

# All About the Atrium CGSUSA Parent Newsletter

## Observation as a Tool for Parenting

Observation has played a vital role in the development of both Montessori education and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. It was Maria Montessori's careful observations of children that enabled her to discover the true nature of children, or as she put it, "the secret of childhood." Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi carefully observed how children used materials and revisited themes that had been presented in the atrium. If children returned to things again and again, and if the work elicited a sense of joy from the children then



those were themes and materials that were retained. The importance of observation continues in the atrium today as it is the catechist's role to follow and serve the child, and the only way to do that effectively is through the art of observation. Observation can also

serve parents as they seek to help their children grow in life giving ways. Here we will explore what observation is and offer some ideas for parents to utilize it to assist them in the task of parenting.

### Skills Needed for Observation

On the surface observation sounds simple; watch what the child is doing. However observation is a skill that is difficult to teach someone else to do, and a person's skill in observing grows through experiences of observation. Observation requires a certain discipline as adults. We need to approach it with a sense of humility and patience if we are to truly observe. Humility is required, as the observer needs to be empty of preconceptions and agendas. Patience is essential as children work in a much slower pace than adults. Often when an adult engages in the practice of observing children, and she notices a child struggling with something, the adult is very tempted to abandon the observation and jump in to assist the child. In ignoring the urge to assist the child, it is often found that the child eventually succeeds without adult assistance.

In observing children, it is helpful to watch for the things that catch their attention and engage them. Often those are the things that are emerging in the child to help him develop a new skill.

If we consider the role of parenting as serving children in a manner that allows them to grow and develop to their full potential, then observation is a practice that will assist parents in that work.



*Mother and son working together on the white garment.*

### **How to Observe Your Child**

Take some time and just watch your children for at least 20 minutes or so and write down what you see. Another option would be at the end of the day spend some time recalling and writing down the things that caught your child's attention or engaged your child that day. Try to be objective. Here are some sample observations from one mother's notes from observing her 3 yr. old: "Today J.J. was noticing temperature differences on the grab bar in the public restroom. The part that was over the heater he labeled as 'hot' and the other section as 'cold.' He took a large scooter venture at the park. He often tries to count things. Today he tried counting the rivets on the bus seat."

By taking time to observe their children parents can identify emerging interests and skills, and then make choices to shape their time and environment that allows their children to continue to grow in that interest or skill. In the sample above the mother noticing her child's interest in hot and cold, might look for more opportunities to allow him to continue to explore temperature. Perhaps in the bath, or maybe inviting him to feel the pavement in sunny and shady spots on a walk. The practice of observation can help parents serve their child's development.

### **Prayer for the Child**

In a sense observation is a spiritual practice because you are placing yourself before the mystery of the child who God chose to be a part of your family. In your practice of observation see what is revealed to you about the mystery of the child or children in your family.

Below is a prayer based on a prayer of Maria Montessori from her book *The Absorbent Mind* that you might consider using as you engage in the process of observing your child.

*Help me, O God, to enter into the secret of \_\_\_\_\_ (insert child's name), so that I may know love and serve - \_\_\_\_\_ (insert child's name) in accordance with your laws of justice and following your holy will.*