



Wider Horizons

Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy

For to be a teacher does not
mean simply to affirm that
such a thing is so, or to deliver
a lecture.

No, to be a teacher in the
right sense is to be a learner.

Instruction begins when you, the teacher,
learn from the learner, put yourself
in his/her place so that you may understand what s/he
understands and in the way s/he understands it...

(Kierkegaard, 1854)



St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI)



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1 Introduction

This is the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy of St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland (SNMCI). It considers and embodies the mission and values of St Nicholas Montessori Society Ireland (SMSI) and places them in the context of higher education. It has been developed in consultation with stakeholders, students, administrative teams and academic staff and sets out the College's philosophy of teaching, learning and assessment.

This document describes SNMCI's current engagement with named priority areas and sets out strategic aims in each. The information in this document is set in the context of the College's current operating procedures and acknowledges the need to balance the need for continuous improvement in the quality and standard of teaching, learning and assessment with available resources- human, capital and physical, available to the College.

The strategy fosters an institutional commitment to academic excellence and is fit for purpose in the context of the College's strategic plan: *Society 2025*.

Strategy 2025 is subject to ongoing oversight and review by the Academic Board of the College and also by the Board of Trustees.

1.1 Context

Montessori Education

Dr Maria Montessori (1870-1952) believed that children were not simply empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, but rather that they should be active agents in their own education and socialisation. She believed that children should be the 'drivers' of their own education and that they learned from themselves, from each other and from their environment. True learning, she said, is best achieved through active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings.

SNMCI endeavours to embed these very same principles of active, co-constructed and shared learning experiences in its *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy* and its practice. It aims to provide learning opportunities which enable students of all ages to realise their potential as professionals and life-long learners.

Who are our students?

SNMCI is proud of the diversity of its student body. By day, the college has full-time students including school leavers, mature students and graduates wishing to change career paths. Our evening and part time students range in age from 18 years upwards and typically have to juggle the demands of studying, with those of a full time job and family. Some evening



and part time students also travel to Dun Laoghaire from surrounding counties, showing great dedication in pursuit of their educational goals.

Full- Time Students: These students are for the most part recent school leavers. They take time to move away from the more rigid controls of secondary education and we are committed to supporting these students by providing classes, activities and feedback designed to allow them, over time, to develop the necessary self-motivation to succeed.

Part -Time / Evening Students: These students are generally working full time in an area related to their programme of study, e.g. as a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) as an Early Years Practitioner, or in some other caring or educational capacity. They view the College as a means of advancing their career with a relevant professional/ academic qualification. They are generally highly committed to their studies. We are proud to meet these students as fellow professionals and as part of a learning community.

1.2 Graduate Attributes

SNMCI's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy represents SNMCI's commitment to institution wide improvement and development to ensure that our graduates, through the course of their studies, will acquire and display the following key attributes:

- **Knowledgeable:** SNMCI graduates have extensive specialist knowledge in the field of education. They understand how education has the ability to transform lives and they identify with the concept of life-long learning.
- **Socially, culturally and environmentally aware:** SNMCI graduates appreciate cultural diversity. They respect human rights, especially the rights of children, and are always aware of their social and environmental responsibilities
- **Creative:** SNMCI graduates are reflective thinkers, capable of applying creative ideas and innovations. They have the capacity to work, reflect, review and build on their knowledge
- **Collaborative:** SNMCI graduates are good communicators. They respect the opinions of children, parents, colleagues and other professional. They work as part of a team in the best interests of the children in their care.
- **Agents of Change:** SNMCI graduates are 'agents of change'. They are proactive and responsive to the needs of the sector.
- **Professional:** SNMCI graduates have integrity and ethical standards. They engage in a professional manner within their schools and within the wider community, for the benefit of all.



1.3 Priority Areas

Priority Areas have been highlighted to support the achievement of SNMCI'S stated 'vision' to *bring excellence in Montessori education to the broader education landscape so that all young people are placed at the heart of their own educational experience and empowered to be independent, confident and creative lifelong learners.*

SNMCI strives to achieve this 'vision' through its Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education where it

