Observation – Lesson Planning – Record Keeping

Observation – The Science and Art of Seeing What Is Without Assumptions and Without Judgment

“With Observation we are Montessori teachers. Without Observation we are conventional teachers with really cool manipulatives” Ginni Sackett

See ‘Introduction to Observation’ for more information

Observation is the most important pedagogical task of the Montessori adult
Observation is necessary to fulfill all other educational tasks – Think of it as the #1 item in the job description; the only legitimate basis for all other activities of the adult educator
We are working when we observe!

Part of the scientific study of the child: “re-creating the experiment”
Part of teacher training – a skill to be learned and practiced: use it or lose it
The necessary basis for adult collaboration in the environment – therefore all adults participate
Observe for developmental phenomena – not just a list of what material a child has in front of him

We agree on its importance – but are we doing it?
Create systems to structure real and meaningful observation
We observe at all times
We observe from the sidelines every day – as often as possible
Create Grace and Courtesy lessons so that children respect the observing adult
Disciplined Practice of the “After-School Task” (see below) will hone observation skills

What to do with observations?
More than a list to be discarded
Refer to ‘Interpretation of Observation’ for guidelines

After School Task
An Exercise to Perfect the Art of Observing at all Times

Have a set of blank Class Lists. As soon as the last child leaves in the afternoon – and as quickly as possible – record at least one thing you remember seeing each child do without adult direction during the day; ideally this will be some form of work, but it can be anything that you actually observed the child to do spontaneously – such as greeted you in the morning; used the bathroom; had snack; had an argument; helped someone tie a bow; ran around outside; etc. If there is a child for whom you can’t remember even one self-directed activity, then you know you have to pay special attention to observing that child the next day.

When you can record at least one ‘something’ at the end of the day for each child in the group, progress to writing down a Montessori material or activity you observed the child choose without adult direction during the day – also try to recall how the child engaged with the material or activity, such as with concentration; was frequently distracted; followed the Control of Error; etc. Continue doing this at the end of every day until you can quickly and consistently recall at least one freely chosen work for each child in the group. This exercise will really prompt you to hone your observational skills, and will alert you to children you ‘are not seeing’ as well as ‘stealth’ children who ‘disappear into the floor boards’.
“Plan, plan, and plan some more, then always be ready to throw out your plan!” Rita Schaefer Zener

Observation + Knowledge of Child Development + Knowledge of Materials / Activities = Lesson Plans

Develop lesson plans naturally out of the Interpretation of Observations (individual and group)
Not a lock-step, scripted curriculum: organic, naturalistic, education for life – ‘illusion of the first time’
Two sets: Lesson plans for each individual child (see example)
Lesson plans for group activities (see example)
Planned individual presentations and group activities can happen at any time
There is always room for a spontaneous activity that isn’t on the plan
Continually evaluate and revise lesson plans – don’t let lessons ‘get lost’
Lesson Plans form the basis for tracking our work (Record Keeping)
Successful Lesson Plans become the Control of Error for our Interpretation of Observation
Lesson Plans mean we are never ‘in the lurch’ for what to do
Any adult who interacts with the children should work from a lesson plan (train assistants for this)
Lesson Plans are helpful for substitute teachers

Sample: Lesson Plans – Set One

Individual Child (one for each child in the group)

Mary Elizabeth D.  Sound Game – Initial Sounds
- Sandpaper Letters – First Presentation
- Red Rods
- Pink Tower – Memory Game, Scattered Locations
- Geometric Solids – Bases
- Dusting a Shelf
- Enrichment of Vocabulary – Parts of a Plant
- Grace & Courtesy: Saying No to a Friend

[You will be adding to this list over time – cross out / check activities presented before transferring to permanent record]

Sample: Lesson Plans – Set Two

Planned Group Activities (for any available, interested and/or targeted child)

Sound Game – all four levels

Songs: Mango Fandango
- I’ve Been Working on the Railroad
- Bicycle Built for Two

True Story: Watching Deer at Oxbow Park

Book: Angus Lost

Question Game: What we do to get ready for lunch
Poem: ‘Bed in Summer’

Enrichment of Vocabulary – Oral Game: Clothing We Wear

Timbre Game: Sound Boxes

Zero Game (target children who have experienced the Spindle Boxes)

Grace & Courtesy: Saying No to a Friend
What To Do If You Need Help
Greeting a Visitor

Preliminary Activity: Finding a Rug Space
Moving Objects on a Table without a Sound
How To Hang Your Coat
What To Do When You Stand Up From a Table

[You will be adding to this list over time – cross out /check activities presented before transferring to permanent record]

Record Keeping – Adult Discipline and Accountability

"It’s too much to hold in your head, and it’s unfair to the children to fly by the seat of your pants!" Sarah Andrews

Yes – we do this! But – Keep it Simple!

