

Weekly Montessori Moment

Week #1

“Observation is my method. I will not teach it to you. You will struggle to learn it.”
- Maria Montessori

Our first message comes from *Montessori From the Start: The Child at Home, from Birth to Age Three* by Paula Polk Lillard (see biography below) and Lynn Lilliard Jessen. Objective observation is an essential component of the Montessori Method. It involves describing exactly what we see in the moment, without “chang[ing] the reality of what has been observed through preconceptions, judgments, or evaluations.”

“Observation is not watching...to observe is to think like a “scientist:” to be completely open to what you are seeing with no preconceived ideas in mind. Therefore, when we observe children, we cannot project what we are thinking onto them. We cannot assume that when a two-month-old baby keeps lifting his head over and over, and sees the design on the pillow in front of his eyes, what he wants is to get to that pillow. He may just be absorbing its pattern or just lifting his head in order to strengthen his neck and back, and the pillow just happens to be in his line of vision.”

Because we want to foster a sense of independence in the child, our first priority must be to:

“Look, then think: ‘What is the one thing that I want to do to help?’ Your aim is to give the least amount of help necessary and give it just at the right moment. This means that when you are with your child, you need to stand back at least some of the time. It is not necessary to be constantly interacting with him. If you are sitting and reading a magazine, put it down for a while just to watch your child and gather information. What is he doing with his hands and fingers? What are his legs and back doing? How hard is he working? For example when he is a year and a half and trying to get dressed in the morning, watch to see what he is doing on his own. Think whether what you are about to do is really going to be of help to him, and so forth, throughout the day. **Observe, think, act.** By following this pattern, you can best guarantee that your actions result in collaboration with your child for his benefit, not an undermining of your child’s efforts for self-formation.”