

# Resources for Webinar Participants

1/10/18 Observation: A Montessori Teacher's Best Tool  
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## Recommended Reading

- The Pleasure of Finding Things Out, Richard Feynman
- The Advanced Montessori Method, Vol. 1, Montessori
- AMI Communications, No. 4, 1992
  - a. *Observation*, Hilla Patel
- The NAMTA Journal, Vol. 41, No. 3 Summer 2016
  - a. *Becoming a Scientific Observer*, Greg MacDonald
  - b. *The Observation Scientist*, Molly O'Shaughnessy
  - c. *Observations*, A.M. Joosten

## Observation: Birth-Age 12

[www.montessoriguide.org](http://www.montessoriguide.org)

Montessori Guide offers an outstanding selection of videos on the topic of observation, sorted by age.

## Sample Observation Sheet

This is just one example. There are other excellent ways to record your observations.



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## Observation Sheet

Date:  
Location:  
Weather:  
Mood:  
Health:

Starting time: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending time: \_\_\_\_\_

Time Record	Detailed Observation	Preconceived Ideas

Reflection:

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# Webinar Outline: Observation, A Montessori Teacher's Best Tool

## Silvia C. Dubovoy, Ph.D.

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### Who has time to observe?

- Have you ever had the feeling that you do not have time to observe the children in your classroom?
- Do you wish you could observe more but feel **pulled to constantly monitor the work or no work of the children instead?**
- You are not alone. This is very common!

## A new understanding

- When you have a new understanding of observation, you will be able to “find” time where there was none, and to observe will be a *pleasure*.
- The practice of observation **transformed** my experience as a classroom teacher decades ago, and I use it in my personal life to this day.

## What is observation?

- **Seeing, hearing, sensing, something carefully** in order to gain information
- Acquiring information from a **primary source** using the senses
- **Collecting data** for a scientific experiment in order to prove or disprove hypotheses, leading to more questions about the world, which imply further experiments

## What is *Montessori Observation*?

- An ability, a capacity that you may acquire through practice.
- An art that needs to be exercised. It is not easy.
- It is connected with a way of seeing and hearing, and for that you need to be in the present-- **here and now**-- without interferences from your past.
- It should generate an unconscious drive capable of transforming us to be efficient in our task.
- It is a way of being aware of your actions and reactions.
- It is silencing our mind but remaining mentally alert in order to make an intelligent observation.
- It should be part of our life, as we breathe and our heart beats.
- It requires patience, perseverance, time, and exercise.
- Most importantly, the motivation of the scientist should direct our task.
- It is not enough to say that we love children; we need to know them in order to be able to guide them to develop by themselves.
- There is no love without knowledge.

The more you know the more you love.

## Why is observation important?

- It is the foundation of your relationship with the child.
- It is an **essential** part of a Montessori environment.
- A **first** priority.

## Your relationship with a child...

- **It is a conversation**— If you are constantly giving presentations and instructions but not “listening” to the child via observation, it is as if you are talking at someone but not having a real conversation.
- **It is like dancing together**— If you are not making time to observe the child, it is as if you and the child are each dancing NEXT to each other, but are not dancing TOGETHER. This kind of dance cannot flow.

## **Observation is worth the effort**

- Observation is the key to achieving states of “flow” in the classroom.
- **Anyone can learn to observe! It takes practice.**
- You have to develop in yourself the spirit of the scientist
- Montessori’s medical background informed her methods
- Richard Feynman— read his book, *The Pleasure of Finding Things Out*, on how he learns to cultivate profound interest in the world around.

## **Spirit of the Scientist**

- We must maintain the **spirit of the scientist**, who is intensely interested in answering a life’s questions
- The scientists use systematic observation, measurement, and experimentation, and then come the formulation, testing, and modification of hypotheses.

## **Observation is scientific AND spiritual:**

- **Scientific** because you have to observe in an objective, precise, consistent and exact manner.
- **Spiritual** because you will be observing human beings, especially the child, and this requires a new way of seeing, a new way of observing.

## **Two types of observation: self & others**

1. Observation of oneself (do this first!)
  - a. “Knowing yourself is enlightenment.”  
-Lao Tzu
2. Observation as a **tool for serving others** in your work
  - a. Attention, interest, respect and responsibility are part of your task

## **What do we mean by self-observation?**

- **To be able to observe, you need a preparation of heart, mind and body.**
- Preparation of the self: 3 components
  - (1) Energy
    - The inner feeling of the energy of life, emanating from the heart as an ethereal state of being, different from the physical body.
  - (2) Mind- Brain
    - Mind, brain, reasoning, mental functioning, neurological integration, and organized structured pathways.
  - (3) Physical Body

## **The Systems:**

Skeletal  
Muscular  
Nervous  
Cardiovascular  
Respiratory  
Digestive  
Urinary

Endocrine

## The Senses

Visual

Auditory

Heart, Mind, Body

Endless fountain of joy

- Without these three elements in harmony, meaningful observation cannot occur. “Going through the motions” without sincere motivation can lead to **boredom and burnout**.
- On the other hand, if the three elements are present, observation can be an **endless fountain of joy** for you and your classroom.

