Observation Guidelines and Assignments

1. When observing, BE POSITIVE. You only learn when you can see the positive in any situation.
2. Always pre-arrange an observation with the teacher before you expect to observe.

1. Expect to sit in a small chair and be as invisible as possible when entering, observing, and leaving the class.
2. Do not engage the children in conversation; if a child talks to you respond positively, politely, and return to your writing. A good thing to tell the children is, “I’m writing about the work the children are doing.”
3. Remember, this is the children’s class and you are the visitor.
4. Do not engage the teacher or assistant in conversation; if they have a chance to talk to you, they usually will. Sometimes, but not always they are available before or after class to answer any questions.
5. Ideally, the following observation schedule is for Montessori Teacher trainees and is meant for 25 hours per week observation, per assignment. Please use the following assignment in light of that.
6. Ask the teacher ahead of time for a class list with the ages of the children and the length of time each has been in the classroom.
7. When choosing a child(ren) to observe, ask the teacher for some recommendations and then make your choice of children in the first 20 minutes.
8. Never, if possible, choose a class with your own child. Do not choose a child you know or a child that you the parents of.

Observation Schedule

I. Assignment # 1 – One Child

A. Daily

1. Write and observe everything the child does in the class; make accurate time notes next to notes.
2. Make notes as to the child’s physical description.
3. Get with the teacher to note any pertinent family or health notes or background information that would be helpful to your observation.
4. Make daily summaries and conclusions based on the 6 topics given in the weekly summary.

B. Weekly

1. Work
   1. Time
      1. Time devoted to work with each material
      2. Time devoted to passive work: observation
      3. Time devoted to disruptive activities
      4. Time between activities: what type, how much
   2. Sequence of activities – order
   3. Number of tasks completed each day (or worked on – especially applicable for older children
   4. Type of work done
   5. Work habits (impossible to note in one day’s observation)
   6. Progression of difficulty (easy to hard, etc.)
   7. Note any repetition (within a task; of a task)
2. Movement
   1. Whole body: stance, gait, large motor
   2. Hands, fingers: small motor, muscle
   3. Evidence of orderliness
   4. Exact movement: attention to detail
3. Development Toward Independence
   1. Who directs or chooses; what percentage of the time; how is this connected with the concentration the child uses when working with that particular material
   2. Percent of time spent working alone; with teacher; near teacher; with other children
   3. Is child an observer or participant in group work? How is this connected to the concentration level?
4. Assignment # 1 – On Child

B. Weekly (continued)

1. Social Behavior
   1. Contacts with other children:
      1. Who initiates contact? Accepted or rejected by other children?
      2. Percent of time spent with younger, peer, and older children
      3. Response to contacts made by other children to chil
   2. Contact with adults
      1. Does child seek help from adult, other children?
      2. Does child avoid adults?
      3. Is child positive to adult contact?
      4. Does child need, accept, reject affection?
      5. Does child want, resent, need contact with adults?
   3. Need for social contacts
      1. What motivates a social contact?
      2. Is child helpful in the class: independently? After it has been suggested? Only after a direct command has been issued?
      3. Manners: ability to get along; social grace and courtesy lessons being applied to class behavior; self-discipline emerging?
2. Obedience Level
   1. Does not understand what is expected or understands but chooses not to obey.
   2. Understands what is expected; has the knowledge; obeys if watched or asked; obedience does not come always from the inner will.
   3. Self disciplined; has knowledge and follows the rules from inner ability to direct own will.
3. Evidence of Concentration (Draw conclusions only after completing the first 5 areas of observation)

Note the following:

* 1. Length of time spent working with the different materials (note which materials the child worked with the longest and shortest)
  2. What type of work produced the most concentration; the least; who directed the work; who chose the work; what time of day was it done; any other pertinent insights, e.g. was it within the normal sequence that the child had established or out of sequence?
  3. What time of day is the child best able to concentrate? Least able to concentrate?

II. Assignment # 2 – Two Children

Same format as first assignment except following 2 children throughout the week.

