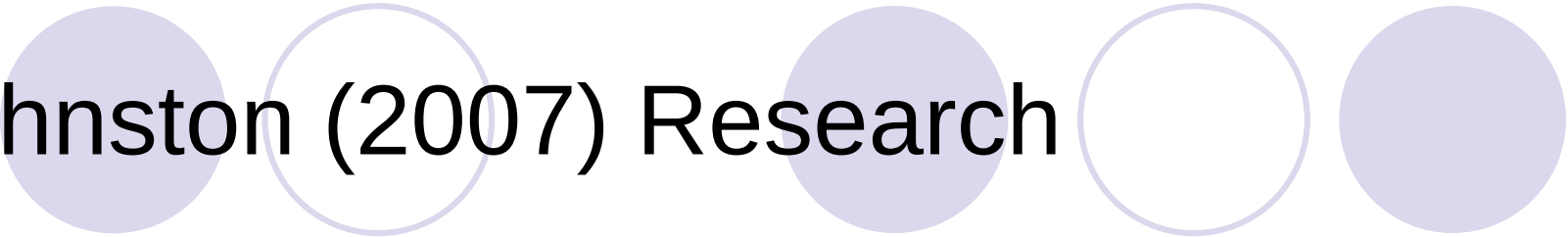




Child Development

Definitions of Child Observations

Johnston (2007) Research



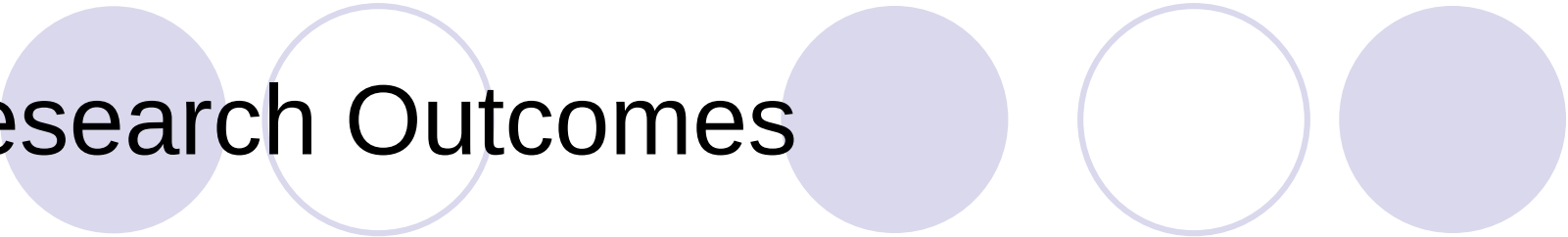
- Study involved 43 students in the first year of undergraduate studies on a BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies course and took place during a teaching session.
- It attempted to find out what student practitioners understand the skill of observation to be, and involved each student writing an individual definition of observation.

Research Outcomes

- 27 students mentioned watching and looking in their definitions of observation, such as:

‘looking at the things someone does and watching what has happened or is happening’

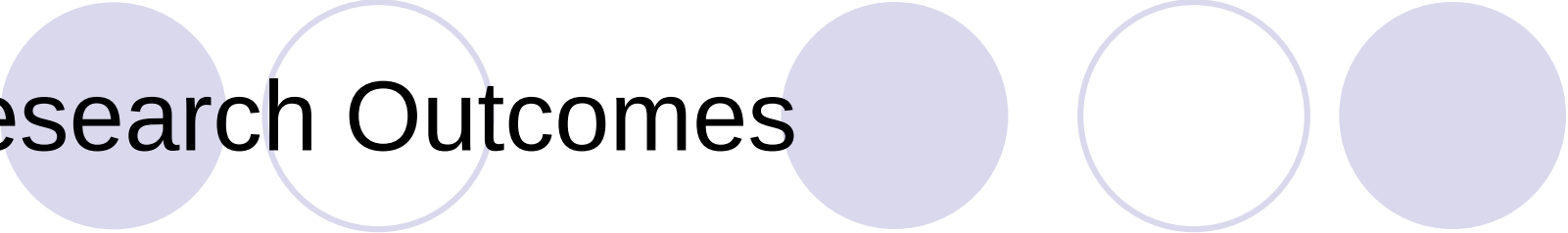
Research Outcomes



Of those 27 students:

