

Elementary Classroom Observation Guide

Welcome to our Elementary Community! We hope you enjoy your glimpse into the Montessori Elementary environment. We are similar (bead chains, map cabinet, geometric solids) yet different (size of furniture, more books) to the Children's House classroom. The Elementary child is in a new plane of development. They are well versed in the real world and have acquired the language to navigate it. Imagination, and the, "big WHYS" of the world have become paramount in their minds. Social interactions and where they fit into them become increasingly important as a child get closer to adolescence. Observation is an important part of Montessori practice and Montessorians practice observing on a daily basis. Many people have had only limited experience with formal observation. We have included responses to several frequently asked questions to help guide your experience.

What do I do when I walk into the room? We have an adult sized chair where you can sit and watch what is happening in the environment. We suggest that you come in quietly and sit without greeting the children so that you will be more likely to see their typical activity.

What do I say if a child comes and talks to me? Some children may be excited to have a visitor. We suggest that you greet children who approach you with a smile and continue observing. If they want you to join them or talk with them, respond briefly and then let them know you are doing your work observing. We give you the clipboard partly because this will signal the children that you are observing like their teachers do.

What if my child asks me to come and work with him/her? We think you will get the most from your observation if you are observing rather than engaging. Remind your child this is a silent observation time not a working observation time. Elementary students have the maturity to understand this response.

Why are all the other children working peacefully and my child is _____? We added this question because some parents have left their observation really worried about how their child behaved. Having you visit is not routine and will likely change how your child spends their morning. You will probably get a better sense of your child's typical morning by observing what the other children of the same age are doing.

What am I looking for when I am observing? Below is a list of observation techniques:

- **Visual Perspective:** Try to view both your child and the entire classroom as a whole. Observe the freedom of movement which is purposely designed within the work cycle.
- **Auditory Perspective:** Listen to the noise level as it rises and falls. Observe the hum of children working together, the quiet of focused concentration, and the excitement of discovery.
- **Learning:** Notice that children learn in different ways. Some work cooperatively, some work independently, while others seem to move around the room watching. When children watch others they can gain as much knowledge as when they work independently or with others.
- **Child-Child Interaction:** Listen to the way the children communicate with each other. Listen for moments and grace and courtesy during conversations.
- **Teacher-Child Interaction:** See how the teachers interact with the children. Notice when a teacher may step in to assist or mindfully waits for the child to make his own discovery. Look for interactions that reflect respect of learning individuality.
- **Sociability:** Watch how different age levels interact with each other. See older children helping younger children. Younger children inspired to try new things by watching older peers. See social activities and children learn the give and take of creating relationships and forming a community.

