

MONTESSORI CLASSROOM OBSERVATION GUIDE

Welcome to Our Class

When you enter the classroom, children may come up to you. Please try not to engage them in conversation. A polite "Hello" and a direct response as to who you are is fine; then **quietly ask the child to return to work**. The children understand that observers come to watch them working and they will understand your response in that context. Please do not move around the classroom.

If you are undertaking an observation with another person please refrain from chatting together during this time. Observing a Montessori classroom is **a quiet, contemplative experience** that you will be able to speak together about when you have left the environment. If questions occur to you while you are watching, please write them down on the paper provided. We will be glad to answer these questions after your observation visit.

Some hints on observing:

Many parents, upon first entering the Montessori environment are amazed by the diverse activities that are going on. The suggestions below are intended to be a focus point for your attention.

Visual Perspective: There is more to the Montessori classroom than the activities of one particular child. First time observers may be attracted to one child or a group of the oldest or youngest children. Try to view both the entire classroom and a focus on a particular child.

Auditory Perspective: Listen to the noise level as it rises and falls. Try to see which groups or individual children are generating the sound. You will hear the normal hum of children working together; the quiet of concentration and at times there may be a special peak of excitement of discovery. See if you can differentiate.

Learning: Notice that children learn in different ways. With some types of materials you will see groups of children working cooperatively, and with others you will find an individual child working alone intensely. Still other children are walking through the classroom seemingly not engaged in any direct activity. Very often, this last type of child is engaged in actively absorbing information through observation of the children and the materials in the classroom. It will help if you alternate your focus on these three learning patterns. Note the

ease and joy with which the children work. You will see the intense self-gratification that the learning process affords the child.

Child-child Interaction: Listen to the way - the child and the content - in which children talk to each other. Listen for the level of respect as well as for the normal pushes and pulls of childhood. Very often observers new to Montessori are surprised that a child will zealously guard his/her work and tell another classmate that they are disturbing this work, and that, as a result of this verbal communication, the other child will leave. Other new observers may find it interesting to see the help children provide each other.

Teacher-child interaction: Watch the way teachers interact with children and compare it with the traditional classroom mode by which you were probably educated. Notice the way in which a teacher corrects a child, and look at the instances in which she does not. Listen to the teacher's tone of voice with the child. The teacher (or guide) is a facilitator of the child's autonomous and self-directed learning process. She guides rather than insists. She prepares the environment, gives the child the tools to utilize the materials and then does whatever else is necessary to help the child interact with the environment without assistance. Sometimes this involves direct encouragement, at other times indirect appreciation, and even judicious absence. There is a basic respect for each individual child's particular style of learning in the Montessori classroom. See if you can pick this up.

Sociability: Watch the ways in which the children offer assistance to one another - with the materials and with everyday tasks - and the ways that they are directly sociable with one another.

The Montessori classroom contains a wide range of capabilities of children and of materials that are appropriate to the different developmental levels. Note how the children go to the materials that are appropriate to their developmental level. Note also how the younger children absorb the older children's work simply by being near them, and how, conversely, the older children may assist the younger ones with work that they have already mastered. There are always pockets of social activity occurring in any Montessori classroom as the child's natural desire to form relationships and be part of an ongoing community is ever present.

Observe the **independence** of the children as they do for themselves in the classroom environment. Watch how even the youngest child takes responsibility for his/her personal environment. Watch as a child chooses a piece of work, takes it from the shelf, completes the work, and returns it to its place so that the next child can use it.

The generation of autonomy is a function of the prepared environment in the Montessori classroom. What this means is that the child will have available all needed materials, in good working order, to complete a task that has usually been self chosen. The structure of Montessori provides the child with as much time as s/he needs to complete the task to his/her satisfaction, and **success is the primary reward**. As you look around the classroom notice the materials, how attractive they are in placement, color, cleanliness, quality, etc. The child is attracted to learn by this environment.

We understand that you will not be able to sort out and see all the dimensions of the classroom that are outlined above in the time you have with us, and hope that you are not disappointed, when you discover that all aspects of the classroom have either not been present during your observation or that you did not see it all. We know that learning how to "read" the Montessori classroom is difficult at first, but we know that with each successive observation your skills will become increasingly honed. We look forward to your next visit to the classroom, and are eager to share with you the excitement that we feel in being a part of your child's growing years.