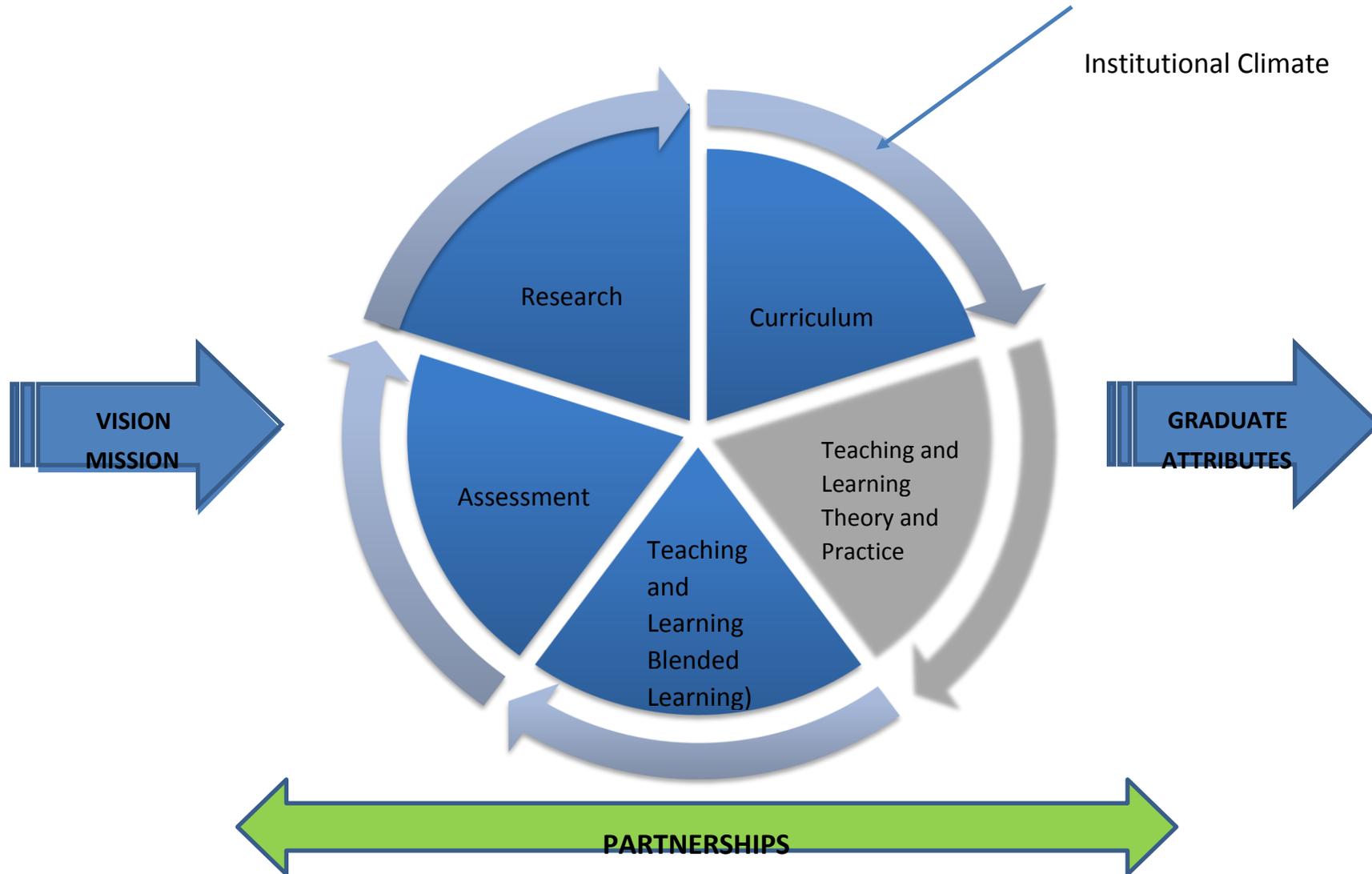
- provides outstanding learning experiences, guided by the philosophy of Dr Maria Montessori in recognition of the needs of all;
- prepares Montessori educators capable of leveraging the full value of Montessori philosophy, to support and nurture learners of all ages to grow and develop as valuable contributing members of society;
- advocates for Montessori Education by supporting Montessori professionals to continually improve and reflect upon their practice, and by supporting the integration of Montessori philosophy into national education systems.

Priority areas include

1. Curriculum
2. Teaching and Learning (Theory and Practice)
3. Teaching and Learning (Blended Learning)
4. Assessment
5. Research
6. Institutional Climate
7. Partnerships



1.4 Priority Areas in Context





2 Wider Horizons: Priority Areas in Context

Dr Montessori used the term 'wider horizons' to describe the physical, cognitive, social and moral progression of children moving through new 'planes of development'. As children grow, she wrote, they have an urge to look for wider horizons beyond those prepared for them by adults, to go out and explore the world and to develop a sense of morality closely linked to membership of social groups. SNMCI reflects this concept of 'wider horizons' by providing a transformative experience for students. As they move through their programmes of study they depend less on tutor support, developing the character, independence and skills necessary for success in life.

SNMCI's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy draws on Biggs (1999) who sees teaching and learning as an integrated and balanced system, in which all components support each other. Biggs outlined some of the components of this balanced system: the **curriculum we teach, teaching and learning environment, the assessment process and reporting of results** and the **institutional climate**.

The priority areas of SNMCI's Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, outlined below, reflect Montessori's 'outward-looking' philosophy and Biggs' notion of an integrated system.

2.1 The Curriculum

The majority of programmes at SNMCI are education based and our graduates are consistently in demand in many educational contexts; early years, special education, Montessori primary education; pre-school managers, coordinators of after-school and homework clubs.

SNMCI recognises that any curriculum represents a carefully crafted learning journey for the student, from the beginning to the end of their programme of study (Clancy 2015).

