

Observation Guidelines

The Montessori classroom is often described as a “child-centered” classroom. This is a different kind of classroom than most of us knew when we went to school. In a “child-directed” classroom, teachers work *with* students rather than do things to or for them. The approach is to provide an environment for the “whole child” – development of social skills, emotional growth, physical coordination and cognitive preparation.

Observation may seem easy; however, objective observation is difficult to accomplish as we bring to the observation our past experiences, values, beliefs, personal issues and hang-ups. We should continually work on controlling our projections to develop our objectivity. To observe well, one must give their full attention to the natural responses of the children to the environment. Be aware that one’s actions can and will interfere with the normal routine of the class, the focus of the children and at times the natural responses to the environment, the teacher and the classmates.

We are glad that you have made the effort to observe a classroom. This shows commitment to understanding how things work here. We appreciate your time.

As you observe, please follow these guidelines:

- Plan to observe for about 45 minutes. (If you have made arrangements to observe for longer, then please plan on your arranged time.)
- Remain seated. Your movement through the room creates a distraction to the children.
- Try not to make eye contact or initiate conversation with the children. If you engage a child in casual conversation, the natural curiosity of the other children may result in their gathering around you. This interferes with your observation and affects the normal routines of the class.
- Refrain from initiating conversations. If a child asks a question, answer briefly and then state that you are here to watch the class work.
- If you are observing your own child’s classroom, you may talk briefly with your child and explain that you are here to watch everyone work.
- If a child approaches you and asks your name, answer politely, but do not encourage further conversation.
- Use a quiet voice.
- Write down your observations and questions on the feedback sheet.
- Please do not initiate conversation with the teacher. He/she is responsible for the education of every child in the room. If you would like to speak later, please leave a note on the second sheet and how you would like to be contacted. If a teacher has the time, they might initiate conversation with you. Please talk in a quiet voice and understand that they might be pulled away to work with students.

Thank you for your cooperation with our observation policy. We have discovered (the hard way) that following these procedures minimizes the distractions for your child and his/her classmates and supports the classroom procedures.

Ideas for observing a Montessori Classroom:

First, take a quick look around the room. Notice:

- The degree of organization on the shelves
- The development of awareness of a sense of order among the children
- Freedom of movement and diversity of activity
- Individual activity of the children
- Interaction of the children

Second, focus your attention on one of the teachers. Notice:

- Composure
- Tone of voice and body postures of the teachers
- Respect the teacher shows the child
- The teacher as a guide and observer of children
- The degree of independence of the class as a whole

Third, focus your attention on one child. Notice:

- Concentration on work
- Succession of activities – do they move from one work to another
- Respect for teachers, other children, materials
- Enthusiasm and self-motivation in the children

Fourth, focus your attention on the areas of learning. Notice:

- Sequencing of the work on the shelf – left to right movement indicates levels of difficulty
- Individualized activities for students
- Control of error – most materials will have a way for the child to self-check his/her work rather than relying on the teacher
- Pace – the children are working at their own pace.

Questions for your consideration:

- What skills are evident to you as you are observing?
- Are there any apparent procedures or guidelines?
- How focused is your child in the work? The other children?
- What is the nature of the interactions between the children?
- Do the children appear happy and relaxed?
- Based on your observation, what would you guess to be the main goal or priority of the teacher?

Feedback and Observation Sheet

Teacher/Classroom: _____

Observations: *(I observed...I was surprised....)*

Questions: *(What was that...Why did you...)*

Feedback for teacher: *(I really liked when you...Please contact me about...)*

Name: _____ Contact Information: _____