

A Guide to Observing The Montessori Classroom

We welcome you visit to our school and would like you to read the following guidelines for observing the classroom. This is an opportunity for us to share with you what life is like in a Montessori School environment by giving you a chance to see the interaction of the children, the teachers, and the learning materials. Also, you will get to experience the less tangible atmosphere that is "home" to the children for so much of their working day. We know from experience that what you see will be colored by your presence in the class, especially if you have a child in the class. To minimize the excitement factor, we ask you to follow these procedures.

Procedures

- When you enter the class you will be shown to a seat that is set at a vantage point for you to get the best observation without being obtrusive to the teaching area.
- When you sit down, 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 his or her work.
- If you are here to observe your child and he or she clings to you, acts silly, or ignores you, don't be surprised. It is all expected behavior. Children respond differently to having their parent in the classroom than they do in the normal course of the day at school or at home.
- Please **do not** at any time interfere in a child's work or walk around the classroom.
- The teachers will not be able to take time from their classroom duties to converse with you either during or after your observation. If questions occur to you while you are watching, please write them down. When you return to the front office you will have an opportunity to talk with the administrator or the administrative assistant.
- If you have come with your spouse, another family member, or a friend to observe the classroom we ask that you do not talk to each other. This can be very distracting to the children. Please wait until you are back in the front office before discussing what you have seen.
- Fifteen to twenty minutes is ample time for a classroom observation. Someone will come to take you back to the front office, or you may quietly leave the room when your time is up.
- If you are observing your child it is best if your good-bye to him or her is brief and positive. It is helpful if you prepare your child to the fact that your visit to the classroom will be short and that you will leave and see him or her at the regular dismissal time. Rest assured that even the most agitated child will calm down very shortly after you leave.

Thank you, NWMS

Observation Points

- As you sit down to carefully observe in a Montessori classroom for the first time, what catches your eye? What do you notice on your second and third visit?
- How is the classroom organized? What do you notice about the layout of activities, furnishings, and shelves?
- Pay attention to the way the adults interact with the children. What do you notice?
- Perhaps during your observation you will see the teacher correct or discipline a child. What do you notice?
- As you observe, try to look for any unwritten rules and procedure that the children are following. What do you notice?
- Focus on a particular child other than your own. Follow her work during the course of at least 10 minutes. How does she spend her time? How does she select work?
- You will probably see the teacher present different lessons during your visits to either small groups or individual children. What do you notice about the way they teach?
- What do you notice about the educational materials on the shelves and how the children work with them?
- What is it about the Montessori materials that seem to be most attractive to the children?
- Focus on a few different Montessori materials. What concepts or skill does each isolate?
- Notice how the teacher introduces children to the materials. Try to catch one child learning from another.
- Focus on the control of error built into several of the materials. How do they self-correct? Try to observe a child correcting her own work through the built-in control of error.
- As you observe the children at work, do you sense that there are certain tasks that the children prefer? Are there any that they seem to avoid?
- How do you as an adult respond to the Montessori materials? Are you drawn to them? Do you wish that you could have gone to a Montessori school?
- What sort of interactions do you notice among the younger and older students?
- During your observation, did the teacher spend most of their time with the younger or older students? If so, try to determine what factors led them to concentrate most of their attention on one age group or another. So the teachers anticipate that the focus will switch? What conditions are they looking for?
- How does your child feel about being in a multi-age classroom?
- What advantages and disadvantages do you see to multi-age grouping?

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