The 15-Minute Early Learning Walkthrough

A look-fors guide for leaders and coaches in Pre-K through Grade 2 classrooms

Short, frequent classroom visits tell you more about everyday learning than one long, formal observation. This guide helps you use 15 minutes to notice what is working, spot one or two areas to grow, and start a supportive conversation with the teacher. It is a tool for learning together, not an evaluation.

How to use this guide

- **Before (1 minute):** Choose one or two sections to focus on. You do not need to look for everything at once.
- **During (12 minutes):** Watch children first, then adults. Note specific things you see and hear, such as quotes, actions, and materials.
- **After (2 minutes):** Jot down one strength and one wondering to share with the teacher within 48 hours.

1. The Learning Environment

Look for...	Seen	Notes
Materials are labeled with words and pictures, and are within children's reach		
Children's own work and words are displayed at their eye level		
Clearly defined interest areas or centers invite exploration (blocks, dramatic play, library, math, art, science)		
The space reflects the cultures, languages, and families of the children in the class		
There is a calm, cozy space where a child can take a break and regulate		

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2. Interactions and Relationships

Look for...	Seen	Notes
Adults get down to children's eye level and use children's names warmly		
Adults ask open-ended questions ("What do you notice?" "How did you figure that out?")		
Back-and-forth conversations last several turns, not just one question and answer		
Adults name feelings and coach children through conflicts instead of only redirecting		
Children talk with each other about their work and ideas		

3. Instruction and Play

Look for...	Seen	Notes
Children spend a meaningful part of the day in purposeful, hands-on play		
Adults extend play with new vocabulary, questions, or materials		
Read-alouds are interactive, with children predicting, retelling, and connecting		
Math is visible in everyday moments, such as counting, comparing, patterns, and shapes		
Small-group time is responsive to what children know and need next		

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4. Routines and Transitions

Look for...	Seen	Notes
A visual schedule is posted and referenced		
Transitions are short, predictable, and supported with songs, signals, or jobs		
Children know what to do and where materials go with little adult direction		
Wait time is minimal; children are engaged rather than waiting in line		

5. Family Connections

Look for...	Seen	Notes
Evidence that families are welcomed (photos, family boards, home-language greetings)		
Learning is shared with families through notes, photos, or take-home activities		
Families' knowledge and cultures are reflected in classroom materials or projects		

After the Walkthrough: Starting the Conversation

Use one strength and one wondering. Keep it specific, curious, and supportive.

Sentence starters
"I noticed... and the children responded by..."
"One thing that really stood out was..."
"I'm wondering what might happen if..."
"What are you most proud of in your classroom right now?"
"What is one area you'd like support with? How could I help?"

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Reflection for leaders

- Which look-fors did you see across most classrooms? What does that tell you about your program's strengths?
- Which look-fors were rarely seen? Is this a professional learning need, a materials need, or a time and schedule need?
- What is one small, shared focus your team could work on for the next six weeks?

Want support turning walkthrough insights into action?
Edify Learning Group partners with schools and early learning programs on coaching cycles, professional learning, and program quality. Visit edifylearninggroup.com/contact to start a conversation.

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