

OBSERVATION

by Lakshmi A. Kripalani

The adult who is inexperienced in the art of observation may, even with the best intentions, react to a child's behavior in a way that hinders instead of helping the child's development. Kripalani outlines the need for training and practice in observation in order to "understand the needs of the children and...to understand how to remove obstacles." To this end, she outlines a technique for practicing observation. She also lists the different aspects to be observed in the classroom and discusses points of awareness in the observation of each.

Observation is essential to human progress. It is an art that has helped humanity from its inception, when there was no language, no tools, and no machinery. Man, in protecting himself through vital information gained by observing, invented fire and the wheel to meet his needs and to make life safe, even comfortable.

Observation as a technique in understanding human behavior is an enormous undertaking strewn with all sorts of limitations. Observing children is especially difficult because their verbal com-

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munication is not merely inhibited by their lack of command over words but generally does not reflect the inner functioning of the child's mind. Their behavior, however, does give some clues to an experienced and trained eye. To a beginner the manifestations of their behavior can be misleading. The predicament that confronts such a novice is that he/she fails to comprehend the child's real inner needs. Thus the individual either gives up in frustration or, in the name of love, help and concern, falls into the trap of hindering the child's growth and development.

A child tries to put on his coat by himself. He struggles to put on the zipper and is trying very hard to succeed. One teacher comes in and zips up the zipper. The child may or may not protest. Even if he does not protest, next time he lacks confidence to try it by himself and continues to be dependent on the adult's help. In the extreme situation, he may even whine and say: "I cannot do it". The adult, out of love and concern, consoles the child and says: "Yes, it is too hard to put on a zipper. I will do it for you." Another adult, who has mastered the art of observation, perceives the same situation in quite a different way. She will note that the child is not holding the



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clip of the zipper down enough to hold the pin on the other side of the zipper in its proper position to function. She will approach the child cautiously and hold his hand and help him to hold the clip down and allow him to put the rod in the hole with the other hand by himself. The child then succeeds in pulling up the zipper, gives a smile and may say: "Oh! Now, I can do it by myself." This type of direction serves as a stepping stone to independence, confidence and happiness.

The intention of both the above individuals was to love and help the child. However, in the case of the first adult, the very love, help and concern turns out to be an obstacle that hinders the child unintentionally. The adult may not consciously be a participant in these hindrances. The adult does not even recognize that he himself may be to blame for the child's deviated behavior. Besides the difficulty of comprehending the inner working of the child's mind and its resultant behavior, the perception of each individual adult varies from that of every other individual. We perceive the world with the special eye of our own experiences. Furthermore, the words and the language we use play tricks with our minds because of their varied usage according to our own experience and interpretations.

What to one individual is rigidity, to another is consistency. What to one is license, to another is freedom. What to one is teaching, to another is restricting the personal growth of the individual being taught and depriving him/her of the opportunity to explore and internalize the experiences that lay the firm foundation of learning. This internalized process of learning cannot be taught by another individual. One may succeed in making another individual produce mechanical reproduction of transmitted facts. This rote learning does not help those so taught to transfer this knowledge to other situations and consequently is of no value in real life. This immediate gratification and illusion of learning overshadows the importance of observation and its significance.

I remember the first parent meeting that I had to address in Iowa City, Iowa. It was my very first experience in addressing a P.T.A. meeting. In India and in Pakistan, at least in those days, there was no such thing as P.T.A. meetings. There were individual conferences and those only in case of emergencies. Children's plays,

drama or elocution competitions were held to reflect the philosophy of schools. I was experienced in public speaking having addressed masses in the fight for freedom in India, but, in a way, for this first P.T.A. meeting in Iowa, I was nervous and not quite sure as to how to address a group of enthusiastic people. I was concerned that I would not say the right words to keep their enthusiasm alive, or that I might mislead them or be trapped into the responsibility of fulfilling their unrealistic expectations of transforming their children into university scholars. When we restarted Montessori in the late fifties, the expectations were that of producing geniuses with the magic word of Montessori. Maybe, even today this is true in certain circles. However, I got up and said: "I have never taught, I have not come here to teach and I have no intention of ever teaching." You can imagine the reaction of the crowd full of Iowa University professors and graduate students who had worked so hard and advanced their own personal money up front to search the whole world for a Montessori teacher who would transform their children into immediate scholars. Instead of elaborating my statement, I quickly put up a demonstration of peeling quite a large potato without breaking the peel, the peel whirling around like an interesting snake to hold their attention. This practical demonstration for the development of coordination and control of movement saved me from being responsible for stopping the heartbeat of at least two individuals, who had made all sorts of promises to start the first Montessori school in Iowa City, Iowa. However, I meant every word of my statement that I do not teach. I believe you all are well aware of the fact that Dr. Montessori did not start the schools to teach. It was to help the child to develop and grow according to his/her maximum potential. However, learning was an incidental phenomenon of this process. Today we are caught in the dilemma of learning how to teach teaching.

Mario Montessori Jr. reminded us, at the study conference in the Netherlands, August 1982, that Dr. Montessori elaborated on the school environment but always observing the child in his/her spontaneous behavior within his/her environment and learning from these observations. He further stated that: "If Montessori courses lose that point of view and do not give enough attention or importance to observation, they will become rigid and only have narrow theories to offer." We have unconsciously fallen into this trap of narrow

theories. Dr. Montessori used her observation to discover the inner functioning of the child and to understand the forces that direct human development from within. Dr. Montessori did not want us to be dependent on her or her theories. She insisted that we continue to look at the child and try to understand the child. She was continuously in search of the understanding of the fascinating phenomenon of creation from its inception and thereby tried to understand the potentiality of the child from conception. This is the challenge we have inherited from her. We have the responsibility to transmit this realisation to the trainees that the observation that they have to do for a required number of hours is merely an introduction to the process of learning how to observe. The process of observation has no end in itself. It continues not merely in the classroom situation but wherever you have the opportunity to find the children. Speaking of the preparation of the teacher, Dr. Montessori said,

if pedagogy is to take its place among the sciences, it must be characterized by its method; and the teacher must prepare herself not by means of the content but by means of the method ... the fundamental quality is the capacity for observation ... That the possession of senses and of knowledge is not sufficient to enable a person to observe; it is a habit which must be developed by practice. (Maria Montessori, *The Advanced Montessori Method, Volume 1*, Kalakshetra Publications, p. 107).

Our observation requirement of a minimum of 75 hours combined with the overwhelming material covered and its preparation is like ripples in the water of a pond that occur against the background of stillness and through the medium of water. "When stillness and activity are in balance, the state of the pond reflects the subtle rhythms that are ordinarily obscured and confused by surface ripples." (Arthur J. Diekman, M.D., *The Observing Self*, p. 104). Mechanical use of the material is like the surface ripples distracting and obscuring the depth and the extent of the potentiality of the child and the process through which normalization is achieved.

When Dr. Montessori talks about observation, she is talking about the ability to perceive the unfathomable potential of the child that is always there but has been difficult to perceive because it is shadowed by the child's inability to function in an environment that is full of obstacles. Imagine a seed sown in a rocky place without

proper sunlight. The seed may sprout and take its root in a zig-zag terrain, and somehow it may manage to appear out of the rocks to get a glimpse of the sunlight but it will not bear the fruit or the flower that it contains within itself. If it does bear the fruit, it will be of a much inferior or a twisted quality. For a would-be teacher, it is impractical to proceed on pure faith. For a new teacher to proceed on pure faith, there lies a rocky road ahead to

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realize the fruit of her labor. The teacher generally tumbles down on this rocky and shaky venture. Even if she is strong enough to hold on to pure faith, she may seem to succeed in a mirage that is neither real nor true. Maybe we too are groping in that mirage or are paddling in shallow waters. With some luck and some intuition we are content with the partial results of our labor here and there. Are we following the framework of our training courses which is safe and convenient for our protection rather than having the courage to question or to investigate our shortcomings? Observation has occupied a peripheral position in our training courses. In spite of its uniqueness and importance for our own growth and that of protecting the child's rights to be what he is born to be, we have not been able to give it proper time and consideration. We are so intertwined in curriculum and perhaps overly dependent on the material that we exhaust our time and energy losing sight of the legacy that we have inherited from Dr. Montessori: "To follow the child, to know him, to understand him and to provide him with an environment devoid of obstacles."

The basic premise is to follow the child to know him. Many a time our new teachers, armed and loaded with the material, are so bewildered and lost that they are left with no choice but to impose this material mechanically on the children. Instead, we must give

them sufficient time with children to observe them and to know them. Luckily and/or incidentally or even accidentally, some children, like a seed depending upon the soil and the environment (which extends from the conception to the home, to the community, to the school), do flower anyway. However, the flower may not be as profound in shape and size as it ought to be.

Any change is difficult to assimilate or to accept. Even when it is accepted it produces results only through a very tedious process requiring patience, perseverance and persistence. To do justice to children in the world geared to the rights of adults is almost an impossible task. But as we have persisted and claimed to be the soldiers for the protection of children, as Mario Montessori used to call us, let us give a serious consideration to the essential task of observation. Our purpose as I perceive it, especially in our limited setting, could be at least twofold:

1. To provide more time to trainees to observe spontaneous behavior of children at different levels of development within the Montessori classroom and also outside the Montessori environment.
2. To provide the time and the opportunity to the trainees to assimilate and to comprehend the process of non-intervention and at the same time not to abandon the child to the vagaries of behavior.

To understand the inner needs of the child, the trainees must study them by direct observation of the child in his/her natural surroundings long before the child enters the school at the age of three. The spontaneous behavior of the child at this early stage of development reflects the functioning of the inner conscious urge. After three years, the responses of the child are more or less intertwined with the conscious and unconscious urges. By observing the child under the age of three, i.e., before the intervention of conscious functioning, the trainees will obtain a clear idea of the transition from the unconscious urge to the conscious act.

For the teacher to understand how the child's psyche urges him to respond to the environment, observation is crucial. Observation provides the trainee with a better knowledge of the child's inner

needs and prepares him/her better to be of help in the natural spontaneous development and growth of the children that are entrusted to him/her. It is not merely essential to observe children from birth to three years in their natural surroundings but in different environments as well.

The art of observation is not an easy task. It is acquired through practice combined with lots of patience until it becomes second nature to one. One can observe the children anywhere one sees them. I have watched children in odd places even without being aware of the fact that I am watching them until something unusual happens and I jump to respond. Recently, at the airport I noticed two passengers reading a book. Suddenly, I noticed another observing person jumped up and caught a toy car that might have hurt a child in a stroller a number of feet across from where she was sitting. A child of about three years was playing with a couple of toys and suddenly decided to throw them around. There was another passenger's child in the stroller sucking on a milk bottle. The mother was relaxing with a book. If the individual had not caught this toy car, the child would have been hurt. The mother was reading, so was the individual. The mother was so oblivious to the other child playing with toys that she was startled to see someone catching a flying toy in the nick of time and save her child from being hurt. One mother was very apologetic and the other very thankful. For the experienced observer it was an unconscious and spontaneous response but a very crucial response for all concerned. The stranger was really involved in the book but was simultaneously aware of the two children and their actions.

So far our emphasis on observation of the child in the Montessori class has been to focus on concentration, obedience, normalization, imagination, social behavior, moral behavior, etc. These are the essential clues that indicate when the development of the child occurs. However, what the trainees also need to keep in mind is what leads to concentration, normalization, etc. The goal of observation is two-fold: to understand the needs of the children and, secondly, to understand how to remove obstacles. It is this type of preparation that will equip the teacher to be a source of help in removing the obstacles that the children face in their growth and development. This will help save the teacher from disappointments leading to

disbelief or being caught in the trap of old techniques of teaching rather than directing the children in their development.

In order to do justice to the path Dr. Montessori led us onto, *we have to rely on the process of our continuous, repeated and objective observations and continually re-evaluate our interpretations of our application.* Mr. Joosten rightly emphasised that:

We must also learn to direct our observations so that merely sensorial looking becomes mentally alert, intelligent observing ... We have to reach a level where our observation does not exclude our direct activity with and for the children, but accompanies it constantly, guiding it continuously, like the beating of the heart. (A.M. Joosten 'Observation', *Communications*, No. 4, 1971.)

In the same article Mr. Joosten describes observation as:

The source of the vital and developmental power of Dr. Montessori's work that animates the love which flows through it. This must do for us also if our work is to preserve its vital and artistic character, if we are to avoid the danger of slow, often unconscious degeneration and mechanical imitation.

As a human species, we all are endowed with the power of observation, but we do not cultivate that art and power of observation. In our civilized and mechanical age we all are spoon-fed with everything ready-made. I believe that soon we will be fed mechanically and we may not even have the much appreciated pleasure of making our own cup of tea. The preparation of good tea is an art which has already vanished. Today, we dunk the tea bag in water and drink a colored water rather than the real tea that has its own delicate taste.

To train the trainees to recapture the art of observation, the following technique and practice has proved to be of great asset:

1. To remember that the art of observation is a continuing and an ongoing process. It starts from the time of training and continues throughout one's lifetime.
2. Before the trainees attempt to observe others, they must observe their own growing process, reflect and

write their own childhood experiences and that of their siblings and recollect their earlier memories and their reactions to their environment inclusive of their parents. This will help them to analyze their own preferences and resentments to the work they are embarking on.

3. To give the trainees different and graded games on observation techniques, such as:
 - a) Cover a few objects with a piece of cloth, open it for a couple of minutes and see how many they can remember.
 - b) Increase the number of objects as they progress.
 - c) Decrease the time the objects are disclosed.
 - d) Put the objects that are associated in groups, e.g., needle, thread and scissors; paint, brush and paper; safety pin, button and hook; etc.
 - e) Put the objects in (d) above without grouping them.
 - f) These games have a tremendous variety and innumerable variations for sharpening the visual periphery of perception. The more they practise, the sharper their perception becomes. Therefore, it is advisable that the trainees develop such an interest in the games that, during the free time, they continue to play. Later on when they, as teachers, are in charge of 30 children or so with a variety of activities going on, they will be able to focus their attention on the ongoing activities in the class.
4. Group the trainees in small groups and ask one group to observe another group. Each member of the group records the observation individually. Let the group

being observed record their own activity and their own behavior. Let them then share objectively their own perception of themselves and the way others observe them

5. To observe and record the director of training carrying out activities with the Montessori material and then discuss in the group what was perceived.
6. To observe children between the age of 0-5 years in their own surroundings, i.e., at home, in the park, in the shopping center, etc. (We achieved this in our community by giving each trainee a letter of introduction to the parents explaining our objectives. We also announced in the local newspaper and requested the co-operation of parents.)
7. Time was provided when the trainees could share their observations with the director of training present, to work as a catalyst as and when necessary, to have a meaningful and professional understanding of perceptual differences.
8. While these activities are in progress, the rest of the training in other areas is simultaneously in progress. After sufficient groundwork is laid down, the trainees are now well equipped to proceed for further observation in the field, i.e.:
 - a) Nursery schools
 - b) KG and Grade 1
 - c) Montessori school

At continuous intervals, time is provided for trainees to exchange their observation under the direction of the trainer. This provides the opportunity to compare and interpret different recordings of the same observation. This helps to sort out the objective aspects from the subjective aspects. Besides, the difference in previous knowledge and experience of the individuals in the group enhances the devel-

opment of the group as a whole, as well as that of each individual in the group. (Caution is taken to discuss the observations without naming the individuals involved.)

All these experiences help the individuals to acquire the art and professionalism in the process of observation. Further, the trainer accompanies these visits intermittently to help in assessing the process of developing the art and objectivity of observation.

After the general observational experience in all the above three settings, the trainees are now required to concentrate only on Montessori classrooms. At this stage they are required to concentrate only on one of the following aspects of the Montessori class but not be oblivious to the functioning of the class as a whole. Having been exposed to all the above experiences enables the individual to observe meaningfully. All the above is just a preparation for observation that follows, which is systematic and classified. These periods of observation now can be classified in the following categories that follow with emphasis only on one aspect at a time but the awareness of the total class continues.

As a director of the class, one has to acquire this ability of being aware of the whole class to be really effective in following each child according to his/her needs.

The different aspects to be observed are:

1. observing a child
2. observing a small group of children
3. observing a teacher
4. observing an assistant or an aid
5. observing an environment
6. observing a specific piece of material

This is not an exhaustive list. It can be enlarged according to the size of the class and other variables involved.

OBSERVING A CHILD

Child's spontaneity to select and persist in completing an activity: how does one overcome the hurdle? Does he/she give up easily? Can he/she wait for assistance from the directress? Does he/she seek help from another child? What follows when he/she completes a task successfully or when he/she cannot proceed? Does he/she repeat the activity? Is repetition meaningful or just busy work to avoid the responsibility of doing any other meaningful activity? What is the difficulty that he/she is facing in doing this task? Can you think of a possible solution if you are responsible for the class? (This is a good time to be aware of the analysis of difficulty that most of the children face in their development.) What is the level of his/her persistence and/or concentration in spite of the distractions in the environment? Does he/she continue when distracted or interrupted in the environment? What is the consistency level of the child in pursuing one task after another? What are his/her reactions to a meaningful activity, such as expression of joy, state of serenity or manifestation of love? When does he/she operate on a high level of energy and when at a low level? Does he/she have a particular pattern of activity, such as from activity to no activity and spontaneously back to another activity, or is he/she being coaxed to continue to work? If so, how does the child react? Is he/she generally orderly or disorderly? Does he/she take interest in the development of his/her companions? Is he/she a leader or a follower? Does he/she show interest or admiration for the work of others? (This is just a partial list of the different aspects of the child's behavior that can be observed. At this stage one is merely looking at what the child is doing not why the child is doing what he is doing. There is special time provided later to analyze why the children