As part of programme development SNMCI commits to to:

- design programmes in line with its vision, and values;
- design programmes in line with its SMSI strategic aims;
- adhere to the Council of Europe's recommendation that programmes of Higher Education should represent preparation for sustainable employment, preparation for life as active citizens in democratic societies, personal development and the development and maintenance, through teaching, learning and research, of a broad, advanced knowledge base;
- look to national and international best practice;
- involve stakeholders;
- seek out 'critical' friends with valuable expertise;
- abide by formal approval processes;
- provide clear information for students;
- offer well organised and rewarding placement opportunities to support classroom learning (as applicable);
- encourage research based practice and continuing professional development.



The Curriculum at SNMCI

Is based on national and international standards of quality in education	Is responsive in considering market needs: early years', special education, primary education	Considers previous learning and experience: RPL, RPEL
Is relevant: based on current research in education	Is flexible	Fosters skills for 'real world' applicability and employability
Is aware of the need for 21 st Century Skills		Is evaluated and reviewed

Strategic Aims re Curriculum

- Plan for future programme development through research and staff development.
- Develop Montessori programmes into broader areas of the community e.g. Montessori Education and Dementia.
- Broaden our suite of programmes in line with faculty expertise e.g. psychology, special education, primary education and community education.
- Provide professional development opportunities based on Montessori philosophy.
- Increase flexibility of access and delivery including short programmes and blended delivery options.
- Increase access routes e.g. work/study options and admission routes for those who have valuable life/work experience wishing to return to education.

2.2 Teaching and Learning Environment: Theory and Practice

Philosophers, psychologists, physiologists, educationalists, sociologists, and others have all contributed to understanding how people learn. There is consensus that *'there is no agreed theory of learning, only a range of theories to choose from'* (Carlile & Jordan 2005 cited in Whitaker 2017). It is important that learning communities reflect on their own beliefs and theories about teaching and learning to avoid teaching in 'the way, it has always been done'. *'Choice of teaching, learning and assessment methods should be grounded in, and considered alongside, an understanding of theories about learning'*. (Fry, Ketteridge & Marshall 2009).



Teaching and Learning at SNMCI is Humanist and Constructivist in nature. Humanism focuses on 'emotions, attitudes, values and interpersonal skills' and constructivism is a learner centred theory that believes that learners actively construct their own knowledge and meaning and build on prior experience and knowledge (Ashworth et al., 2004, p.5)

	HUMANIST	CONSTRUCTIVIST
Main Theorists	Abraham Maslow Carl Rogers	John Dewey; Jean Piaget Lev Vygotsky; Barbara Rogoff
View of the T&L process	A personal act to fulfil potential	Construction of meaning from experience
Locus of learning	Affective and cognitive domains	Individual internal construction of reality
Purpose of education	To become self-actualised, autonomous	Construct knowledge
Table assembled with reference to Whitaker, 2017, p. 75.		

Teaching Methods and Strategies

SNMCI acknowledges the advantages of exposing learners to a wide range of teaching and learning methods across their programme of study. It further acknowledges the importance of staff development to provide opportunities to explore alternative approaches to teaching and raise the quality of traditional approaches. In choosing teaching methods and strategies SNMCI considers the following:

- learners and lecturers are both responsible for making learning 'happen';
- learners experience the same teaching in different ways;
- cultural background and beliefs can impact on student behaviour, interpretation and understanding. Knowing this, lecturers/tutors must modify their approaches;
- an understanding of where learners are starting from is vital to properly scaffold learning to the next level and to avoid gaps in learning;
- feedback and discussion are important so that learners and lecturers can both be satisfied that accommodations of new understanding are 'correct';
- all learners bring their own valuable knowledge and experiences to learning;
- learners need to be encouraged to engage and internalise new knowledge and to draw on prior knowledge;
- learner involvement and choice increases motivation;
- small peer group work and discussion can be a powerful learning tool.



Teaching and learning for both learners and staff is mediated via a wide range of methodologies including (but not limited to) the following:

METHOD	DESCRIPTION
Didactic lectures with opportunities for discussion and activity	Didactic lectures are employed for theoretical sessions. Lecturers are aware of the 'diminishing returns' concept so these sessions must provide opportunities for engagement by learners. Lecturers are encouraged to interrogate their practice and to continually monitor the style, delivery, content, usefulness to the learner etc. Lecturers are encouraged to be organised and enthusiastic, to outline learning objectives and to link the content to the learners' experiences either past or to come, e.g. placement or work situations.
Practical/Workshops	Opportunities for deep and active learning. Guided. Learners take control of their own learning, setting goals.
Team Teaching	Dependent on disciplines and the working relationship of staff involved. With the correct preparation this can be rewarding for learners and staff.
Inquiry based Learning	Inquiry based learning and problem based learning are very similar; yet not the same. They are both based on the notion that education begins with the curiosity of the learner. Inquiry based learning can link well e.g. with the concept of the flipped classroom because it begins with 'questions' and proceeds to discussions and new understanding. Inquiry based learning raises questions and supports reflection and so is a useful teaching and learning strategy. It offers learners a chance to interpret information, to ask questions and hypothesise and to direct their own learning.
Problem based learning	Problem based learning begins with inquiry but goes beyond that. It can anticipate 'real world' problems that educators may face. It requires the lecturer to be a facilitator as learners are encouraged to higher order thinking skills. Problem based learning looks for solutions. As it draws on prior knowledge and skills it is a useful teaching and learning strategy for later stages of a programme. It offers learners a chance to identify a problem, research information and data, outline goals and plan towards a solution.
Flipped classroom	Fits in with the active learning stand of the College. Can be advantageous to both lecturer and learner provided there is 'buy-in' on both sides. Learners can engage with material at their own pace and lecturers are present when 'new' learning takes place.