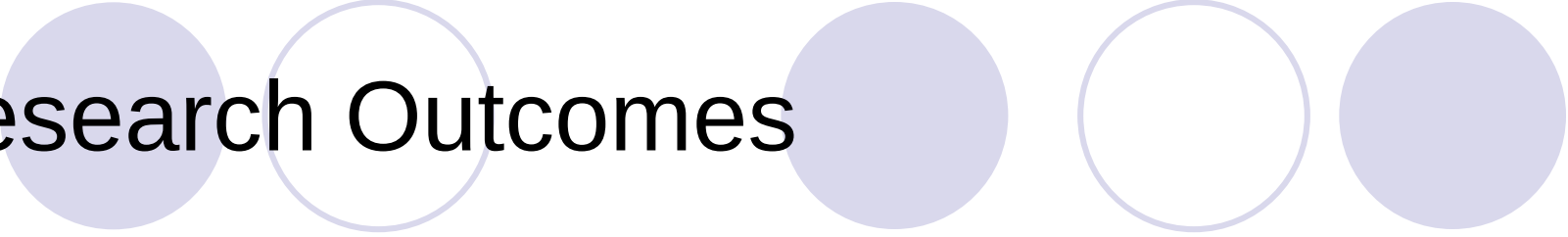
- 6 identified looking in depth
- 4 mentioned looking to learn from or find out
- 2 stated that looking involved deduction, hypothesis and explanation
- 1 mentioned gathering words and actions
- 1 mentioned absorbing information

Research Outcomes



- Observation was a skill identified by 5 students
- 9 identified analysis
- 8 identified recording
- 1 mentioned questioning

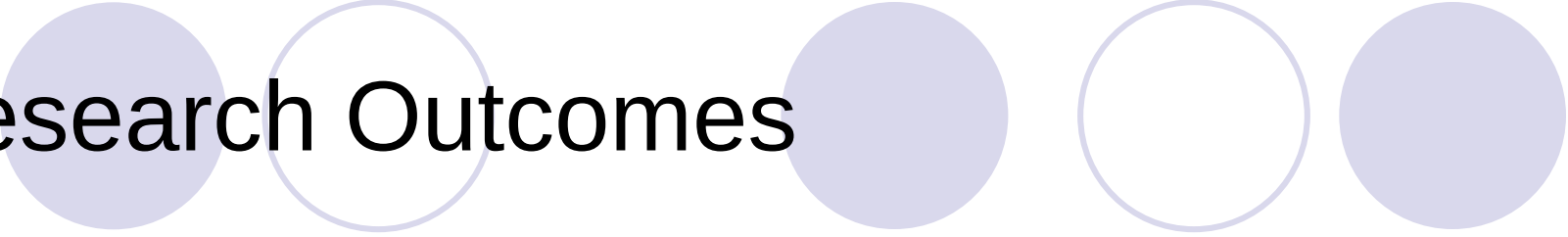
Research Outcomes



Comments included:

- *‘The ability to analyse surroundings and take in every detail, resulting in the ability to describe whatever it may be later’.*
- *‘This is when you watch/look at somebody and something and record what you have seen or just take in mentally what has been observed.’*
- However, mention of these skills appeared to consider the skill of the observer rather than the observed.

