



Damariscotta Montessori School

## Observation Guidelines: Primary Classrooms

Welcome to Damariscotta Montessori School. We are pleased to invite into the children's classroom. As a guest of the children, we ask that you read through these guidelines—they will assist you in understanding the Montessori classroom, provide you with the information to have an enriching observation experience, and allow the children to work within their environment undisturbed.

In a Montessori school, the classroom truly belongs to the children in it. They are responsible and take pride in maintaining the room, and working with the materials in a careful and thoughtful manner. You will notice that most of the classroom is "sized" for the children in it. Shelves are low to ground and designed to be at the child's eye/hand level, chairs and tables are smaller to accommodate "younger" bodies and to make the children feel at home. You will not see multiple desks and chairs, but instead see a classroom environment that reflects how children really work, play, and learn providing work spaces for individual and group activities at tables, on rugs, mats, and pillows.

Montessori classrooms welcome observations of parents and visitors, but usually not during the critical first three weeks of school. This is a time when the children begin to familiarize themselves with a new routine and a new environment. They are just learning new ground rules and the social aspects of sharing the classroom with many new "friends". For this reason, we ask parents to avoid classroom observations right as the new year begins.

Feel free to move to a different part of the room during your observation and do take a close look at the activities on the shelves and that the children are working with. **In order to see the classroom as it normally operates, it is important to remain as unobtrusive and quiet around the children as possible. The children are, by nature, curious and will often engage a visitor in conversation. Please feel free to tell them, "I'm just being a watcher!"**

Look for these key elements of a Montessori classroom:

- Secure sense of independence
- Degree of concentration demonstrated
- Ability to choose one's own work
- Respectful of each other and the classroom
- Positive social interactions
- Children of varying ages working together
- Peaceful and calm body movements

Most likely, you will be observing the classroom during work time. Children are free to explore the classroom environment and choose activities that interest themselves from the following Learning Areas:

**Practical Life:** Activities of everyday living, that include pouring, spooning, polishing, care of the environment, care of self, food preparation. Many of these activities are also designed to reinforce and strengthen a child's fine motor skills, preparing the child for holding a pencil, writing letters and finally words on their path to reading.

**Sensorial:** These activities focus on the use of the child's senses. The materials allow the child to explore dimensions, size, length, width, shape, color, smell, sound, and weight.

**Math:** These activities allow the child to recognize and name numbers, understand one to one correspondence and the basics of geometry. The materials move through number recognition, linear counting, decimal system and the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division).

**Language:** These activities prepare the child for reading and writing with emphasis on developing a relationship between listening skills, the sense of touch, and language skills.

**Geography/Cultural:** These activities promote an understanding of the universe and our own planet with a focus on both it's physical and cultural traits. Children become familiar with maps, names of continents, countries, and regions. . . and learn about different cultures at various points in the school year.

**Science:** These activities develop an understanding of our environment; beginning understanding of classification (living things, non-living things), types and parts of plants/animals, ecosystems, seasons.

**Snack Time:** Snack area is open during work time and the children cycle in and out. Each child is responsible for tidying the snack area when they have finished eating, and when a spot opens up, another child is free to take his/her space .

### **Other Important Notes:**

If you are observing YOUR OWN CHILD—he/she may become shy, try to perform specially for you, or seem to act in a silly or other unusual way. If Mom or Dad is participating, your child may also become very possessive of your attention. This is completely normal. For this reason, try not to compare your child with other children during your observation.

Kindly remember that the TEACHER'S RESPONSIBILITY is with the CHILDREN. Please make a written note of questions as they arise, and feel free to ask them after your observation or during your parent teacher conference.

***Relax and enjoy your visit.***

## DMS Classroom Observation Worksheet

Date of Observation: \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher/Classroom: \_\_\_\_\_

As you sit down to carefully observe the classroom for the first time, what catches your eye?

As you settle into your observation what are your first impressions?

How is the classroom organized? What do you notice about the layout of materials, activities, furnishings and shelves?

Pay attention to the way the adults in the classroom interact with the children. What do you notice?

Perhaps during your observation you will see the teacher correct or guide a child who was acting inappropriately. What do you notice? How did the other children react?

As you observe, try to look for any unwritten rules and procedures that the children are following. What is your impression?

Does this observation raise any questions for you? If so, jot them down to ask the Director or one of the teachers later: