the outcomes used to inform and guide practice.

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Key features to consider in programme evaluation can be found by referring to quality control documents, for example:

- Programmes reflect a clear statement of MSS' philosophy and a related set of broad centre goals - how do we show that we are 'respecting the needs and rights of children'? What daily practices or strategies demonstrate this philosophy?
- Programmes are evaluated regularly - are all team members included in the evaluation process? How is feedback gathered from children and parents? How is this feedback used to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme as it relates to the stated philosophy and goals of MSS?
- Record of children's learning and well being are maintained by MSS' centre staff and are used to plan programmes that include experiences appropriate for each child - how is the link between developmental documentation, parental goals for children and the daily programme demonstrated?
- Programmes cater for the needs interests and abilities of all children in ways that assist children to be successful learners - does the programme support social and cultural diversity?

Programme evaluation is part of the ongoing cycle of reflection, observation, planning and change. All educators must be prepared to reflect about their practice, be open to change, have a positive attitude towards continuing their own learning and be aware of their roles and responsibilities related to the planning framework. Professional educators continually reflect on aspects of the programme in search of the best way to achieve the service goals.

Planning Formats should;

- be practical and 'time efficient' (how are observations collected? Are things only written once?)
- link to observations so that decisions about what is provided for children are appropriate for both individuals and the group
- allow for the follow up of planned and unplanned events
- be easily understood by others (educators, relief educators and parents/custodians)
- reflect MSS' philosophy and goals for children's development
- meet standards required by Regulations and Quality Assurance (e.g.. show experiences for the week and how individual children's development in all areas is planned for and how it is displayed)

INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS

Individual needs are important factors when educators gather information about children's development and interests, which assists in planning children's experiences.

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GROUP NEEDS

Children, like adults, are social beings and their peer groups affect how they interact, play, learn and develop.

Educators need to be aware of how children's interests are crucial factors in developing play and learning experiences. It is important to understand that children's interests often reflect popular cultural concepts such as music, fashion and technology.

At MSS experiences are planned to reflect the needs and interests of children when they are in peer groups.

KNOWLEDGE OF CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

Educators provide individuals and groups of children with experiences that meet their current abilities. This involves planning experiences that encourage and challenge children's development and set achievable goals.

The educator's knowledge of child development is fundamental when planning and evaluating children's experiences.

KNOWLEDGE OF CHILDREN

The knowledge of individual children, their life experiences, behaviours and interests is an important aspect in planning children's experiences. Having an awareness of how individual children interact and play are important factors when educators gather information.

GATHERING INFORMATION

MSS defines 'gathering' as observing, collecting and documenting.

The definition of 'gathering' guides educators how to observe children and collect information, which includes children's relationships, family backgrounds, lifestyles, interests, language, culture and community.

OBSERVING CHILDREN

Educators consider independently on the most appropriate methods of observation being used to gather information about children and their families. The focus for observation should be towards developing an understanding of how children use strategies to strengthen their learning, develop, interact and form relationships, and think critically. Observation should also acknowledge the importance of children's interests and strengths, and the value of interpersonal relationships such as family, culture and community.

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DOCUMENTING PEDAGOGICAL INFORMATION

Educators should consider several basic concepts when documenting. These include:

- providing a clear and transparent purpose to why educators are gathering information
- ensuring that documentation is clear, objective and meaningful
- showing a 'developmental pathway' of experiences, learning and progress;
- clearly linking documentation to children's individual and group experiences

Further, Staff/Educator should consider the following reflective questions:

- What is the purpose of documenting children's interactions and experiences?
- What do we learn about children from documenting observations and experiences?
- How do we use documentation to plan for furthering children's experiences?

EVALUATING DOCUMENTATION

An ongoing process of evaluation through reflection and review allows educators to identify strengths, interests and opportunities for further development.

It is important to use methods of evaluation and continually evaluate what works best for all the MSS stakeholders.