Record Keeping is an important aspect of the scientific study of the child / our role as scientists
Records grow naturally out of Lesson Plans

Requires a system – but no one system is perfect
Computer-based systems are available but not necessary (unless your school requires them)

Two basic aspects of any record keeping system:

Data

A record of the teacher’s work: presentations given; activities led
Teachers can make their own version of this – it frequently is organized as a grid
This type of record-keeping is also available commercially and as computer programs

Data collection confirms the lessons each child has received: no holes, no ‘lost’ children or activities
Can include a notational system to record the child’s progression towards mastery

If the teacher is following all guidelines for preparation and readiness, the record of giving a presentation should indicate developmental achievements, capacities and skills – for example: a record of giving the presentation of Constructive Triangles – Rectangular Box would indicate the child’s thorough exploration with the Visual Materials for Dimension, Color, Shape, including all relevant language for Triangles and Quadrilaterals from the Geometry Cabinet

Anecdotal

Permanent Anecdotal Individual Record (see sample)
This record creates an evolving picture of the child – where each child is at this point in terms of
... Developmental work
... Personal development
... Social development
Permanent Record of Guided Group Activities (see sample)

- Confirms Group Activities initiated by the Teacher – noting the title of the activity, the date, the number of children who participated, and any interesting observation about the activity.
- This record also includes spontaneous, un-planned activities.
- It is not necessary to record the name of every child who participates in a group activity.
- Significant information about a particular child’s participation would be included in the child’s individual anecdotal record.

Record Keeping provides a ‘Paper Trail’ for challenging situations.
Record Keeping supports the teacher’s accountability.
Record Keeping is essential for successful Montessori education.
Record Keeping provides a framework for Parent Conferences – allows discussion to be professional, objective, non-judgmental, productive: are we seeing the same child?
Record Keeping supports reliable Reporting.
- What are the school expectations for reporting?
  - ... End of year Reports ... Exit reports ... etc
- Are there other agents of oversight?
  - ... Licensing ... Board of Directors ... etc
- Legal reports
  - ... Individual child assessment ... Child custody ... Suspected child abuse ... etc

The Power of With …

“We are not responsible for how the children act. We are only responsible for how we respond to how the children act.” Hannah Levan

Education is a partnership, a collaboration of adults and children.
- Teachers / Support Staff with Parents with The Child (our forgotten partner)
- The adults act in the children's environment
- But … The child does all the work
- Successful Collaboration requires collaboration without prejudice, assumption, fear, or judgment.
- The glass is – we simply respond to what is
  - ... We interpret in terms of our knowledge and experience (the source of our authority)
  - ... We decide on a response – aligned with the laws of development

Adult Collaboration = Shared Observation
Team Lesson Plans
Accessible Record Keeping
Sample: (Permanent) Anecdotal Individual Record
(For each individual child)

Mary Elizabeth D.  
Age at Entry: 3 yrs 4 mos
Entered: September ‘11

11/15  Pr Sound Game – initial sounds
Lots of interest in sounds of words for rest of day
Daisy is a special friend right now

11/16  Sound Game – initial sounds: identified object in tray
Lots of energy – likes to move!!

11/17  Pr Pink Tower – Memory Game: Scattered Locations – wanted to hide the cubes, needed lots of direction, but LOVED the game

11/20  Pr Sandpaper Letters – M; E; P  Thought of her name first for “M” – really focused!
Second Pr for A; D; C  Stayed with all six for about 5 minutes on her own
Daisy is a bossy friend – M.E. doesn’t seem to like this /doesn’t seem to know what to do when Daisy tries to run the show!
Chose Scattered Location with Pink Tower – much more order, idea seems clearer

11/21  Suggested she play scattered locations with Brown Stair – not interested (sigh)
Asked for more letters Pr U; S; T; B; O; G
Sound Game – initial and final sounds isolated on rug
Needs Grace & Courtesy for bossy friend …
Lots of big-body energy today!

11/22  Sand Letters: Third Period Review – all presented letters. Re-pres D; G; Pr L; I; N; F

11/23  Grace & Courtesy: Saying No to a Friend (didn’t want a turn to practice)
Pink Tower – Scattered Locations
Pr Geometric Solids – Bases (she was polite, but did not keep it out)
Loves Mango Fandango (hummed the melody while running around outside)

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Sample: (Permanent) Record of Guided Group Activities

(... this can include spontaneous, unplanned activities)

11/15  Poem: ‘Bed in Summer’ (just about the whole group)

11/16  Sound Game Levels 1 & 2  4 children (lots of interest)
      True Story: Watching Deer at Oxbow Park  9 children
      Spontaneous Conversation with three children about wild deer eating out of gardens

11/17  Sound Game Levels 1 & 23 children
      Book: *Angus Lost*  Whole Group
      Ext of 3rd Period – types of dogs  About 12 children (I suggested most of the types)

11/20  Oral Game: Clothing  8 children (lots of suggestions!!)
      Song: I’ve Been Working on the Railroad  Anyone who joined (very energetic)
      Question Game about riding MAX with 2 children who mentioned MAX after Railroad song
      Poem: Bed in Summer  large group (no one joined in)

11/21  Timbre Game: Sound Boxes  4 children (big hit!!)
      Poem: ‘Bed in Summer’  Large group (some joined in recitation)

11/22  Timbre Game: Sound Boxes  10 children (got a little rowdy!)
      Song: Mango Fandango (they like this – lots of spontaneous body movement)
      Sound Game Level 2  6 children (moved several children to level 3)
      Question Game: Bed time routine at home (from spontaneous conversation with Cameron, who was
      remembering ‘Bed in Summer’ poem)

11/23  G & C: ‘Saying No to a Friend’  4 times, 3-5 children each time (very dramatic)
      Song: Mango Fandango  Entire Group, end of morning session
      Oral Game – winter clothing; summer clothing  Afternoon Group

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