Supervision of project or research	Useful for discussing current strengths and weaknesses, encouraging the learner to plan for taking the work forward, setting short-term objectives, setting up a more detailed time and action framework. It allows supervisors/tutors to reflect on their role e.g. at which stage(s) of the project or dissertation will they be in a 'teaching' role and at which stage(s) a facilitator's role? Lecturers need to consider the skills required at both ends of the spectrum.
Staff training and development	Impact on curriculum and programme design
Staff mobility and collegial sharing of experience	Providing opportunities to explore alternative approaches to teaching and raise the quality of traditional approaches.
Conferences	Conferences are useful ways to allow staff to stay up to date in their academic discipline. They provide opportunities for the discussion and exchange of ideas and provide an opportunity to develop a learning community with peers/colleagues (disciplinary and interdisciplinary) and engage in dialogue with international and national communities/partners to enhance teaching.

The Teaching and Learning Environment

Is respectful	Uses a wide range of methodologies	Encourages independence and self-regulation
Is reflective and reflexive	Links theory to practice	Allows for active learning and concrete experiences
Teaches for understanding	Is Humanist and Constructivist: Challenges and allows students to demonstrate understanding and reach their full potential	Is based on the Montessori philosophy for collaboration



Strategic Aims re the Teaching and Learning Environment

- Embracing the student partnership mode of delivery with increased student input into programme development and assessment practices.
- Enhanced technical support for students and staff.
- Support for staff to engage with professional development; informal and formal accredited.
- Enhanced mentorship for new staff.
- Enhanced research opportunities for staff and students
- Practical environment: new campus facilities for both academic and social use.

2.3 Teaching and Learning Environment: Blended Learning

Blended learning is the integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences (Garrison and Kanuak, 2004, p96) cited in QQI, Statutory Quality Assurance Guidelines for Blended Learning (2018, p3).

SNMCI believes that 'blended learning' has the capacity to draw on the strengths of each learning space, to give learners control over some aspects of time, place and pace during their studies, to optimise learner engagement and to increase flexibility of delivery in an academically effective way. The nature and details of the 'blend' depends on the nature of the programme, the nature of the teaching and learning activities, the capacity of the organisation, the engagement of learners and the ability and willingness of lecturers to develop their technology enhanced teaching and learning skills.

Teaching Methods and Strategies

Blended learning at SNMCI is being supported by the COACT framework developed by Dr Nicholas Breakwell (Johnston and Breakwell, 2011; Bailey et al, 2014). The COACT model is a practical framework that supports lesson design and structure in blended learning environments, with a view to ensuring that higher-order learning is achieved. The framework builds on Säljö's (1979, 2004, 2010) seminal work on the hierarchy of learning that underpins work by The Goteburg Group (Gibbs et al., 1982) and later the ETL Project at the University of Edinburgh (Enwistle, 2009).

The model was developed in order to improve the overall student learning experience and create sustainable approaches to teaching and learning by:

- creating a framework for course design that, if followed, guarantees higher-order learning takes place and learning objectives are explicitly addressed;
- ensuring the creation of truly engaging e-learning content;
- drawing on the full range of pedagogic tools available in order to create a richer learning experience;
- encouraging a move away from a dependence on tutor-led learning in order to create independent learners;



- enabling learners to acquire lifelong learning skills by equipping them for the knowledge-based society.

The definition of the word 'CO-ACT' is at the heart of the student learning experience: COACT = 'CO': 'together' + 'ACT': 'to take action, do something'. This definition, upon which the framework is based, represents a mutually constructed, active approach to learning. The model breaks the learning experience down into a five-stage process, as shown in **the figure overleaf**. These five stages reflect a progression from lower-order towards higher-order learning, towards 'seeking meaning' through interpretation, critical analysis and application of knowledge.

