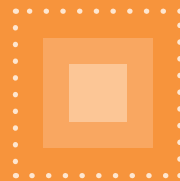


Observational techniques



A step-by-step guide: presenting and experimenting with observational techniques

At the end of this chapter you will be able to:

- **Identify aims and objectives**
- **Record detailed observations**
- **Relate your findings to work practice**
- **Record your observations in a variety of ways**
- **Recognise the strengths and weaknesses of each method**

Using the written/narrative style as an example

In the first chapter we outlined some of the usual ways in which observations can be recorded. Now it is your turn to try out the skill. We will begin by looking in detail at how to organise and present an observation using the written/narrative format. To help you through the stages that will follow, we have started with an example of how a completed observation will look, with explanation for the headings used. The headings in bold type will actually always remain the same, whichever format you use. An explanation of the heading is given in *italic type*.



Observation

Observation 1

It is important to number the observations so that you can refer to a particular example if you want to use it as evidence.

Date 18.02.2014

There are two reasons for recording the date: (1) you may wish to repeat an observation at a later date in order to compare a child's ability with their previous performance; and (2) it will enable you to work out the exact age of the child so that you can evaluate your results against the expected developmental stage.

Time commenced 10.20a.m.

Time completed 10.30a.m.

This allows you to comment more easily on the length of time a child spent on an activity.

Number of adults 1

Number of children 4

Although you may have decided to observe one child, it is useful to record the number of children in the group, as this may have an influence on the behaviour.

Name of child Nina

It is only necessary to record the first name so that the record remains confidential if you are using the observation for study purposes.

Age 3 years 10 months
(46 months)

You will need to know the child's date of birth to work this out. It is important to record the exact age in years and months (or just in months), in order to make a fair comparison with developmental stages.

Setting The junk-modelling table in the creative area of a nursery school. The children have a free choice of materials, but a childcare practitioner is available to offer advice if required.

It is not necessary to identify the place by name (in order to maintain confidentiality), but it is useful to record the general background to the observation. It is also important to record if an adult is involved, as this is likely to affect the way the children behave.

Aim To observe a child who is nearly 4 years old during a junk-modelling session, in order to identify fine manipulative skills and problem-solving ability.

The aim of an observation should set out the broad areas of development that you wish to find out.

Objectives To observe and record Nina's ability to use scissors and glue spreader. To observe and record Nina's ability to plan her model and work out how to make it.

The objective should identify the specific abilities that you wish to observe.

Record of observation

Nina puts on an apron and approaches the table. She picks up a circular box and turns it over in her hands then puts it back down. She walks round to the other side of the table and selects a larger cereal packet then returns to her original place. She looks at the child care practitioner and smiles. "What are you going to make?" asks the child care practitioner. Nina looks at the display on the wall and says "A rocket".

She picks up some silver foil and carefully tears it in half. With a well-developed pincer grasp she picks up a glue spreader and dips it into the pot of glue. Some of the glue drips onto the newspaper covering the table as Nina carries the spreader over to the box. The child care practitioner moves the glue pot closer to Nina. Nina tips the glue off her spreader onto the box and smears it over half of one side, then she leans over and puts some more glue onto the spreader and places it on the box. Concentrating very hard, she uses the spreader to cover the whole side. She smiles as she continues to make patterns in the glue.

"Are you going to stick your silver paper on?" asks the child care practitioner. Nina picks up a piece of the silver paper with her left hand and leans over to put some more glue on the spreader. She holds the paper in the palm of her hand and covers it with glue.

"I think you have enough glue now", says the child care practitioner. Nina places the piece of glue-covered silver paper onto the box. Her fingers stick to the paper, which lifts off as she attempts to fix it to the box. She looks across at the child care practitioner, who comes over to assist. "I think you can put the other piece of paper on without any more glue." Nina selects a cardboard tube instead. She pushes it against the box and holds it in position for a few moments. When she moves her hand, the tube falls off. She picks up the spreader and puts some glue around the end then pushes it down on the box again. As she lets go, it falls over.

The child care practitioner picks up another piece of cardboard tube. "Shall I show you how to fix it?" Nina nods and watches as the child care practitioner makes a cut about two centimetres long down the side. "Can you make some more cuts around the edge?"

