

## Observations in a Montessori classroom

Observation is a cornerstone of our work in Montessori. We observe children to determine what lesson we should give next, we observe the environment and ourselves when we are noticing behaviors that we can't quite explain. We observe to ensure that a classroom is running smoothly and we observe during training to practice scientific observation that avoids imposing our own interpretations on children's actions. Observation is critical to what we do.

I came back from observing yet another classroom the other day exclaiming what an amazing experience it was and how incredibly those classrooms are running and Anne Krueger, our new Business Manager (and parent) said "you say that every time you come back from an observation. But as a parent I don't necessarily know what I am looking for. What's so amazing? What do you see?"

These are great questions.

I generally go into a classroom to observe the *whole class* and see how it is functioning. A Montessori classroom is an incredibly complex ecosystem that includes the adults, the children, and the environment itself. And each of these parts have components that we are looking for during the observation.

For example, we look to see *shifting*. This is when a child wants to do something and discovers they cannot do it right now. For example, when they want to work with a particular material on a shelf and find that someone else already has it out. At this moment they have to practice the idea of *shifting*. Moving from a desired task to a less desired task. On any given day we may see lots of children doing this or we may see children get stuck when the desired task is not available. Both are ok! How does a child learn to move forward if they are never presented with the opportunity to do so?

We also look to see children *initiating work*. This happens when children choose work, find a place to work, and transition without adult direction. Children practice this in order to build their executive functioning muscles. Like shifting, we may see this in few children one day and in more on another day. This is part of the growth process.

We also look for *joy*. What a wonderful thing to be looking for in a classroom! We look for children expressing joy as they go about their work. This comes in the form of spontaneous singing, laughing, and smiling with others or alone and expressing satisfaction with their work. Why is joy important? This shows the children are comfortable in the environment. That they feel safe and connected. Joy is a byproduct of a well functioning classroom. Joy leads to learning.

Other things we look for have more to do with the adults. Are adults *presenting lessons*? Are they showing *connection with the children*? Are they modeling *care of the environment*?

When you enter the classroom for your observation, you are probably looking at your child and not necessarily at the entire ecosystem of the room. I understand that! I'm sure I would do the same! But may I encourage you to spend three minutes of your observation looking at the broader classroom and answering these questions:

- How does the environment look? Is it tidy? Inviting?
- Do you see children caring for the environment? Pushing in chairs? Cleaning up after themselves?
- Do you see children shifting?
- Do children seem comfortable with adults?
- Do you see joy?

We invite you to observe in your child's classroom because we believe that it gives the best window into what they are doing, how they are learning, and their well-being in a classroom. Please realize, however, that because you are there they will naturally act differently. They will want to show you things and their ability to shift to something else will be reduced when you are in the space. Observing the broader classroom as well will help you to see how the classroom is thriving even if, on this particular day, your child may be having a difficult time in the environment.

Not every classroom will have all characteristics on a given day. Some days children may be having a hard time and some days the adults may be! But using observations as a snapshot and a jumping off point for conversation allows us to reflect and adjust what we are doing.

I hope you'll sign up for an observation in your child's classroom. If you are interested in observations in other classrooms, those are also available. We cannot wait for you to see the incredible work that is happening here.