



Observing in the Montessori Secondary Classroom

_____ Teacher(s) Observed _____ Observer

Name of School _____ Date _____ Number of Students ____ Ages ____

This form serves three purposes: (1) the field consultants use the “Characteristics” as a basis for observing adult learners during the practicum year. (2) Adult learners use the “Characteristics” to make observations of secondary classrooms to fulfill CMSTEP observation requirements. (3) All secondary Montessori teachers use the “Characteristics” to reflect upon and improve their own practice.

Observation Structure for Adult Learners

1. The adult learner writes a pre-observation reflection. See “To the Adult Learner” at the bottom of this page.
2. Coordinate a block of time for the classroom observation (2 - 6 hours), a meeting with the Head of School (15-30 minutes), and time for a follow-up discussion (30 min).
3. Observation (120 minutes minimum) day takes place.
4. Participate in a post-observation conference: discuss observation, self-reflect, set goals (30 min).
5. Sign the observation form.

To the observer: It helps to ask oneself the question, “What can this teacher do that is better than I can do?” The task of the observer is to act as a catalyst, empowering the colleague to find his/her own way to improve the work with the children. The observer must ask him/herself, “How can I avoid criticism and develop the keen skills of observation?” Through making observations, asking questions inwardly, and taking time overnight to process, the observer’s comments can often help the colleague come to solutions or find ways to resolve problems in the classroom.

The observer should strive to:

- Have emotional equilibrium*
- Practice careful non-judgmental observation*
- Acknowledge one’s own path of self-development*
- Have appropriate professional boundaries*
- Honor confidentiality as a basis for relationships based on trust*
- Maintain an open and approachable manner*
- Exercise humility*
- Be both a leader and a team player*
- Be inwardly balanced*

- Carry enthusiasm*
- Be articulate*
- Be a good listener and respectful of the other*
- Maintain a positive attitude*
- Be flexible, not dogmatic*
- Be perceptive, objective, and fair*
- Be organized*
- Set realistic goals and practice effective follow-through*

To the adult learner: The following lists are the essential elements of a well functioning Montessori classroom. The observer will be looking for these and other characteristics during the course of the observation. This list is intended to be your own guide and teaching tool. *If this is a scheduled observation for certification, write a paragraph about your classroom regarding each of the categories (environment, student, teacher, procedures, academics.) Give the essay to the observer before the observation begins.*

Montessori Secondary Characteristics

Montessori Environment

- Is there student maintenance and care of the classroom?
- Is there the opportunity for large blocks of time?
- Are the lessons and objectives clearly posted and visible for the students?
- Do work groups within the classroom reflect diversity (unless there is a specific opportunity for high achieving students to work together)?
- What is the physical classroom like? Is it tidy? Clean? Organized? Beautiful?
- If there are plants, are they well attended?
- Are the classroom materials cared for?

Montessori Teacher

- Balance of student-centered and teacher-centered classroom instruction (i.e. direct instruction to large group, but also small group lessons and coaching of small groups and individuals. You may not see all of these teaching modes during your observation.
- Teacher actively teaches and coaches at all times. This may include observing a student as she works to understand the next step for coaching the student.
- The balance of freedom and authority is an essential part of the life of the developing adolescent. Does the teacher intervene to guide students with inappropriate behavior? Does she provide the follow-through invitation for academic support for students who need tutoring and consequences for inappropriate behavior?
- It is important for the adolescent to be given healthy opportunities to follow the authority of the adult. Where is the evidence that this is happening? Does the adult understand how to set up the necessary infrastructure for students to follow guidelines that create student success and a pleasant classroom community?
- How does the teacher discipline students? What is a student's response to correction?
- Does the teacher have a thorough knowledge of the content?
- Does the teacher understand how to use differentiation of instruction so that all students are challenged and supported?
- Does the teacher provide a variety of teaching methods on a regular basis? (ex. TPR, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, musical?)
- Does the teacher facilitate smooth transitions between activities?
- During blocks of time, do teachers provide an opportunity for students to work without being interrupted? Does the teacher distract the students?
- Does the teacher manage lessons so that they begin and end in a timely way?
- Is the teacher skilled at Socratic dialogue/Paideia seminar?
- Does the teacher wear appropriate attire? Neatness? Cleanliness?
- What is the predominant temperament of the teacher? How does the teacher balance her own temperament

Montessori Students

- How do the students greet the teacher? Do they look at her or avoid her eyes?
- What habits have students developed as they enter the classroom?
- Is there warmth between the teacher and the students?
- Do both the students and teachers respect the learning environment by walking to one another and speaking softly rather than talking across the room? (Unless in a large group lesson, which even then, does not disturb the class next door.)
- Do the students know the routine, their place?
- Is it clear that students understand the limits and guidelines of the classroom? If so, do they respect them?
- Are the students responsive to the authority and guidance of the teacher? Do they make an effort? Can they work independently?
- Students are respectful of one another and know how to go about appropriate problem solving.
- Students are engaged and focused on their academic work.
- Are the students really listening to the teacher? What are the indications?
- How are the relationships between the students?
- What are the work habits and problem solving skills of the students?
- What is the demeanor of the students as they move?

Montessori Procedures

- Evidence of some choice for students with clear limits and guidelines. This is apparent in the independence and respect with which the students conduct themselves within the classroom, as well as some choice in the work a student attempts (This does not mean the student chooses alternative assignments that are not sanctioned by the teacher or chooses not to work)
- Community meeting has clear procedures and leadership, and feels orderly and respectful.
- Students wait their turn to speak
- Clear topics
- Conversation stays on-topic
- Students listen and respond to one another appropriately
- Block of time:
Encourages concentration and self-discipline.
Conversation limited to the class work at hand.
- Only water, fresh fruit and vegetables are eaten in the classroom, and only at the appropriate times.
- Students sit respectfully and take notes during lessons. It is expected that students automatically get out pen and notebook during lessons and with guests who come to speak to the class.

Montessori Academics

- There are clear, appropriate, and rigorous objectives for academic work.
- Theme is evident in the classroom (display, cover sheet, activities, kick-off, group initiative/processing, discussion, etc.)
- Rubrics are used by the students and teachers to guide choices in behavior and work decisions.
- Checklists show differentiated work.
- Shelfwork reflects a variety of modalities (book, computer, manipulatives, cards, etc.)
- A project is part of the cycle's curriculum. Students have one major, long-term project and other short term projects.
- Students regularly self-evaluate work and/or behaviors.
- Are the lessons engaging?
- Curriculum encourages skills, knowledge, cooperation, self-discipline, and students to be citizens of the world.
- Coursework has interdisciplinary links.
- Does the teacher understand the need for and actually address the following gateways for the adolescent (from *The Soul of Education*)? How does each show up in the classroom?
 - The yearning for deep connection
 - The longing for silence
 - The search for meaning and purpose
 - The hunger for joy and delight
 - The creative drive
 - The urge for transcendence
 - The need for initiation