



## When is it Important to Ignore *Wrong* Answers?

***“Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought.”*** Albert Szent-Gyorgyi, author of [The Scientist Speculates](#)

In our high tech society the ability to research is vital to success. Yet many schools never teach it and even when they do, they usually overlook the simplest and most primary undercut: something a child *must* be able to do before he can research. What is it? He needs to be able to observe (see, view) what is in front of him.

The way to teach observation is to allow the child to *observe things for himself*. To accomplish this goal, we must be willing to *ignore his wrong answers*. Don't take this to mean you are supposed to give or leave children with misconceptions. This is not what is being talked about. It should not be confused with reading where we teach children that words have precise definitions. It should not be confused with math where we teach that problems often have precise answers. Nor should it be confused with spelling where we teach that letters are written in a particular order that allows readers to duplicate what is being written.

Rather, what is being addressed here is a child's unique ability to see what he sees. It goes like this: we ask a child to tell us what he or she perceives (sees, views, observes) at a given moment. And the only "right" (correct, true) answer is exactly and precisely *what the child perceives*.

The concept is so elementary, it is often *too* basic and therefore, overlooked. By comparing it to how a baby discovers the world, however, it comes to light. Here is an example: when my grandson Corbin was about 18 months old, like most babies, he loved the game of "hide-and-seek." He would hide his head under a blanket and since he couldn't see me, he assumed I couldn't see him. I would go along with his idea and search and search for him all the while asking, "*Oh where oh where is Corbin hiding?*" When I finally raised the blanket and said "*I found you,*" he would squeal in delight. Within a number of weeks, he discovered on his own (without anyone saying anything to him) to hide his whole body.

It is easy to enhance the art of discovery: if your child says the spider he is looking at has four legs and one eye, merely *thank him for telling you*. Don't try to correct his observation. He will soon discover an additional eye and legs on his own, *if* he is given the opportunity.

When we tell a child, "*No, no, no, it's not like that, it's like this,*" "*It's crooked, it's not straight,*" "*It is navy blue, not black,*" "*You're wrong on this account and you're wrong on that account,*" we end up with a child who stops looking at things for himself.

We must be willing to ignore a young child's inaccuracy of observation and let *him* straighten it out. When we encourage children to observe for themselves we allow them to experience the *magic of discovery*.



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