STAGE ONE: CONCEPT		
TEACH	LEARN	TOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe and contextualise main concepts Place concept in social and historical context. Compare and contrast with previous concepts and recent developments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess existing understanding of the concept and identify relevance in own setting. Identify supporting and opposing concepts from previous work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Text, podcast, video introduction to concept. Blog on personal understanding. Discussion in forums with colleagues.
STAGE TWO: OVERVIEW		
TEACH	LEARN	TOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarise expectations, including objectives and outcomes. Give a brief overview of the session as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the session structure and be aware of how to achieve the learning outcomes. Identify one or more outcomes which may be challenging and explore reasoning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online needs analysis/pre-test tool. Polling and surveys to identify students' needs. Blog learning/diary to track progress towards outcomes.
STAGE THREE: ACTIVE DISCOVERY		
TEACH	LEARN	TOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate active and collaborative discovery of evidence and data to support the main concept. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engage with academic content to add detail to the concept framework. Share learning with peers, co-construct content and solutions to problems. Track learning development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web-quests, reading resources, video, lectures, flash simulations. Podcasts, classroom workshops, instant chat, forums, blogs, wikis, collaborative creation.
STAGE FOUR: CRITIQUE		
TEACH	LEARN	TOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emphasise essential features and empower students to construct evidence based critiques of concepts. Support students in evidence based analysis and promote self-correction based on this analysis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyse and synthesise discovered data to support main concepts, preparing to justify conclusions. Contribute to group work and refine understanding as a result of critique. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Virtual classrooms, class workshops, case studies, presentations, blogs, wikis, collaborative creation, social networking.
STAGE FIVE: THINK		
TEACH	LEARN	TOOLS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage reflection on relevance and importance of concepts. Exemplify ways of thinking and facilitate understanding of the concepts within students' reality. Identify progression. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflect on/apply essential concepts to a personalised setting. Evaluate meaning of concepts and identify and critique the effect of existing knowledge on present understanding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case studies, forums, blogs/diaries, social networking, concept mapping.



In planning lessons, authors are required to explicitly work through each step in the framework to ensure that each level is addressed. Within the structure of the framework, however, authors are free to choose whatever learning objects or teaching methods they feel are most suitable to achieve the learning outcomes.

The intended outcome of this approach is that the graduated 'journey' through the learning shifts the educator's focus towards the best format to allow learners to achieve the learning outcomes. Because such decisions are made on a lesson-by-lesson basis, this in turn ensures that lessons are varied and draw on a large variety of resources. While authors may at times still wish to spend time developing custom content, the necessity for this is reduced as authors are encouraged to view the learning experience in a more holistic and constructivist way, with the learner at the centre of the experience.

The Blended Learning Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy is supported by specific quality assurance policy and procedure:

Volume 2: QA 5.2 Blended and Online Learning

Volume 2: QA 5.3 Development of Online Learning Resources

The Blended Teaching and Learning Environment (in addition to the overarching Teaching and Learning Environment)

Leverages the benefits of learning technologies	Enhances access	Applies the same QA policy and procedures to all teaching, learning and assessment activities.
Supports faculty and learners to develop their technology skills	Explicitly seeks to support and encourage an online community of learners	Facilitates engagement at distance
Uses a flipped classroom mind set to carefully plan to maximise the value of in-class workshops	Encourages faculty to question and re-work their approach to teaching, learning and assessment	Is fully supported by technical and pedagogical experts



Learning Technologies

The College is currently using the following learning technologies;

Moodle – Moodle is the College’s Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) which provides a learning resource repository allied with a range of course organizational tools such as a calendar, announcements and gradebook. All learners and staff are provided with a Moodle login as part of the induction process.

Zoom – Zoom is the College’s virtual classroom platform providing the ability to host live online meetings with up to 200 participants. Zoom is a simple to use platform which offers screen sharing and break out groups.

Library – EBSCO is the College’s main online library resource. EBSCO provides virtual access to thousands of peer-reviewed journals, books and other resources.

SMSI Portal – the College has developed a bespoke portal software and app which provides learners with a single sign on facility to Moodle, library services and email. The portal also includes an attendance tracking module and other functionality to supplement the blended learning experience.

As the College continues to develop its blended learning provision, additional learning technologies will be explored and integrated where learning value can be added.

Strategic Aims re the Blended Teaching and Learning Environment

- Support staff to complete teaching and learning programmes and other CPD opportunities to enhance their online teaching and learning capability.
- Continue to develop and increase technical and pedagogical support for faculty and learners.
- Support the COACT approach while investigating other models of best practice in blended and online delivery.
- Accredite and re-accredit face to face programmes to include blended aspects as appropriate.
- Select, test and review learning technologies that best serve learner needs.
- Review and update quality assurance related to blended learning.
- Seek and collect feedback to closely monitor blended learning implementation.



2.4 Assessment

The Assessment is a systematic process for gathering and evaluating information on a student's academic progress. It can be used for one or more of the following purposes:

- To provide certification: identifying different levels of achievement of the learning outcomes for the purposes of making an award, upon completion of a module or programme of study.
- To improve student learning: motivating students and creating a learning environment. Allowing students to assess their progress.
- Quality assurance and enhancement: providing evidence of academic standards and student progress to staff and stakeholders
- To inform teaching and curriculum enhancement.

SNMCI's assessment strategy has been developed with an eclectic approach to ensure a wide range of academic knowledge, skills and competences are assessed and to accommodate different learning styles. Continuous assessment (e.g. essay, presentation) is applied to assess learning against expected outcomes and is a method of assessing learning as it is occurring. The focus is on constructive learning, where feedback is motivational and directed at improvement.

Other types of assessment (e.g. terminal examination, dissertations or projects) tend to occur at the end of a semester or stage. All assessment techniques have advantages and disadvantages. Programme developers and lecturers in SNMCI are expected to consider their modules carefully and choose from the range of assessments techniques available, to find those capable of allowing learners to demonstrate how well they are learning in any given module.

