



## **Seacoast Center for Education**

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### **The Observation Journal**

Observation is one of the hallmarks of the Montessori profession. At all levels, observation by the Montessori teacher is a critical tool for management. As with other learning processes, you may find this a difficult and frustrating experience at first, but by developing a consistent practice of documented observation you will better understand who your children are, how they interact with each other, and how they do or do not move forward in their work. The time you invest in developing good observation skills will return substantial dividends in the course of your professional development.

During your practicum year we ask you to document regular observation of your classroom. An observation journal is a requirement for successful completion of a practicum experience. This document is designed to help you get started. Additionally, online support is available for discussion of classroom observation among other topics.

#### **Basic Journal Requirements**

Your observation journal should document fifteen minutes per day four times per week, a total of one hour each week for at least twenty-five weeks of your practicum year. For each journal entry, show dates, beginning times, and ending times. Observations are expected to take place in the classroom in which you are working.

The choice of medium (i.e., composition book, loose-leaf paper, laptop) or other is yours. The journal should constitute actual notes taken during observations (as opposed to summaries written after the fact). The end product may be somewhat dog-eared from constant use, but is expected to be a legible and coherent document that you are able to use for later reflection and analysis of classroom activities.

Your documented observations will be grouped into five successive theme areas: Environment, Work Cycle, Learning Styles, Social Interactions, and Transitions. Each area should be the focus of five or six weeks of observation time during the school year. Take each theme in turn and in order.

Questions related to the five categories are provided to help you focus your observations and in preparing summary statements. You are not expected to cover each point or to use the questions as a checklist. They simply represent the consciousness experienced teachers might bring to the observation. Review the questions in advance but spend the actual time watching and recording. At the end of each theme area (e.g., five weeks focusing on Environment) revisit what you've written. Record any insights you may have in your journal before you begin the next

category. This summary does not need to be more than 1-2 pages in length and should be included at the end of each section's notes.

Your observation journal will be considered complete if it shows evidence of a consistent effort totaling one hour per week for 28 weeks and contains summary reflections on each of the five themes. Completed journals receive up to 28 hours of credit for Independent Study. At the discretion of the Course Director, and subject to AMS approval, all or part of hours credited to Independent Study may be counted towards course content in meeting certification requirements.

While this documentation may be useful in record-keeping, an observation journal is not a record-keeping system in itself and does not satisfy that area of practicum requirements.

Observation technique constitutes an entire course of study in itself. For our purposes, simpler is better. Bear in mind that objective and subjective observations are two different things. The objective portion of your journal should be the emphasis. If you are unpracticed in documenting observation, make sure to note primarily what you see and not what you think about what you see. One way to do this is to create a list of observed activity as a column on the left side of the page with any comments or insights logged on the right.

Another approach, typically used in ethnographic observation, is to make continuing notes but bracket any comments that are subjective. Example: 10:45 Sarah with the stamp game. Exchanges tens for hundreds. Blinks. Blinks again several times. [Sunlight from that window really is intense today. Problem for that table?]

### **Submitting Observation Journals**

Observation Journals may be submitted to on-site evaluation staff or by mail to Seacoast Center for Education, Box 323, Greenland NH 03840 Attn: Assignments. Journals submitted by mail may require 4-6 weeks of evaluation time. Please direct inquiries related to your journal and any other assignments to [assignments@seacoastcenter.com](mailto:assignments@seacoastcenter.com). We regret we cannot respond by telephone to questions regarding assignments.

Electronic submission of observation journal documents is possible. Please visit links to Assignments on our web site ([www.seacoastcenter.com](http://www.seacoastcenter.com)) for information.

### **Questions About Practicum Assignments**

Liandra Lloyd is Practicum Director for all of our Seacoast Center for Education sites and should be contacted with any questions at [practicum@seacoastcenter.com](mailto:practicum@seacoastcenter.com).

## **Observation Focus Points**

Use these questions to support your reflections. Some will apply to observation of a single child, others to groups of children, and still others to the space itself.

### **Environment:**

1. How do the children flow in their space?
2. Is the space warm and inviting?
3. Is the space overwhelming or too sparse?
4. How's the noise level and is it working?
5. Are there areas of congestion? Are there areas where children tend to collect, congregate, "hang out", or hide? Are there areas that remain empty/unused?
6. Are there quiet work areas for individuals and small groups? Are there work areas conducive for large groups?
7. Is there adequate group and quiet space for the children?
8. Are the individual work areas inviting or "punitive"?
9. Are the materials beautiful and inviting both in condition and in their organization?
10. How do the children interact with the materials? Are some shelves more inviting than others?
11. How respectful are the children of their environment and the materials?

### **Work Cycle and Expectations:**

1. How independent or interdependent are the children i.e. do they go to each other for help or to the adult?
2. How do the children know what's expected of them?
3. How do they choose their work? What percentage of the choosing is theirs vs. the teacher's?
4. How engaged are they in their work? Can they focus? Do they focus well? Are there a lot of distractions?
5. Is the bell curve occurring?
6. What are individual children doing and for how long?
7. How much wandering happens in the class? How long does it take for them to get engaged or re-engaged? Can they do that on their own or does it take intervention?
8. Do the children demonstrate patterns of when they take out easier vs. more challenging work?
9. Do the children demonstrate patterns of when they take out short term vs. great work?
10. What types of work do individual children prefer? What work do they avoid?

## Learning Styles:

1. How well does the child focus?
2. What is distracting for individual children?
3. Do they need quiet or to talk while working?
4. Do they need to move frequently?
5. What re-engages the child?
6. Do the children need a lot of short-term activities? Can they handle "big work"?
7. Where is their sense of organization? Where do they need assistance with organization?
8. Can they work well in groups or pairs?
9. Who do they tend to work with? Is this working for them?
10. What materials attract individual children and what do they avoid? Is there a pattern?
11. What helps individual children calm down or focus?
12. What engages individual children?
13. How do individual children process information best? What causes confusion for them? What helps them?
14. Who works well together? Why?
15. Who doesn't work well together? Why? Is there anything that they can do together?
16. What have you tried with children who are having trouble with certain work or subject areas? What worked? What didn't work?

**Social Interactions:**

1. How well do the children negotiate with each other?
2. How respectful are they with each other?
3. Do they tend to turn to an adult to solve their issues?
4. What problem solving techniques are they using? What works? What doesn't work?
5. How do children handle those that are distracting or annoying them?
6. What tools do they use to problem solve? Do they need further guidance on effective problem solving (win/win) techniques?
7. How much adult intervention occurs?
8. What roles do individual children tend to take in their social groups, in the class? Is this good for the child?
9. What is helping individual children in their social connections? What is getting in their way?

**Transitions:**

1. What cues are used to indicate the end of a cycle?
2. Do the children know what is expected of them during the transition?
3. What children have trouble following through? What helps them? What gets in their way?
4. How well do they do in their jobs?
5. Is this time primarily teacher directed or child directed?
6. Are the adults monitoring, modeling through participation, or both?
7. What techniques are used to help those children who have difficulty during these times?