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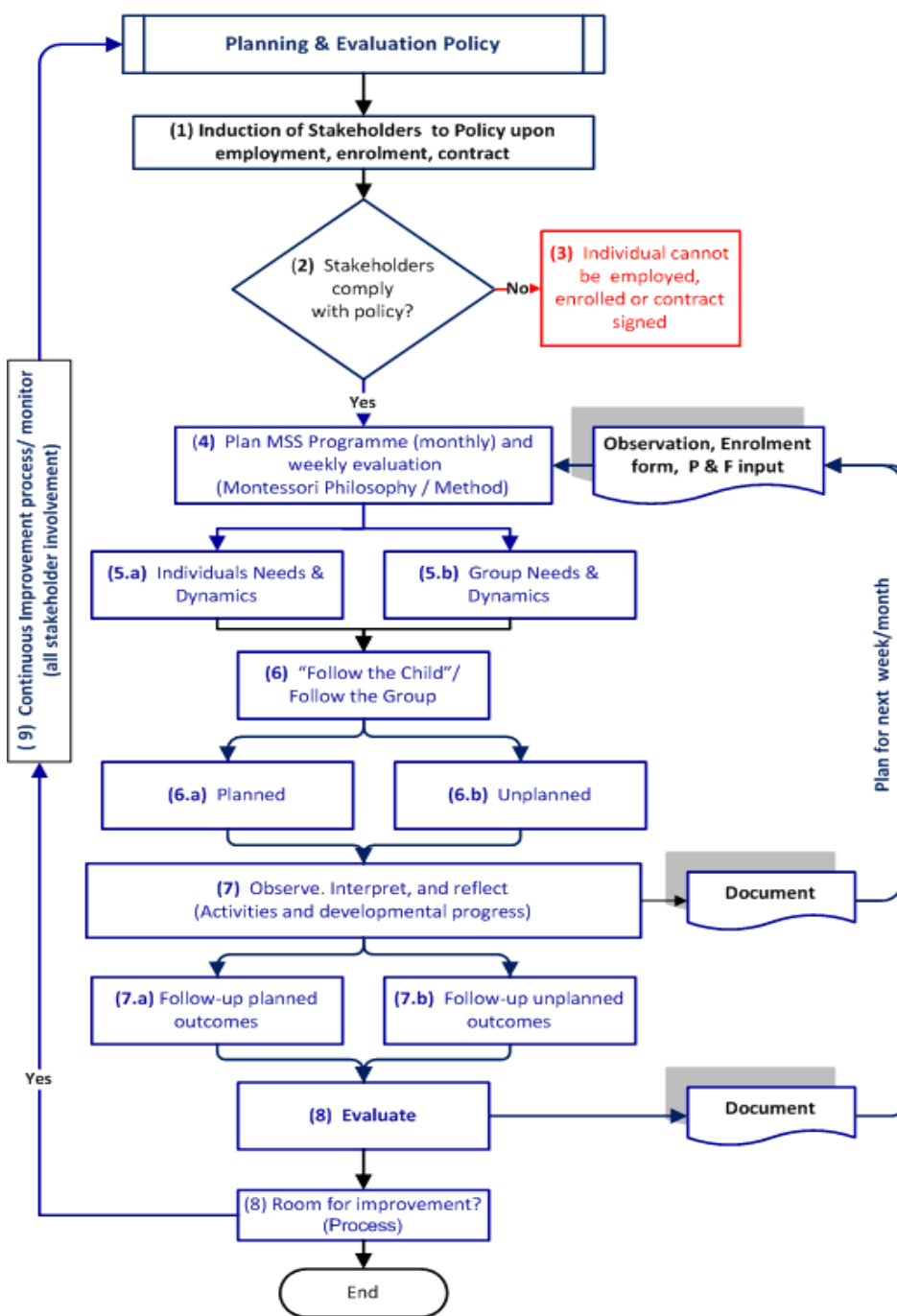


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PROCEDURE

Please refer below



Day	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Year 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Year 2	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Year 3	15	16	17	18	19	20	21
Year 4	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Year 5	29	30	31	1	2	3	4
Year 6	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Year 7	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Year 8	19	20	21	22	23	24	25
Year 9	26	27	28	29	30	31	1
Year 10	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Year 11	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Year 12	16	17	18	19	20	21	22

MONTESSORI - CENTRE OPERATIONS

ANECDOTAL OBSERVATION

Child's Name: [] Date of Birth: [] Room: []

Observer: []

Observation Date: []

Observation Time: []

Observation Location: []

Observation Focus: []

Observation Notes: []

Observation Summary: []

Observation Reflection: []

Observation Signatures: []

MONTESSORI - CENTRE OPERATIONS

WEEKLY EVALUATION

Week From: [] To: []

Group/Room: []

Observer: []

Evaluation Date: []

Evaluation Focus: []

Evaluation Notes: []

Evaluation Summary: []

Evaluation Reflection: []

Evaluation Signatures: []

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