The Teaching, Learning & Assessment Board meets both at the end and at the beginning of each academic year to discuss issues related to assessment, for the outgoing year, and to propose and review assessment for the upcoming year



Range of Assessment

Type of Assessment	Skill/Knowledge/ Role	Comment
Attendance and Engagement Formative	Listening Communication Participation	The introduction of a small percentage of marks available, for participation and engagement with in-class task/s is new to our overall strategy. Learner feedback suggests that this is a positive and fair step and supports attendance.
Practical: Presentation of materials, Formative and Summative	Enquiry, Linking of theory and practice, Creativity, Performance Competence	Manipulation and presentation of Montessori materials is an important part of many SNMCI programmes. First presentations are a 'low stakes' formative form of feedback to allow learners a risk free engagement with the materials. Later presentations may be assessed for a mark.
Exams	Information retrieval skills Information synthesis	There are advantages and disadvantages to exams. SNMCI places value on strong knowledge bases for core subjects. Once content is familiar, learners can be encouraged to reflect and integrate that knowledge in other ways. Surprisingly, assessment surveys indicate that learners find them familiar and more equitable than some other forms of assessment.
Environmental Projects	Enquiry, Reflection, Planning, Writing, Creativity, Problem solving, Contextualising ideas and applying them to practice.	ESD projects allow learners to reflect and to interrogate their own beliefs about the importance of ESD. This process is vital, as the enthusiasm of the teacher is directly related to pupil engagement with the subject.



Essays	Critical thinking, Evaluation, Analysis, Academic Skills	Essays are a good test of written communication. They are applicable to any topic that requires the ability to construct and sustain a written argument. They allow for individual expression and research and can show breadth of learner knowledge. Learners also receive on-going feedback on academic skills. Correctors need to be aware of objectivity and the 'halo' effect, i.e. the level of an essay just marked can impact on expectations of an essay about to be marked. As with any substantial written piece, the issue of plagiarism may also arise.
Material Making	Problem solving, Creativity, Practical application Writing Links theory and practice Reflective	Material making is a good assessment for learners and is closely linked to Montessori principles of concrete and active experiences. It has 'thinking', 'doing', 'writing and reflective aspects' which gives learners different modes of knowledge demonstration. It fosters linking of theory to real world practice.
Showcase	Creativity, Performance, Teamwork, Reflection, Communication	Creative Showcases with reflection bring together different 'art' strands delivered and encourage learners to be creative, self-directed and collaborative. Team work involves learning how to negotiate and work as part of a team and has real world value for learners.
Reflection/Reflective Journals	Insight, Critical Thinking, Ethics,	Reflection is an essential on-going practice. Learners encounter material that is new and related to their personal lives as well as to their profession. They are encouraged to note points of interest, personal response, 'lightbulb' moments etc. Reflective journals encourage students to be independent thinkers and to develop their capacity to solve various problems on their own.



Article Review	Academic Reading and Writing Skills, Retrieval of information	Academic skills of reading, writing, sourcing of information etc. are vital at all stages of all programmes. They are introduced in Stage One and used and developed throughout the programme. Article reviews can stimulate and develop critical thinking and can help students to understand existing knowledge in their field. They are useful for later research activities and expose students to a wide range of reading.
Blogs	Computer Literacy, IT Skills, Individual response, engagement with others.	Blogs are a good assessment as they allow learners to respond in a format that may be more user-friendly for them. Asking for a blog response where e.g. formal academic language and grammar etc. are not judged, allows learners to have more freedom in their replies, and to concentrate on a 'response' to assigned material. Commenting and responding to peers fosters respect for others opinions and allows students to learn from each other in a safe space. (i.e. a space with rules re respect etc.)
Business plans presentation with marketing Programme specific	Planning, business acumen, organisation, teamwork, communication	As applicable/ Engaging with a business presentation and producing marketing materials etc. makes learners aware of all of the strands entailed in owning and operating an ECEC setting; not only business but also legislative, quality, community etc.
Show and Tell	Decision making, organisation, research, making connection between theory and practice, communication, argument with supporting evidence.	This is good assessment tool for any level depending on how it is pitched. It is usually short, and a good way of easing learners into longer presentations at later stages. Dividing the assessment into Show , involves choice, making the right decision (in this case a piece of material or an activity). Tell involves thinking about the choice in relation to theory and practice and providing a rationale. Students learn both from the experience of presenting and from each other.



Resource File	Organisation, Professional Planning, Sourcing of Information	Producing a resource file allows learners to source, make decisions about, evaluate and present material in an organised way. It is also something that can be added to and that showcases some of their achievements for placement purposes.
Case Study	Analysis, Problem-solving, real world skill,	Case studies help students demonstrate theoretical concepts in real-life issues. In general, teaching materials can be a short journal or news article or a scenario etc. As an assessment piece it is important to gauge the level of difficulty i.e. at what stage of the programme it is set. Case studies require clear and detailed instructions for the learner.
Teaching Performance: Tutor Visits Formative and Summative Feedback Programme specific	Initiative, Linking theory to practice, Communication, Teamwork, Organisation, Classroom Management, Planning, Reflection and Reflexive Practice.	Learner achievements while on placement. The first tutor visit is designed to give constructive and formative feedback. Learners have the opportunity to build on this feedback and to demonstrate progression during the second tutor visit.
Teaching and Learning Resource File	Professionalism, Planning, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Organisation, Reflection	A portfolio is a cumulative assessment that represents a student's work and documents his or her performance. This type of assessment usually spans an entire academic year. As portfolio building is usually time consuming, students are offered interim formative assessment opportunities so that students can receive advice on whether the evidence they are assembling is appropriate.



