Kindergarten Observation Summary

Name:
Birthdate:
Date of Observation:
Age at time of Observation:

A child is best prepared for a healthy, successful experience in school when fully ready to undertake academic work. “Readiness” is a term often used to describe the individual timing of a child’s developmental process in relation to ease of learning. Waldorf Education takes a developmental approach, using multiple lenses to observe each child’s individual process and timing for physical maturation, social and emotional maturation, and sensory-motor integration.

The “Picture” of Readiness

This picture of readiness is determined by looking at multiple developmental aspects—physical maturation, social and emotional maturation, and sensory-motor integration. This information is gathered through observation of both full-body movement (gross motor) and dexterity of hands and fingers (fine motor). Speech, hearing, use of language and interpretation of what is heard are also observed. How well the child can access memory at will and remember a sequence of instructions are also part of this picture of readiness.

Some indicators of physical maturity for school readiness are growth of the six-year-old molars, loosening and loss of baby teeth, and lengthening of limbs in proportion to head size. Also observed are individualizing of facial features and the beginnings of a “three-fold” bodily quality seen in a lengthening of torso, development of arches in the feet and lengthening of the fingers bringing new possibilities for dexterity and manipulation of objects.

Sensory-motor observation includes noting integration of the automatic, reflexive nature of early movement patterns from the first three years of development. These automatic movement patterns wisely provided training for the infant to master the movements leading to uprightness by age one and ability to move freely through three-dimensional space by age three—see below “early movement patterns and bilateral integration.” It is widely understood that if these patterns linger beyond their appropriate time, the child’s academic success may be hindered. If unintegrated, a child uses compensatory movement in attempts to manage the physical coordination needed for academic working. Our wish is for children to bring ease and fluidity to their learning based on the ease and fluidity of their movement systems. At this time of introduction to the world of formal/academic learning, such ease will lead to a love of learning that lasts a lifetime.

The Observation

Following is a summary of the readiness indicators observed in the learning support readiness observation that you may have observed. Information from your observations at home, the teacher’s observations in class and those from the Learning Support session are put together to build a working picture of your child’s development. Keep in mind that development is a process extending over time and will vary for each individual. We don’t expect each child to manage all of these activities with full competence; there is no “pass” or “fail.” Through the expression of gesture, movement and behavior,

children share a picture of their unique inward experience. With careful observation, we can awaken to children's inner experience and explore what might best support their needs in the classroom. In the grade school, many learning opportunities are offered through rhythm and movement. Children learn concepts by doing movements in a steady, sustained rhythm that also support the development of memory. Dexterity of hands, movement of feet and speech are combined to work into the body; mastery of static balance provides the child with the inner place of quiet needed to quiet oneself outwardly. Brief descriptions of some of the developmental aspects considered in our observations are as follows:

Gross Motor (large movements of the body):

Upcoming first graders can jump holding both feet together. Once this is mastered, they begin to hop on either foot independently—though one will likely be stronger. Hopping will be possible in a forward direction with good control. Galloping and shuffling from side-to-side with either foot leading is another developed skill. Sustained cross-patterned skipping and moving horizontally on the floor like a lizard or on hands-and-knees like a cat has developed. Playing two- and one-handed toss-and-catch with a playground ball and beanbag is also usually in the domain of the school ready child. If the child has had opportunity for practice, beginning skills for turning jumping rope are emerging.

[notes]

Early Movement Patterns and Bilateral Integration:

Each child is born with a series of reflexive movements that guide development. Once each of these movement patterns has served its purpose, it is integrated by being replaced with movements that the child intentionally directs. More permanent postural forces are then available to the child, giving a sense of stability and an inward experience of quiet centeredness. Similarly integrated are the "midlines"—invisible planes of division between upper and lower body, left and right sides, and front and back. While the midlines are still active as a barrier, a somewhat fragmented experience may result as the child is challenged to work with one part of the body without unnecessary overflow movements appearing in another part—for instance, when using fingers intricately, one may be unaware that the jaw or tongue may be active simultaneously. Once the midlines no longer act as barriers, a new level of experience of the body as a whole is achieved and the student can use one part without another part imitating it or being activated. When such early movement patterns and midlines are active beyond the normal timeframe, they can interfere with freely directed and coordinated movements, which are important for academic development.