The child care practitioner hands the scissors to Nina. She manages to put her fingers in them correctly and, holding the tube close to her body, she makes a short cut. She pulls the scissors out and attempts a second incision. The scissors come together at an angle but do not cut. Nina begins to look anxious. The child care practitioner comes round the table and puts her hand over the scissors to guide them. Together they make several more cuts. The child care practitioner shows Nina how to bend the card back to make a bigger area to glue. "Now you can stick it to your rocket." Nina spreads some glue onto the box and then puts the tube in place. She moves her hand and smiles when it stays in position.

"Do you want to add any more?" asks the child care practitioner. Nina looks at the model and says "No". "Shall we put your rocket somewhere safe to dry?" Nina nods then goes off to wash her hands.



The record should be written as it happens whenever possible. You should record everything the child does.

The conclusion should summarise what you observed and match it to what you hoped to find out – your objectives.

Conclusion

Nina decided what she wanted to make before she started the model by observing what was on the wall frieze in the creative area. She was able to use the glue spreader and enjoyed putting lots of glue over the box. She used more than was necessary to stick the paper to it and spent some time making patterns, which she appeared to enjoy. Nina had some difficulty using the scissors but she held them properly. She was not yet able to work out how to fix the cardboard tube to the box, but managed to complete her rocket with the assistance of the child care practitioner.

The evaluation should compare your findings with what you expect children to be able to do at that age. You should use a recognised source in order to make your comparison. Examples could be from the milestones in Chapter 2 of this book, or from the Prime and Specific areas of the EYFS. You can also compare the child with other children in the class who are the same age. Where possible, you should also use current research or theorists.

Evaluation

The development milestones for a 4 year old (48 months) according to the EYFS 'Development Matters' guidance states that they 'handle tools, objects, construction and malleable materials safely and with increasing control, and can use simple tools and techniques competently and appropriately.' They are beginning to name drawings before starting. Nina is not quite 4 years old – she is 47 months old – but she held the scissors properly and made a partially successful attempt to cut the tube, which is a difficult shape. She was able to name what she planned to do. Nina appears to be operating well within the normal limits for physical development and some aspects of 'children's thinking and discussion' within communication and language.

One of the main uses of your observation is to enable you to plan activities that will help the children perfect their skills and move forward. By observing what the child is doing you can organise suitable activities. This is backed up by the research of Lev Vygotsky, who concluded that children could learn more by the correct amount of adult intervention. He used the term 'Zone of Proximal Development' to explain the range of potential for learning each person has, compared to the learning that actually takes place in their environment.

"Zone of Proximal Development: the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers."

Vygotsky, 1978

Recommendations

Continue to offer opportunities for Nina to plan her own activities. Encourage activities that will help to strengthen finger muscles (fine motor skills), e.g. drawing, construction toys and using a wide range of tools and equipment. You will be able to find many more suggestions in chapter 5 for ideas to extend junk modelling and the use of different tools and equipment.

Now that you have seen how a completed observation is set out you should be ready to try the skill for yourself. The following sections have been arranged so that you can work through the activities and build on your knowledge.

It is not easy to record what is taking place as you are trying to watch everything that is happening around you. While you are writing you may miss an important interaction. One way you can speed up your note-taking so that you do not need to have your head down all the time is to develop a code. This can be quite simple. For example, you may put A → B. This could mean that child A (Ben) went up to child B (Sunil) and exchanged information. This might be very useful if you were recording a child's ability to socialise. You will need to think about possible shortcuts and then note them down, because it is not much use having a lot of observations that you are unable to read back.

This raises another important point about writing up observations. **The sooner you read them through, discuss and summarise on the individual child's progress sheets, the easier it will be.** If you record and discuss the observation while it is fresh in your mind you will often be able to visualise the situation again and

know what you have written and why you have written it. Another way to make your recording easier is to identify clearly the reason why you are observing the child and what you hope to find out. This will give you your aims and objectives.

Activity

The photograph below is a picture of two children, aged 48 to 50 months, playing in a sand tray in which seeds have been mixed into the sand. The following account relates what took place during a fifteen minute observation. Read through the observation and then make a list of what you think it tells you about the children.



Two 48 month old children, playing in the sand.



Observation

Record of observation

Nina and Leah are standing either side of the sand tray, running their hands through the sand. Leah picks up a bowl and begins to fill it up using a large scoop.