Poster: Creation and Presentation	Assimilation of knowledge, Capacity to present findings, Creativity, Design, Verbal and non-verbal communication,	A poster will allow the learners to think about module topics and to be creative in the ways that they assimilate knowledge and make it evident in their practice. They add a visual element to assessment which may benefit some students. They allow for peer-to-peer interaction and generally develop a wide range of skills.
MCQ	Quick thinking, Decision making, Broad synthesis of knowledge.	There are advantages and disadvantages to an MCQ. They can be good for covering the syllabus, can be carried out quickly, can show how fast students think, and can include a test of interpretation and decision making as well as basic information retrieval. Issues to consider include the skill needed to design the questions, students may be guessing and if the task is on-line there is the risk of personation and difficulties for some learners.
Creative File	Creativity, Reflection,	Understanding of the pedagogical importance of 'The Arts'. According to the World Economic Forum, creativity' will be one of the top three skills required to thrive beyond 2021. Graduates with an understanding of what it is to be creative in the wide sense of the word will be better equipped to succeed in all professional contexts.
Group Presentation	Research, Teamwork, Communication, Organisation of information, Enquiry, Presentation skills. Question and answer skills.	Group presentations are assessed for content, teamwork and presentation skills. Students tend to take presentations seriously and they learn from their own and everyone else's presentations. They cannot be anonymous and there can be issues around perceived contribution of individual members.
Teaching from a lesson plan	Confidence and competence in teaching, Planning and Evaluation, Creativity, Practical application	A 'live lesson' is a good assessment at levels 7 and 8. It is one thing to plan a lesson and quite another to deliver it. Students learn more about planning, pitching to the right level, the adult's role and the child's role, level of resources required, pacing etc. through the experience of teaching, than they do in hours of preparation to teach. Feedback for the exercise itself, the children and the mentor is motivational and



		directed at improvement.
Lesson Planning	Professionalism, Planning, Critical Thinking, Creativity, Organisation, Reflection	The development of lesson plans allows learners to retrieve and utilise information in curriculum documents and to create age appropriate learning experiences.
Individual Presentation	Communication, Presentation Skills, Professional Skill, Confidence, Choosing from a range of information.	Similar issues arise here as with group presentations. Some students prefer the comfort of the group while others are clear that they prefer individual presentations. They have their own stressors (stage fright, lack of confidence etc.) but some students prefer to succeed or fail by their own efforts rather than 'relying' on others.
Research Skills/Research dissertation	Research, Ethics, Citizenship,	As with all assessment there are advantages and disadvantages to research. It is a high level of individual work and allows the student to demonstrate advanced understanding. Dissertations are supervised and carefully moderated so the quality of the assessment is assured. As assessment pieces they require a high degree of attention to detail by correctors.
IEP/Transitioning document	Critical thinking, Problem solving	These are specialised professional skills that all educators will come across in 'real world' working environments. Students engage well with these types of assessment as they make learning real.
Symposium	Leadership, Communication, Organisational Skills	This type of assessment fits well into a final year and can be considered as almost a second 'capstone' module. It allows learners to let go of the mantle of 'learner' and finally emerge as new professional. They work best when they are learner led and organised.



Assessment at SNMCI

<p>Is Valid: Fit for purpose and measures what it intends to measure</p>	<p>Is Transparent: There is clarity and understanding by all involved in the assessment process</p>	<p>Is Fair: Assessment is accessible to all students and provides equal opportunity for all students to succeed, using reasonable accommodations where appropriate.</p>
<p>Is Formative: Assessment designed to provide feedback on students' learning. It can help students by providing them with information to self-monitor their academic progress. May or may not be graded</p>	<p>Is Summative: May be Continuous Assessment (CA) i.e. an essay or presentation that occurs mid semester/year, or an assessment that occurs at the end of a semester/year e.g. a terminal examination, project or dissertation</p>	<p>Is based on valid assessment techniques and measures the skill or attainment it is designed to measure.</p>
<p>Is Authentic: Has real world applicability</p>	<p>Reflects Quality: Assessment is reliable and equitable and in line with all agreed standards and procedures.</p>	

Strategic Aims re Assessment

- Engage in consultation process with other HEI's and validating bodies re best practice in assessment.
- On-going staff development around assessment.
- Review of assessment to match the needs of professional practice.
- On-going review to maintain quality and promote innovation in assessment.
- Increased opportunity for student engagement and contribution to the development of assessment

2.5 Research

The College has a Research Strategy which specifically address questions relating to the integration of Montessori philosophy and methodologies into modern education



systems. A key aim of the Research Strategy is to further enhance the reputation of Montessori teachers, and specifically those educated at St. Nicholas Montessori College.