[notes]

Sensory systems: Self-movement/Proprioception and Balance/Vestibular

The health and stability of the basic sensory systems—subconscious perception of body geography, including control and awareness of limbs during movement, plus ability for static balance while stationary and in slow movements—are important aspects of children's sensory development. Stability in these systems creates the experience for a strong center of self, a strong sense of groundedness and inner quiet, foundational for academic learning.

[notes]

Dominance:

Each person tends to unconsciously use one hand, eye, foot, and ear as the preferred or dominant one, with the dominance for all of these ideally being on the same side of the body. For efficiency in academic working, it is especially beneficial when the preferred hand and eye share the same side. In addition, knowledge of a child's dominance is useful information for the teacher in terms of seating in the classroom.

[notes]

Dexterity:

Grade school work requires well-developing fine motor skills for drawing, writing, handwork, instrument playing, hand games, etc. We explore how the child is developing independent capacity of the individual fingers along with speech. Ease in grade school tasks can be anticipated when the child can manipulate small objects with pairs of fingers, cut with scissors, use a needle and thread, knead dough, play clapping and finger games, and so on.

[notes]

Visual Capacity:

Form and artistic drawing, copying and writing letters and numbers require that the eye and hand work as a unit with coordination and relative ease. Performing a series of drawings shows how well the eye and hand work together. Like hands and feet, the eyes are a pair that moves together. In good visual functioning, the eyes' movements are coordinated in tracking, scanning, adjusting focus from near to far, and converging to see something up close. This motor development of the eyes is closely related to the early movement patterns since eye movement develops at that time as part of the movement patterns. We explore how the eyes team together and how smoothly they track and scan. Eyes are at rest when looking at a distance. As something comes closer, a near point of focus requires the muscles in the eye to contract. (This is a big consideration for developing eyes in our world of technology that requires long periods, sometimes hours, with something at a near point with a flat surface.) While we are not attempting to diagnose vision problems, movements of the eyes can give a picture of how they are developing and whether or not further examination by a vision or sensory integration expert might be beneficial. Ease of fluid, mature eye movement is important due to its profound effect on attainment of skills for reading and writing, and the potential for strain and fatigue due to compensation.

[notes]

Listening and speaking:

A great deal of instruction and content in the grade school is given orally, so children must be able to accurately perceive and process inwardly what they hear. Children are asked to repeat verses, clap rhythms, sing familiar songs, and follow a sequence of directions. The first grade curriculum also expects each child to be able to offer verbal responses and descriptions of material presented in the lesson—for

instance, helping to recall the story told the day before. Foreign languages in the early grades are taught through oral presentation, so the development of the oral-motor and auditory skills is essential.

[notes]

Drawing:

Children's drawings show developmental milestones in archetypal forms. The rising first grader is asked to create a free drawing that includes three requested elements. The ready child's drawing shows a typical development of form, balance of composition, detail, and grounding of objects. How these elements are combined is another marker of readiness and the small details the child carefully and intentionally adds give us clues to the individual picture of his/her process of development.

[notes]

Summary and suggestions for support:

STUDENT is a strong and capable student who is bringing many wonderful gifts to the first grade. In the classroom STUDENT has been observed to change and mature a great deal, coming into the role that is expected of a kindergarten child. This screening will help us to keep watch on STUDENT's continued development and support his efforts as needed in the classroom. The continued support of providing adequate sleep, daily rhythms and attention to healthy eating and lifestyle at home will maintain the foundation for continued rapid growth and development as STUDENT works to develop skills and his natural capacities at school. In Summary:

[notes]

We are committed to working together to give STUDENT the opportunity for a successful experience in accessing his high capacity with ease so he will experience a lifetime love of learning. It will be a delight to witness his growth and development over many years to come at DVWS.

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