

Ways of Observations

In deciding upon a program for your child, classroom visits can provide a good source of information. However, unless one has some idea of what to look for, sorting this information can be difficult. It is often helpful to focus an observation rather than look at all aspects of the program. Below are some possible guidelines to help you focus your observation. Although people often have biases toward a classroom structure, i.e., open classroom vs. more traditional settings, or same-age group vs. a heterogeneous group of children, there are educational processes which can be viewed within any structure. **While you are in the room, please remain seated and do not talk to other visitors ~ children can be distracted by “strangers” talking or walking around. We do ask that you do not *initiate* conversations with children, but feel free to respond if a child approaches you with a question. Also, since teachers will be busy with their classroom responsibilities, please save any questions for the Director.**

1. Note the manner in which a teacher speaks to children. What is her/his attitude, tone of voice, volume, etc. What roles do the teachers take and when (observer, initiator, helper)?
2. What does the classroom look like physically? Is it designed with the children in mind? Is it fairly clean and uncluttered? Are materials in good condition? Are displays relevant? What is a child's response to his/her environment? Is the child dependent or independent in his/her environment? Is there an attempt to make the room a pleasant place to be?
3. What is the general tone of the classroom (calm, restless, focused, distracted)? Since a classroom is a very human situation, there are days when things run smoothly and days when any classroom may seem to fall apart. The important issue is not that it happens ~ it does, and we know the cycle is a normal one ~ but how the situation is handled by the staff.
4. Observe the socialization that takes place in the classroom. How do children relate to adults and to other children? Is there mutual respect that is apparent between teachers and children, children and children, teachers and teachers? What type of leadership roles do you observe among the children? How do children spend their time between activities (socializing, choosing, resting)?
5. Whether in a traditional setting or open setting, does there appear to be sensitivity to individual needs of children? Does that become apparent in any concrete way that you can see?
6. How do children choose/initiate their activities? To what degree/in what way does the teacher direct their choices? Do you observe variation in the length of time that the children work? How do they put away the materials when they are finished with them? How do group activities begin/end? Which activities are initiated by the teachers? How do teachers provide assistance when requested? How do the teachers invite children to work with the various materials?
7. If you observe a conflict between/among children, how is it handled by the teachers?
8. As an alternative to reviewing the entire class, watch one or two children for an entire period. Note general behavior, concentration, interest span, relationship to peers and teachers.