Nina picks up a sieve and fills it with sand. She watches as the sand runs through, leaving seeds lying in the sieve. She picks up a scoop and attempts to use it to move the seed from the sieve to a yogurt pot. Her concentration shows on her face but very little seed goes into the scoop. She leans over to the tray of utensils and selects a spoon that she then uses to carefully transfer the seed. After six spoonfuls, she tips the rest of the seed into the pot allowing it to spill over the sides back into the tray. She puts down the sieve, picks up the scoop and moves round to the other side of the table. Leah says: "This is my side". Leah looks round but there are no adults looking. She picks up the sieve. Nina takes it from her saying "That's mine," and walks back to her own side. Leah fills a dish and turns to the teacher saying: "Look at this!" A third child, Ella, walks up to the sand tray and starts to dig.

Nina: "Teacher... there's three, there's only supposed to be two." Ella walks slowly away. Nina: "Shall we get all the toys out and collect all the seeds?" She starts to collect all the utensils and put them on the tray, watched by Leah. She starts to sieve the sand and tip the seeds into a corner of the tray. "We'll just have seeds, shall we?" Leah picks up a sieve and begins to do the same. Nina: "I'm going to Nanny's house for lunch, no, dinner." Leah says: "I've got some more seeds for you." They pick up individual seeds using pincer grasps for about two minutes. Nina puts some seeds in a pot and brings them over to me: "Here is a cake for you!" We talk about the cake. A child who is deaf comes up to me and attracts my attention by rubbing my cheek. He indicates that he wants to play in the sand. Leah looks across and says: "No, Nina is still here." Nina returns to the sand then brings back another pot of seed with a lid on. Leah walks over to me again and says: "You know what? I've got a L.E.A.H. in my name." Nina offers me the pot of seeds. "I've made a big cake... no, I'll open it as it's full up." The children walk back to the sand but practitioner announces that it is clear-up time.

When you have completed your list of comments about the children, compare it with the suggestions given at the end of this chapter (p105). Try not to look too soon. You will notice that the list has been arranged into different areas of development. If you try to think in these terms you will probably find it easier to identify areas you wish to observe.

There are several reasons for observing these children; however, if you focus on just one area of development you can look and record in more detail. Go back and look at the observation

again. You can see that although there is a lot happening, there are also lots of gaps. Unless you were looking for social interaction it would probably be better to concentrate on one child and look at one area of development, e.g. Communication and language (Listening and attention and Understanding), Physical development (Moving and handling), or Expressive arts and design (Being imaginative). See Chapter 2 for more details of developmental areas.

Activity

The photographs below show children aged from 2 to 4 years engaged in various activities. Basing your observation on the situation shown in each photograph, choose to observe a single child or else a whole group, then suggest what you might want to find out. Try to formulate specific aims and objectives, but if you find this difficult discuss your ideas with your work colleagues before you decide how to proceed.



Handy tip:

if you are stuck for ideas, try looking at the section on developmental milestones in Chapter 2, any child development book or the 'Development Matters' guidance to see what children are expected to do at the various age-related stages. This should help you formulate your ideas for aims and objectives.

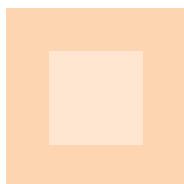
Remember, *aims and objectives* are just the formal way of setting out your plan to discover what children are able to do. For example, your aim could be to observe a teacher talking to a child. Your objectives could be to discover if the child listened to what was being said and if they could understand what was being asked. This would be written as:

Aim

To observe the class teacher communicating with a 4 year old (48 months).

Objectives

1. To identify the child's ability to listen to a simple request.
2. To identify the child's ability to carry out a simple request.



Alternatively, your aim could be to see how children organise an activity. This could be written as:

Aim

To observe a group of nursery children (aged 40 to 50 months) planning.

Objectives

1. To identify how well children are able to work together.
2. To see if all the children become involved.
3. To see if any of the children become the leader.

Or your aim could be to see how good the children's physical abilities are:

Aim

To observe the gross motor skills of a group of 4 to 5 year olds (48 to 60 months) engaged in physical play in the adventure playground.

Objectives

To identify how well they are able to balance, move between objects and control their movements when using the equipment.

You might also observe if they worked together to achieve an objective. This observation could be useful when discussing with the group how they would like the area to be set up. For example, you could talk with the children about the need to match their actions to the space they are in.

Activity

Now that you have successfully formulated a variety of aims and objectives for the children in the photographs, it is time to try out some of the techniques in your own environment.

