

Vincent S. Mastro Montessori Academy

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Est. 1968

Celebrating 40 years of Montessori Education in Monmouth County

OBSERVATION GUIDELINES

The children and the staff of the Vincent S. Mastro Montessori Academy welcome you. We hope that you will enjoy seeing us at work.

We suggest two goals for your observation.

- 1 - to better understand the work children do here and how they do it.
- 2 - to recognize how the specially prepared environment nurtures children's natural abilities and fosters the growth of a community of children according to their individual needs.

WHAT YOU'LL SEE: AN OVERVIEW

In a Montessori classroom, the space and everything in it is deliberately designed and arranged to invite exploration and facilitate independent learning. Furniture and equipment are child-sized and organized into work areas. Materials are arranged attractively and activities presented sequentially, giving children ample opportunity to:

- ◆ gain control over their bodily movements,
- ◆ gain independence in the care of their person,
- ◆ isolate sensory experiences,
- ◆ build a foundation for intellectual functioning in language, mathematics, art, music and eventually the cultural subjects of geography and science.

During your observation, you will see children move freely from work area to work area, selecting materials from shelves and taking them to a table or a mat spread out on the floor. They will work with the material they have chosen for as long as it holds their interest then return it to its proper place – all without disturbing classmates who are busy and focused themselves. You may also see children working in pairs or small groups; the directress presenting a lesson to one or more children; or older children helping younger ones.

WHAT WE ASK...

Activity in our downstairs primary or elementary classes can be viewed from inside the classroom or seen through observation windows. For the upstairs primary class, only in-class observations are possible.

When you enter a classroom to observe, please sit in the chair designated for you. Remain seated and try to be as inconspicuous as possible throughout your visit. You should be able to observe the entire classroom without moving the chair.

- ❖ TIP: Have paper and pen handy. To make the most of your visit, you will want to jot down notes and questions for discussion following your observation.



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VINCENT S. MASTRO MONTESSORI ACADEMY

During your observation, the classroom directress and her assistant may not direct their attention to you. They are not being rude, but rather allowing you to see the truest possible picture of the class. They will be happy to talk with you about the materials and activities-- after the observation.

The office staff is usually available to answer questions immediately following an observation. The directress may even be able to step outside the classroom to talk with you. But if she is not, she can call you at home. Or you can schedule a conference.

Prospective parents or other visitors, please do not initiate contact or conversation with the children. If children initiate contact, just respond naturally. Do not attempt to help the children with their work. The children know how to request assistance from the directress, her assistant or the older children in the room.

Parents of current students, your children will want you to observe them at work. Please watch with interest and appreciation, without evaluating or intervening.

As you observe, allow children the freedom to make choices and errors and to learn from those errors. Permit children to select materials and work with them as they usually do rather than asking them to demonstrate a specific material or explain an activity.

- ❖ **TIP:** Before school on the morning of your visit, tell your child that you will be coming to see him work.

If your child becomes distracted or wishes to stay near you or sit on your lap, do not become uneasy. Try to encourage him to return to his work or to work at a table or rug near you.

All observers, by watching and listening rather than interacting, you will come away with a clearer picture of the Montessori classroom and a true sense of the learning that goes on there.

You may also want to use some of your time to absorb the unique ambiance of the classroom. Get a feel for the ebb and flow of activity and for the interaction among children of the same and different ages and between children and the adults directing and assisting with their activities.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Watch for the joy. Do children freely express excitement over a new discovery and want to share what they've learned? Do children approach each other to work together? Do they gather around with interest when someone says, "Aha!"

Look for the learning. How is this "work of the child" done? Does the work have a purpose? Does the work have a purpose beyond the completion of the task or operation at hand? What do you see that reflects the notion that children in Montessori classrooms learn *how to* learn?

Get a sense of the Community. What is the social nature of this classroom? How do children treat each other and the adults in the classroom? How are they treated by the adults? When do the children socialize? How does the way they socialize when they are at work differ from the way they socialize on the playground?

Check for:

- ✓ INDEPENDENCE-- the primary goal of our Montessori school is to help children grow towards independence, self-direction, and inner self-discipline. It is hoped that each child here will acquire a sense of self-acceptance and social responsibility and a feeling of having undergone successful experiences.
- ✓ ORDER--In the primary classes, the materials are arranged into four categories: practical life, sensorial, mathematics, and language. Only one set of materials may be used at a time and the materials must be returned as they were found to their proper place.
- ✓ FREEDOM--Although the Montessori prepared environment is carefully planned and structured, children have complete freedom to choose the activities they want to do and to do them for as long as they choose.
- ✓ DISCIPLINE—With freedom of movement come limits to respect. Children may not disturb one another, be unduly boisterous, or abuse the materials. When discipline is required it is achieved by bringing the children into contact with work that absorbs their interest and helps them control their bodily movements.
- ✓ DIRECTION --Children who work at one or two tasks without fatigue or restlessness for the entire work period (usually 2 to 2 ½ hours) are considered *normalized*. Ordinarily it takes 3 to 5 months to achieve this. Until a child has, the directress is very active presenting materials and controlling the direction of the child's work. Once children do arrive at normalization, the directress becomes more of an observer and guides only when asked.

NOTES: