

# OBSERVING AND RECORDING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

## Why observe children?

Observing children provides teachers opportunities to learn about young children's needs, interests, skills, and learning styles. Teachers use observational notes to reflect on what is working in learning centers, what skills can be scaffolded with more challenging material, and what sparks children's enthusiasm for learning.

Observing children in their natural environment will provide the best objective notes about their developmental stages. For example, a child digging for buried letters in a sand table can give the teacher insight into the child's letter identification, fine motor and, if there is a peer at the table, social skill development.

## How do I record children's development?

- Be sure to date all observations for monitoring progress. Plan to observe children at various times of day.
- Record exactly what is observed to remain objective. Write as many details as possible.
- Develop a system for taking observational notes, filing them, and retrieving them.

Recording Technique	What is it?
Anecdotal Notes	Short statements of what children are doing. The note contains the date and time of the observation, setting, observers initials, and objectively describes the child's actions. Direct quotes are used. Anecdotal notes have a beginning, middle and an end.
Running Records	Documentation of children's actions and conversations over a specified time period of typically at least ten minutes. Everything the child does or says is recorded. The teacher analyzes running records for the child's developmental progress in the domains.
Checklists	Designed to record if children are able to complete a particular skill. For example, a teacher may plan a small group activity to see who can cut on a straight line and may check whether or not children are able to successfully complete the task.
Time/Event Sampling	Documentation of a child's developmental information for a period of time. For example, this can be used to observe a child's behavioral interactions with peers during circle time. Samplings usually occur for 10-15 minutes at a time over a period of 2-4 weeks. Observers can then look for patterns of behavior while analyzing notes.
Frequency and Duration Counts	Record of the number of times a child exhibits a particular behavior in the classroom and how long that behaviors lasts. This type of tool assists the teacher in determining how often and how long a behavior is occurring and to make a plan of action.
Use of Technology	Audio recordings, photographs, and videos are useful tools for documenting children's progress. When using these methods, ensure that the appropriate permission is secure for the use of technology tools.
Family Questionnaires	Keep the questionnaire brief and only ask for information that may be valuable to you in understanding children's progress. This tool can help you design a survey that meets your needs: <a href="https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/harvard-education-surveys/">https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/harvard-education-surveys/</a>
Portfolios	Collection of items such as work samples, photographs, rubrics, and developmental checklists, compiled throughout the year. A portfolio will illustrate the learning progression that has happened throughout the year.

## Other Resources

- ◆ *The Developing Child: Observation Guidebook* by McGraw-Hill Companies  
[http://glencoe.mheducation.com/sites/dl/free/0078883601/680442/DC\\_ObsGuideBook.pdf](http://glencoe.mheducation.com/sites/dl/free/0078883601/680442/DC_ObsGuideBook.pdf)
- ◆ *Kidwatching: Documenting Children's Literacy Development* by Gretchen Owocki and Yetta Goodman
- ◆ *The Power of Observation: Birth to Age 8* by Judy R. Jablon, Amy Laura Dombro, and Margo L. Dichtelmiller

## Sources

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- Marotz, L.R. & Allen, K.E.. (2013). *Developmental profiles: Pre-birth through adolescence*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Cengage Learning.
- Owocki, G. & Goodman, Y. (2002). *Kidwatching: Documenting children's literacy development*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.