You could try out one of the examples you used in the last activity, or construct some more of your own for the age group you work with. You will have noticed that the aims often refer to the age of the child, so it is important to record the exact age in years and months or in just months. This is especially important in the younger age groups, since there a lot of change will take

place throughout one year. Your objectives for a child who is just 3 years old are unlikely to be the same as for a child who is 3 years and 11 months old, as the development of this second child should be closer to that of a 4 year old. For this reason, it is now more usual to state ages in months.

In the first instance it might be a good idea to think of an observation for each of the prime areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage. For the age group you have chosen, write out an aim and objective for:

- Personal, social and emotional development
- Communication and language
- Physical development

When you have planned your observations, discuss them with your room leader.

Having established what you are going to do, set aside a convenient time to begin to record your observations.



The first thing you need to consider is whether the objectives have been met. This is discussed in the conclusion of your observation, by looking again at what you have observed and matching to what you hoped to find out.

The following is an example of an observation with a conclusion. The format also includes details of the child, such as name and age, and details of the setting. We have also noted the time the observation started and finished.

Observation

Observation 3	Date 15.03.2014
Name of child Susan	Age 9 months
Time commenced 5.15 p.m.	Time completed 5.25 p.m.
Number of adults 1	Number of children 1
Name of child Susan	Setting The bathroom of the family home
Aim To observe a 9 month old baby during bath time.	
Objectives To identify and record the child's physical skills. To identify and record the child's interaction with the adult carer.	

Record of observation

The nanny lays Susan on a towel on the floor and starts to undress her. Susan concentrates on the adult's face and appears to be listening to her as she explains what she is doing. "Let's take this jumper off, shall we?" The nanny pulls the jumper over Susan's head and says "Boo!" Susan squeals with delight. She lies quite still as the nanny unfastens the dungarees and pulls them off, then removes the vest. Susan starts to wriggle and attempts to roll over. The nanny gives her a rattle, which gains her attention and she lies quite still, holding it in front of her while the nappy is removed. As she is lifted into the bath she drops the rattle onto the floor. Once in the bath, Susan picks up the sponge and puts it in her mouth. She begins to suck it and splutters in surprise as the water goes down her throat. She turns and moves onto her knees and grasps the handle on the side of the bath. She pulls herself up into the standing position and leans over the edge. The nanny sits her down in the water again and gives her a plastic book to look at. Susan passes the book from one hand to the other and then puts it in her mouth. She drops it into the water and looks around for something else. The nanny fills a plastic bottle by pushing it under the water. Susan watches the bubbles and laughs, then begins to shout "da-da-da!" The nanny asks: "Is daddy coming home soon?" Susan begins to grizzle and rub her eyes, so the nanny quickly finishes washing her and then puts out her hands. Susan holds up her arms to be lifted out.

Conclusion

You can see how the conclusion summarises what you have observed and relates the findings to the objectives.

Susan was very mobile during the observation. She wanted to roll over when she was on the floor and she pulled herself up in the bath. She was able to hold an object in her hand and pass it to the other hand. Susan responded to the language and joined in the game of 'peek-a-boo'. She co-operated by lifting her arms when it was time to come out of the bath.

Activity

Look back at the previous activity and think about conclusions for your own observations.

This activity almost completes what you should include in a written or narrative observation. You now need to consider how observations can help your work practice by reinforcing your knowledge of child development, and help the children in your care by identifying experiences that will lead them forward.

The value of observations is in their use, not just for a collection in a record-keeping file. We make use of the observation by evaluating it, comparing it to the expected developmental stage and then making any recommendations. It is possible to compare the development with the other children of a similar age, but it is more useful to refer to a recognised source.

For example, see the observation on the following page.



Observation

Observation 4

Date 7.10.2013

Time commenced 10.15 a.m.

Time completed 10.35 a.m.

Number of adults 2

Number of children 3

Name and ages of children 58 months, 60 months, 58 months; identified in observation as Children A, B and C

Setting Forest school – wooded area. Children have the freedom to choose where they wish to explore and play. Class teacher and teaching assistant (TA) are monitoring and ensuring safety.

Aim To observe a group of children during outside play.

Objectives To observe how the children interact.
To observe how they use their natural surroundings.

Record of observation

Children A, B and C are playing together. They have decided to make a 'hospital' in a corner of the wooded area. They are deciding where would be the best place to start. They are careful to step over tree roots and avoid slopes.

Child A says: "We can't have it there," pointing to the tree, "because there is no shelter."