## Deviations in the Montessori teacher

- You have to constantly look at yourself. There are also deviations in the Montessori teacher.
- Why am I correcting this child constantly? Why do I need to control everything? What do I have to learn from what just happened between two children?
- Reacting
- Why do I react to children’s behavior with anger?
- What triggers a feeling of discomfort when I am talking to this parent?
- Why I react to a child that does not want to receive a presentation?
- Why am I taking it personally** when a child is defiant or opposes my “orders”?
- Ego
- It is our **ego** that reacts to children who we cannot control with our words. The ego makes a person have misconceptions related to actions of others.

## Observation Do’s and Don’ts

- DO** be objective
  - Objectivity is a quality that permits you to be **fair, neutral, open minded and impartial**.
  - It is a lack of bias; you are a just person
  - It prevents you from prejudice, judgments and expectations
  - It is a form of detachment and neutrality that helps you to be fair.
- DO** Judge
  - Observation can help you to **rightly judge** when a correction is actually beneficial.
  - Observation of yourself can help you understand **how and where to make the correction**, so that it may be of help to someone and not embarrass or hurt him or her.
  - Insight, understanding and self-control are part of this correction.
- DO** check your motivations
  - The teacher must derive not only the capacity, but also the **desire**, to observe natural phenomena. If you are not interested in discovering (and constantly re-discovering!) the needs of the child, you will end up imposing

yourself on the child and substituting yourself for his own personality.

- **DON'T** Pre-Judge
  - Observation has to be done without making **judgments**, without the sight becoming **tinted by preferences, prejudices or expectations**.
  - When we see in others anything that we do not like, it is because we have those things.
  - We all judge to make choices in situations or concrete decisions.
  - In our relationships with children we cannot pre-judge.
  - Judgment is a learned trait.
  - When a **judgment** comes to your mind, look into yourself and understand why do you need to do it. Where does that judgment come from?
- **DON'T** have preferences
  - Preferences are related to partiality and **bias from past experiences**.
  - They are a form of conditioning response.
- **DON'T** be prejudiced
  - Prejudice is a learned trait; we are not born prejudiced.
  - We absorb it from the adults around.
- **DON'T** have expectations
  - Expectations are related to assumptions based on past experiences.
  - When what we were expecting does not happen, we feel **frustrated**.
- **DON'T** assume
  - Assumption is to **accept a thing as true or as certain to happen, without proof**.
  - It is similar to an expectation, but when taking it as a premise or a supposition it prevents good communication.
  - Assumption and ironic language directed at a child affects the relationship of trust.

#### **"Not sacrifice, but satisfaction"**

- People used to ask Dr. Montessori: "How can your method succeed if you ask your teachers to renounce all their most natural and spontaneous desires?"
  - "But what no one understands is that not sacrifice, but satisfaction, is in question; **not renunciation, but a new life in which the values are different**, where real life values, hitherto unknown, have come to exist."
- M. Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind*

#### **"If you don't have time to observe, you need to observe more!"**

- What type of work do you have?
- Professor, Teacher, Nurse, Parent, Waiter, Other

#### **Some observation tips & suggestions**

- Practice outside the classroom

- After you have learned how to observe yourself, practice observation in a restaurant or coffee shop. Consciously be aware of the smell, sounds, images that surround you.
  - Write these observations for 5 minutes without letting anyone know what are you doing.
- Embody the practice as a character trait
  - Observing in other places will help you to practice until it becomes **a permanent character trait**. Then, you will no longer react to situations. You detach from them: observing without being emotionally involved, waiting for some seconds, thinking about it, and then acting.
- Keep a notebook
  - Make it a habit in the classroom. Have a little notebook where you can write things to remind you of the situation and pass it to your daily journal later.
- Recording your observations on template paper. There are many good options!
- Plenty of tips, forms and other ways of observing:
  - M.Montessori. The Advanced Montessori Method Vol. 1 Pierson-Montessori Publishers, The Netherlands
  - The NAMTA Journal, Vol.41, No. 3 Summer 2016
    - Becoming a Scientific Observer by Greg MacDonald
    - The Observation Scientist by Molly O'Shaughnessy
    - Observations by A. M. Joosten
- Don't forget to ACT!
  - "Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing?" -Alan Watts, *The Zen of Seeing*
- My story
  - Observation has been a gift that **transformed my life**.
  - An indispensable tool
  - "From the Montessori point of view, the purpose of observation could be thought as the 'corner-stone' of our work. It is the **indispensable** part that makes our work come alive and become meaningful. It is the **tool which enables us to follow the child's spontaneous manifestations**, not with the aim to study the psychology of the child but in order to refine our own thinking and understanding to be able to give to the life of the child the help that he has the right to receive." --*Observation* by Hilla Patel, Communications, No. 4, 1992
- Observation is a way of life
  - "To the mind that is still the whole universe surrenders."
 

-Lao Tzu

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