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behave the way they do. Specific situations are also clarified for better understanding.)

OBSERVING A GROUP OF CHILDREN

After having some experience and being able to concentrate on an individual child, the trainee now should proceed to observe a group of children especially those that are usually interacting with and around the first child observed. The trainee may first go from one child to two children and then concentrate on a small group of children. Later on she may increase her periphery according to the individual ability and proceed till one can observe the whole class in detail with some facility. Besides observing the above aspects as in the case of one child, there will be special attention diverted to the details of the interaction between the children as well as with the teacher and vice versa.

OBSERVATION OF THE TEACHER

While observing the individual child as well as the group of children, the teacher was inevitably there in the peripheral observation all the time, but now the concentration is fully focused on the teacher. The aspects of observation now specifically include her movements in the classroom, her general tone of voice, and her facility in presentations. Is the tone of voice normally soft or unusually soft that it is quite unnatural or does she direct from one corner to another? Does the teacher accept the low level of activity or inactivity patiently and let the children find their own rhythm of activity? Or does she get restless and collect the children, or frequently ring the bell to get them to work? Is she always happy to meet the challenges put forth by the children or is she irritated or desperate when a child cannot do a task as it should be done? How does she approach the children who are not meaningfully occupied? Does she start the presentation from the beginning or does she analyze the hurdle the child is facing and show the child how to cross the hurdle, or does she solve the hurdle herself or does she abandon the child, day-dreaming indefinitely? Is she flitting like a butterfly from child to child to help them or does she glide smoothly to wherever she is needed? What is her body language? Does she sit down patiently to observe what is going on and then answer the call of need or does she sit glued to the chair instead of

at a desk and expect wonders to take place? Does the teacher mostly work with the individual child, or with a small group or the whole class? It is very essential for the trainee to absorb all these aspects of adult behavior so that when she is in charge of the class she can be conscious of her own behavior and act according to the best of her ability. Caution must be taken that this analytical observation is not done to criticize or to put down the teacher but to comprehend what behavior is essential if you are to meet the needs of children and help them in their process of development.

OBSERVATION OF AN ASSISTANT OR AN AID

An assistant or an aid in the classroom is an essential part of the living and acting part of the environment. Generally, the assistant is not a trained individual and is not supposed to be a teaching assistant but she is an acting human being and an essential part of the environment. It is essential to note her attitude, her interaction to her work and to the environment and his/her role in the class. Is she actually working with the children or is she generally in the background? Is the aid made responsible for the total discipline of the class while the teacher is totally engrossed with an individual child and oblivious to the rest of the class? In what area of the classroom is she more active? Is she limited only to the practical life area, the most important area of a Montessori class that really helps the process of normalization? Is this area totally ignored by the teacher? Is the assistant really struggling to keep the children and herself with the household chores, as a maid? Or is she functioning as a teaching assistant? Or is she only responsible for the upkeep of the prepared environment? Does she replace the broken or soiled material as and when necessary? Or does she wait till the end of the day? Does she keep the supplies ready at hand? Do the children have to line up for the paper to be cut for drawing insets? Does she introduce the new material or only represent the material? Is she respected as the teacher? (Sometimes the role of the assistant is the most demanding role and at times even confusing for her to be or not to be!)

OBSERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Observation of the environment needs essential attention. What is the physical layout of the environment? Does it allow free move-

ment of the children? Is the environment aesthetically pleasant? How are the different sections of the environment organized? These are some of the basic aspects of the classrooms but the physical size and shape of the classrooms vary indefinitely. It is, therefore, essential that the trainees have the opportunity to observe a varied number of classrooms and be aware of what makes an arrangement of the classroom within a set of circumstances more practically workable for the children to have the freedom to move around and carry out their activities smoothly.