Child B says: "We can put this over the top for shelter"; she pulls a large twig covered in leaves down over the base of the tree.

Child C says: "We need a sign for the hospital" – she picks up two sticks and places them into the ground as a cross shape. "That's it, now everyone will be able to find the hospital". Child C appears confident in her approach and moves on to talk about an ambulance.

Child B says: "We need a stretcher – when I was in hospital I went on a stretcher". She goes behind the tree to look for her materials. "We need big leaves... something soft."

Child B finds a leaf that is large and wide.

Child C finds a long narrow leaf.

Child B says: "Mine is big – it will be comfortable."

Child C says: "Mine is long so you can lie down on it."

Child A has been listening and watching the other two girls. She says: "We can use the big leaf as a cover on the bed."



The other girls agree and return to the base of the tree to place their items. The three children run over to the TA to tell her about the hospital. The TA moves over to the base of the tree and asks each child about what they have been doing. All of the children are eager to relate their part in the process of making a hospital. They continue to look at their hospital and Child B suddenly says, "When I went into hospital I went into the plaster room – I hurt my arm and had to have plaster on it. My friends wrote their names on it."

The other children listen carefully and decide to use a hole in the base of the tree for a plaster room.

Suddenly they hear the signal for finishing all activities. They walk back towards the tepee and sit down on the logs with the other children and adults in the group to recall the morning's activities.

Conclusion

The three children worked well together, eager to add their own ideas but listening to each other's. They showed an awareness of safety when moving about. Each child appeared confident when they made a suggestion. Each time they needed to negotiate a situation they were patient and sorted out any differences quickly and amicably. Child B had experienced a hospital visit and was able to share it with the others. Child A thought about differences when the children were discussing the size and shape of the leaves, and suggested a resolution so that both could be used. All the children appeared to enjoy their activity and share their contributions with the TA.

Evaluation

The children appear to be operating at the level expected for their age. This can be shown by comparing their actions and speech to the age ranges described in Development Matters in the EYFS.



Physical development

Moving and handling:

40 – 60+ months

Handles objects/materials safely and with increasing control.

Moves freely with pleasure and confidence.

Health and self-care:

40 – 60+ months

Shows understanding of the need for safety when tackling new challenges and considers and manages some risks.

Practices some appropriate safety measures without direct supervision.

The children collected and used the twigs and leaves in an appropriate way. They demonstrated an awareness of health and safety by avoiding tree roots and slopes when positioning their hospital. Although adults were nearby, they did not need to intervene to supervise.

Communication and language

Listening and attention

40 – 60+ months

Two-channelled attention – can listen and do simultaneously, for a short span.

Understanding

40 – 60+ months

Listens and responds to ideas expressed by others in conversation or discussion.

Speaking

30 – 50 months

Builds up a vocabulary that reflects the breadth of their experiences.

40 – 60+ months

Uses talk to organise, sequence and clarify thinking – ideas, feelings and events.

All the children were able to listen to each other and use ideas expressed by each other. They continued their play while listening, and talked through ideas to organise their role-play. Child B used her hospital experience to add ideas.

Personal, social and emotional development

Making relationships:

30 – 50 months

Can play in a group extending and elaborating play ideas, e.g. building up a role-play activity with other children.

40 – 60+ months

Initiates conversations, attends to and takes account of what others say.

Explains own knowledge and understanding and asks appropriate questions of others.

Takes steps to resolve conflicts with other children, e.g. finding a compromise.

Self-confidence and self-awareness:

40 – 60+ months

Confident to speak to others about own needs, wants, interests and opinions.

Managing feelings and behaviour:

40 – 60+ months

Aware of the boundaries set and of behavioural expectations in the setting.

Beginning to be able to negotiate and solve problems without aggression.

All the children were able to take part in the role-play, to initiate conversations and listen to others, and resolve any different ideas. They understood where they were able to go in the wood and when to stop play at the end of the session.

Mathematics

Space and measure:

30-50 months

Shows an interest in shape and space by playing with shapes or making arrangements with objects.

The children understood the concepts of 'big', 'small', 'long' and 'wide' when discussing the leaves.

Understanding the world

People and communities:

30 – 50 months

Remembers and talks about significant events in their own experience.

Child B used her experience of going to the hospital to extend the play.

The world;

30 – 50 months

Shows care and concern for living things and the environment.

40 – 60+ months

Looks closely at similarities, differences, patterns and change. Appreciates and expresses opinions on natural environments.