Try to choose 2 children who have both contrasting as well as similar situations.

Examples: 2 girls, one 3, one 5 years old

Two 4 year old children; one brand new, one began in the class at 2½

III. Assignment #3 – Lessons

* 1. Daily

1. Lessons Given by the Directress/Director
   1. What was the lesson (name the material or activity)
   2. To how many children – formally, brought to watch the lesson
   3. Time of day given
   4. Length of time spent
   5. Result after teacher left the area where lesson was given?
2. Lessons Given by any other Adults (use 5 points above)
3. Lessons by Children
   1. Note material
   2. Who, if anyone, directed one child to teach the other?
   3. Who gave the lesson? To whom? Note whether “teacher” was older, younger, or peer
   4. What was the immediate result after the initial lesson was presented?
   5. Any other pertinent insights?

B. Weekly: Draw Conclusions

1. Percent of time spent on:
   1. Individual lessons
   2. Small group lessons
   3. Collective (whole class) lessons
2. Note patterns
   1. What time of day are individual lessons given; small group lessons, collective lessons
   2. What type of lessons are given to what age groups, in general (from what area of the classroom – practical life, sensorial, language, math, etc; individual, small group, collective; note whether formal or informal new or representation, etc.)
3. What amount of time given on new lessons, follow up, representations, formal, informal?

III. Assignment #3 – Lessons

B. Weekly: Draw Conclusions (continued)

1. Note any pertinent insights regarding how the child receives the knowledge:
   1. Teacher to child (direct)
   2. Teacher with child watching
   3. Child to child
   4. Child with another child watching
2. How was lesson followed up?
   1. Teacher observing child work independently or very close by
   2. Informal follow up by point of interest or note of helpful information, etc.
   3. Complete representation
   4. New and further dimension of same material
   5. Next step in sequence of activities after the material originally given
3. Note any pertinent insights on lessons given by other adults.
4. Note how repetition was encouraged.
5. Note what effect who chose the lesson had on concentration.
6. From the above points, draw conclusions about children working with that material after the initial lesson.
7. Are lessons interrupted? What effect does this have?
8. If movement or grace & courtesy lessons are given, note the time of day, to how many children and what effect it has on the class later that day, the next day; on the individual children involved in the lesson?
9. How are the lessons involved in the class management process?
10. How are the lessons of the teacher related to independent work?

IV. Assignment #4 – Sensitive Periods

A. Are the children working with materials appropriate to their sensitive periods?

1. Choose several that are and follow their work.
2. Choose several that seldom work with materials appropriate to sensitive periods
3. Choose several that work within the framework of their sensitive periods some of the time

B. How do the children work (concentration level, etc.) in relation to their sensitive periods according to the 3 above groupings?

C. Who chooses the work related to sensitive periods (teacher, child, another child)?

D. Other comments, conclusions?

V. Assignment #5 Preparation for Class Management

This is a two-week period of observation and practice teaching

A. Week One: Do a complete observation on each child in the class. If, for example, there are 30 children in the class, try to observe 6 each day, and do a daily summary on each child at the end of that day. Make careful notes as to:

1. Work: Pattern of, care in, level of concentration, use of materials, appropriateness to age level and sensitive periods, choices made, etc.
2. Movement: Large and small muscle, coordination, level of control under child’s will.
3. Social behavior: relation to other children and adults
4. Obedience level
5. Note any other particulars that affect the child’s work and/or movement, social behavior, obedience. This might include medications taken, changes in the family structure (divorce, new job, recent move, new baby, etc.), physical/mental or emotional differences, etc.

B. Week Two: Begin working with the children as the supervising teacher directs. Make any additional notes on each child’s summary as appropriate. Begin organizing the children into 3 groups:

1. Those who need to be very close to the teacher, under constant direction.
2. Those who need to be close the teacher, under occasional direction, coming into close contact at times, but able to work independently for some time.
3. Those who can have freedom the room, can work independently for most of the morning and can manage without or with only occasional direction.