Is the environment attractive and alive with plants, flower pots, pets, etc.? Do the children take care of the plants and pets? Are the pets and the plants there only for the decoration rather than part of the activities in the classroom?

Is the outdoor environment an extension of the indoor environment, where the children can carry out their activities freely? Or is the outdoor environment only as an outlet for the repressed energy in the classroom? Is the outdoor environment attractive as well as peaceful—surrounded with flowers, plants, bushes and trees or only equipped with jungle gym, swings and seesaw, etc.? Do the children have their own area where they can dig, sow and plant their own vegetables and flowers? Or is the outdoor area maintained by a gardener for the attraction of the adults? Are the children allowed to take care of their own gardening area? Does the teacher prepare the outdoor area and encourage individual participation so that the children learn to enjoy and respect the whole environment?

Another aspect of the environment is to see how the environment is maintained when the class is in session, for instance, when a child leaves handwashing material in disarray (wet soap in a basin with water) or some of the cubes of the pink tower on the floor or a large one on top of the small one, or number rods not in sequence? Is it all left alone for the rest of the day to respect the work of the child? Is the child forced to put it in proper order in spite of his/her outbursts of refusal? Does the teacher rearrange it without a fuss to set the example for the child to follow suit happily and, therefore, comprehend how the material is expected to be left in the classroom for other children to function without an obstacle?



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Or do the other children help and put the things in order? Are all the dirty linens, etc. replaced when necessary or at the end of the day? Are the supplies, like paper, pencils, wash-cloths and sponges available conveniently or does the activity stop till the replacement of articles can be fetched? Do the children replace the supplies? Are music, art and physical exercise activities part of the prepared environment? Or does an outsider come in and interject half an hour's program to fulfill these needs? Is the chipped material repaired and/or replaced frequently or left in that condition for the rest of the year or forever?

Another aspect to concentrate on is the material used. What material is used, how frequently, and at what age? When is a particular piece of material totally ignored, etc.? Are the exploration exercises with the material allowed to comprehend the various aspects of the material and to enhance the creativity and imagination of the children?

All the possibilities of concentration on varied aspects of observation have not been exhausted. The possibilities evolve as the ability to observe enhances and the interest in looking for further details increases, that is when the fire is lit and the trainee, who now becomes a teacher, does not stop the observation but continues the search for knowledge and how to improve it. Observation becomes a tool for acquiring further knowledge rather than merely a requirement to be fulfilled.

No specific time for each aspect of the observation has been provided intentionally since the number of students and the experience of the students varies from year to year. The trainees bring their own richness of experience or lack of it. The children available for observation in the vicinity also varies from year to year. Therefore, depending on the needs of the trainees and other practical considerations, the timing has to be flexible for each aspect.

Another point taken into consideration is to put two trainees together at a particular observation. To enhance their understanding, it is required of them to write their independent observations and then share their recorded observations with each other. Also, the director of training has to be prepared not only to have the ability to follow the child but also to follow each trainee in her development, to be able to direct each one individually and let each one find their own limitations, their own assets and their own solutions. This was practically achieved as the trainees were involved half of the day either in observation or in practice teaching. Practice teaching generally followed after sufficient observation but then they were handled intermittently as the need and growth of the individual dictated. (L.A. Kripalani, 'A Continuing Exploration in Montessori Teacher Training', *NAMTA Quarterly*, Summer, 1981.) The teacher, however, must also keep in mind the "Guide for Psychological Observation" written by Dr. Maria Montessori (*The Advanced Montessori Method, Volume 1*, chapter 3.) Here the emphasis has been to help the trainees to develop the art of observation and comprehend the importance of continuous observation in order to know the children and their needs.

Dr. Montessori used to say that the children we know are mentally starved and psychically unhealthy. It is then essential to acquire

the ability through analytical observation to appreciate the laws of development and to know the mental starvation and the psychic health of the children. "Development has laws of its own. If these are respected and if respect does not start too late, the child will be normalised and reveal the true nature of man." (Dr. Montessori, *Communications*, No. 3/4, 1984.)

By this she means that through observation we will understand the child and learn to respect the child and his needs and acquire the ability to prepare the right environment for the right age, where the child can function independently and enjoy the freedom with a sense of security and self-confidence.

Let us then remember that we will aspire to respect the laws of development only when we understand them. We will understand these laws only when we understand the needs of the child. We will understand the needs of the child only when we observe the child and his environment with a clinical eye and the warmth of our hearts in the service of the child.