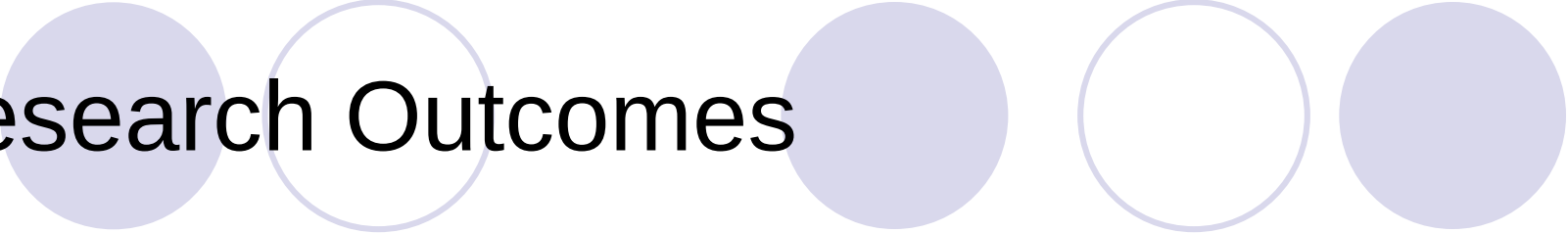
Research Outcomes



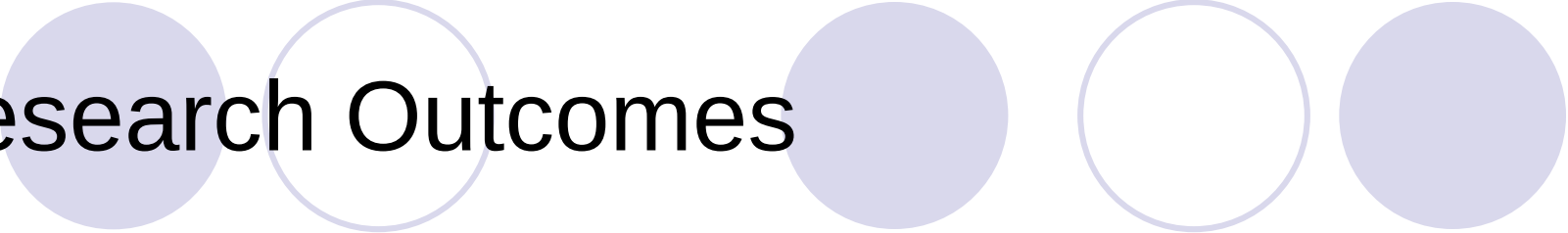
Interestingly 18 people mentioned people or children in their definition:

- *An observation is when someone observes children or adults as an individual or in groups. An observation is carried out in order to find out more information, which will be important. Observations are usually recorded.*
- *This is a way in which we can watch people in their environment and analyse their abilities.*

Research Outcomes



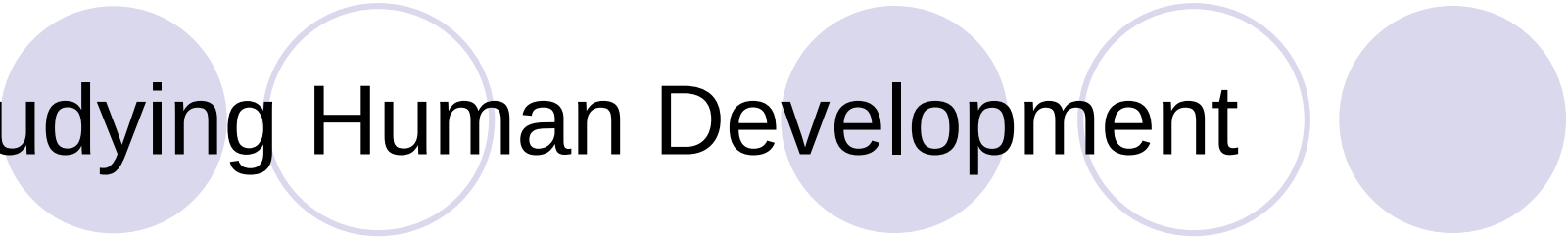
- Further, it appears that students have been influenced by their immediate studies, which have involved observations of children in settings (schools, nurseries and playgroups).
- Other characteristics of observations suggested by 3 students were listening, and using all the senses by one student.
- *To watch and to learn from something that can be seen. Observations can use all five senses (touch, taste, smell, hear, see) and can include practical or theory activities.*



Research Outcomes

- Only 2 students considered observation in the environment and no student considered observations as a scientific skill.

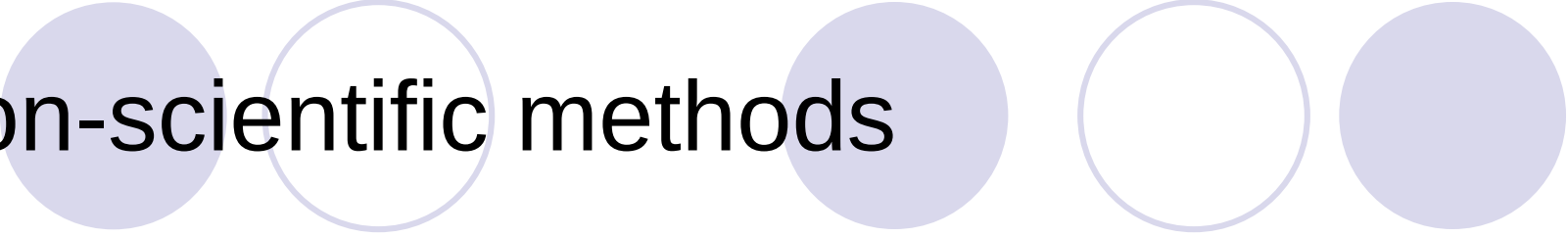
(Johnston, 2007 cited in Jonhston & Nahmad-Williams, 2009:82-83)



Studying Human Development

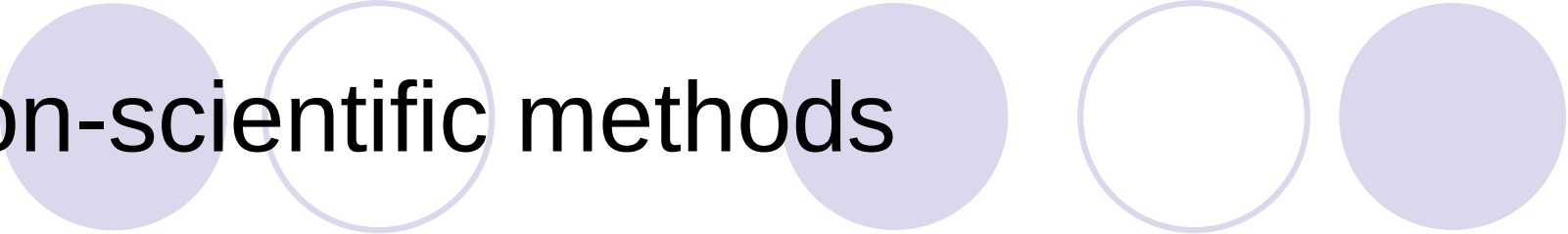
- Mostly about the study of change.
- In order to understand it we need to study the changes children undergo, from the womb, through the post-natal period and continuing through childhood.
- The study of change can be and should be scientific.
- Some research methods used to study child development are experimental, but these are not always relevant.

Non-scientific methods



- Parents, teachers and practitioners working with children are not experimenters with children.
- They will be more familiar with observing children directly to facilitate understanding of their progress.
- These observations tend to be naturalistic rather than experimental but may still be regarded as scientific.

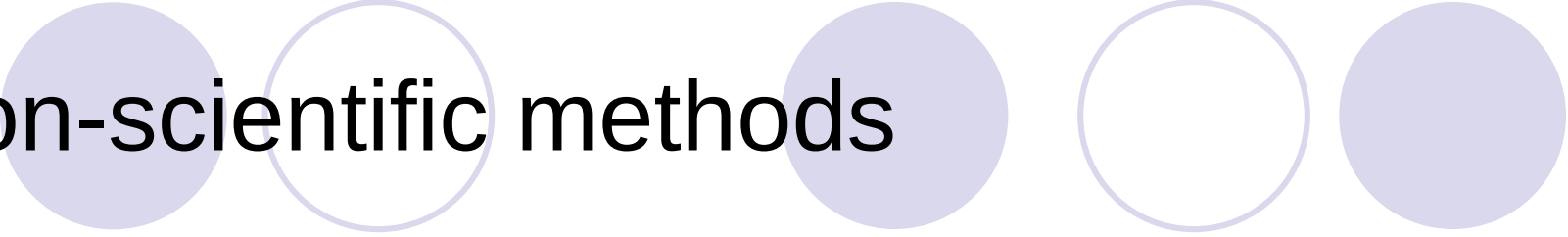
(Doherty & Hughes, 2009:4-5)



Non-scientific methods

- Many researchers and practitioners observe children's behaviour in everyday environments.
- A range of methods may be used.
- The tools and skills needed to undertake these observations are similar to those used in laboratory conditions.

Non-scientific methods



- Naturalistic observation of children can provide a wealth of data and may identify many aspects of a child's behaviour.
- A potential difficulty of naturalistic observation however, is the presence of the observer and their effect upon the behaviour of the child.

(Doherty & Hughes, 2009:76)

References

- Doherty , J & Hughes, M (2009) *Child Development: Theory and Practice 0-11*, Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Johnston, J & Nahmad-Williams, L (2009) *Early Childhood Studies*, Harlow: Pearson Education Ltd.