While the five key objectives outlined in the Research Strategy all impact on this Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy, key objective 3 is directly related in its direction to:

Adopt an interdisciplinary research approach that supports excellence in teaching and learning across the society.

The key actions associated with this objective are as follows:

- Ensure that research skills and methods are embedded in all degree programmes
- Align learner research projects and dissertations with the core research themes
- Encourage ethical research involving St. Nicholas Montessori School(s)
- Evaluate the case for Level 9 (Master's) provision

What We Do As Staff and Students

Current Research: Informs Teaching and Learning and Programme Development	Staff: Research related to discipline areas and further study
Staff: Conference presentations and journal submissions	Student: Capstone Research and presentation of research with mentor guidance

Strategic Aims re Research as Applied to Teaching, Learning and Assessment

- Ensure that the College Research Strategy is fully integrated with Teaching, Learning and Assessment.
- Fostering a climate of research to drive all aspects of College life.
- Hosting research conferences.
- Supporting and encouraging staff research.
- Encouraging student presentation and publication of research.



3 Institutional Climate and Interactions with Students

SNMCI understands that the space, physical, social, cultural and intellectual that surrounds students is important and has a great impact on learning, and that, not only formal, but also informal and non-formal education takes place in the environment. The ethos of the College supports a positive institutional climate.

- **Physically:** our learning spaces are adaptable to the needs of learners. Teaching environments range from traditional lecture rooms, to varied layouts for the facilitation of small group discussion, practical work, the arts and computer laboratories.
- **Intellectually:** learners are encouraged to be active in the learning process and to interact and confer with peers and lecturers. The College extends invitations to guests to speak about their specialist subjects. Montessori philosophy supports active engagement, the joint construction of knowledge and the sharing of experiences and understandings. The College supports students to direct their own learning and encourages them become critical thinkers with a range of subject specific and transferrable skills. Learners on the programme are encouraged to engage with on-line resources, including Moodle and library databases.
- **Socially and culturally:** the very presence of individuals and groups from different backgrounds results in diversity, but SNMCI is aware that it is the experiences of individuals and groups and the quality and extent of the interaction between those various groups and individuals, that speaks to the institutional 'climate' of any organisation. A sense of personal responsibility is the bye-product of a good institutional climate and SNMCI expects all members to take responsibility for an inclusive, supportive environment, where everyone is valued and encouraged to reach their goals.

The Institutional climate at SNMCI

Is diverse and promotes inclusive practices	Is learner-centred throughout the learner journey	Encourages life-long learning
Supports a community of practice: staff, students, school, pupils, teachers, parents and broader associations.	Provides lines of communication and support for all; staff and students	Is based on respect
Supports staff CPD	Encourages staff and student mobility through Erasmus and wider connections.	



Strategic Aims re Institutional Climate

- Recognition of students as partners and not merely consumers.
- Ongoing review of the processes that impact on student success.
- Continued development of a Centre of Excellence in Montessori Education
- Transparency in the feedback process e.g. when, how and if student feedback is used.
- Ongoing opportunities for staff CPD.
- Support for learners (all ages and stages) making the transition to third level education

3.1 Partnerships

The College recognises that it is part of a wider community with interests in the development of quality education in Ireland. The College is actively engaging with other key stakeholders in both ECEC and primary education, recognising that it can best contribute to national conversations and debates by working collaboratively with others. Such cooperation leads to increased awareness of SNMCI, and reciprocally, greater knowledge and understanding of the wider developments in the field of ECEC and primary education developments.

In today's highly competitive higher education market, partnerships of all kinds are increasingly valued e.g. employer, community and inter-institution. *The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030* has identified a need for more community-based approaches and for greater coordination between institutions and sectors. This is particularly the case in the relationships between higher education, schools, and the wider community. Partners often offer capabilities and resources not found anywhere else within the institution. They have the ability to fill gaps, bring new data and insights and to drive innovation.

SNMCI engages with

<p>Higher Education: Memberships of Committees and Sub- groups</p>	<p>St Nicholas Montessori School: Montessori Education in Action</p>	<p>Teachers' and Parents' Associations: Information, training, social and community activity.</p>
<p>Schools and Early Years settings: Long – standing mutually advantageous student placement Memoranda of Understanding.</p>		<p>International Connections: Montessori Europe, Kastalia, Erasmus, staff and student mobility.</p>



Strategic Aims re Partnerships

- Maintain and strengthen connections between St Nicholas Montessori School and College, developing a true community of practice.
- Strengthening current connections with early years', primary and special education schools.
- Encourage greater inward mobility of staff and students between HEI's, business, professional agencies and the wider community.
- Expansion of the Montessori Teachers' Association with information and CPD opportunities for staff students, practitioners, placement mentors and the community.
- Host events related to sharing of practice, e.g. Montessori Europe, HECA events.
- Contribute to Higher Education research activities, fora and conferences.



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