

A guide to observation in the Montessori Elementary Classroom:

- We have found it helpful to offer a guide to observing and interpreting the dynamics of the Montessori classroom. There is more to the Montessori classroom than the activities of one particular child. Try to observe in a context - alternate between a wide-angled view of the entire classroom and focus on a particular child. Listen to the activity level as it rises and falls. There will be some individual learning activities, some small group learning activities, or a large group lesson being presented.
- 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 different 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. If your child has experienced a primary montessori education, you will notice the different behavior patterns in the Elementary student. While primary students are focused on process, Elementary students become aware of finished accomplishment and product as well.
- 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 is a facilitator of the child's autonomous learning process. He or she guides rather than insists. The teacher 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 a judicious absence. There is a basic respect for each individual child's particular style of learning in the Montessori classroom.
- 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 both ages 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 will assist the younger ones with work that they have already mastered. You may notice a teacher asking a child to have another child help them with their work, thus facilitating the peer tutoring process.
- These activities have a strong social component to them - one that includes a sense of responsibility for and community with all those in the class. There are always pockets of purely social activity present in any Montessori classroom as the child's natural desire to form friendships and be part of an ongoing community is ever present.