Expressive arts and design

Explaining and using media and materials:

40 – 60+ months

Manipulates materials to achieve a planned effect.

All the children used the twigs and leaves to achieve their interpretation of a hospital.

Being imaginative:

40 – 60+ months

Plays alongside children who are engaged in the same theme. Creates simple representations of events, people and objects.

The children were able to use their imagination; by using natural materials to create a hospital they extended their play as new ideas emerged.

Recommendations

The outdoor area provided an opportunity to work together in a team – providing an opportunity to explore ideas through an activity with a theme, which enabled all the children to enjoy the spontaneous fun that occurred. Outdoor areas within the natural environment are an excellent setting for children to explore their own ideas without constraint. Indoor spaces used for role-play should also provide equipment that can be used in several ways, e.g. lengths of material and different size boxes.

Activity

You can now complete your own observations by making the final evaluation. Look at your aims and objectives, read through your observations and make sure you have summarised them in the conclusion. Look at the stage/level of normal development for the age group and make a comparison with your findings. The previous example refers to stages described in Development Matters, but you can also use the milestones given in Chapter 2 of this book.

Points to remember:

- Be specific in your comments.
- Do not make sweeping statements or assumptions about a child.
- Try always to be objective in your findings.
- Identify where the child may be in his or her own developmental pathway.
- Make any recommendations for further observations or activities and consider ways you can support children in order to move them forward in their development.

The exercises you have accomplished should have enabled you to complete your structured written/narrative observations – that is, observations which have been planned to discover the abilities of a child or children in a certain developmental area; observations which have pre-determined aims and objectives. Once you have been recording these for a while and discovered their value you may want to use them to spontaneously note language or behaviour that happens around you. This would mean writing without specifically formulated objectives, although it is likely that what interested you was related to one prime area of development. This would be called an unplanned or unstructured observation. In fact, although it was unplanned it should still include details of the child so that conclusions, evaluations and recommendations can be made.

For example, see the observation on the following page.



Observation

Date 14.10.2013

Names of children Sophie; plus 3 other children.

Ages Sophie 48 weeks; 3 children (similar ages).

Time commenced 2 p.m.

Time completed 2.20 p.m.

Number of children 4

Setting Role-play area – in Reception class setting.

Record of observation

Sophie is in the role-play area, preparing to give a show to a group of children who have joined her. They are sitting on the carpet ready to be the audience. Sophie is in a long skirt and wears a “magician’s” hat. She collects together all her props. She does not ask for any adult help – she is certain of what she needs. When she is ready she stands confidently in front of her audience. She has a small rabbit puppet on her right hand and she holds it up towards her face – next to her ear. She is motionless, listening to her puppet. After a few quiet moments she says, in a higher pitched voice, “Oh, do you want to talk to the audience?” She makes the puppet nod its hand and head and listens again for her next instruction. “Oh, you want to go in the hat to disappear – right ladies and gentleman, the rabbit will go in my hat and disappear.”

She puts the rabbit in the hat – she hides the rabbit inside a pocket in the hat, then shows the audience the empty hat.

“Look the rabbit has gone.”

She shakes the hat and then makes the rabbit appear again – she has a slightly amused look on her face and bows to the audience. They all clap and she walks away with a large smile on her face.

Sophie walks back to her ‘stage’ and looks at the audience. She stands for a minute, holding the puppet up to her face. The children who were watching stay in their position on the floor, waiting to see what happens. Sophie walks to the children, holds the puppet near to them and says, “You want to talk to the children. What do you want to say?” She looks at the children. “He wants to know if you want him to disappear again – do you?”

The children say “yes” and she proceeds to put the puppet back into the hat and repeats the performance. The children clap again and Sophie walks off.



Conclusion

This observation gave a completely different insight into Sophie's personality. She is usually a quiet shy girl in the setting, and waits before offering to join in activities.

When Sophie used the props she had an awareness of her own role as magician, the role of the puppet, and an awareness of how they both needed to interact and entertain the audience.

Sophie was also aware of changing her tone of voice; she is able to differentiate between each character and the audience while maintaining her own character. It appears that she felt more confident by stepping into the role of magician, wearing props and changing her tone of voice.

When she finished she was very pleased and quite confident. As soon as she removed the clothes she reverted back to shy quiet Sophie.

Evaluation

During her role-play, Sophie demonstrated that her development is well within expected ranges for her age. Comparison with the EYFS stages of development can show this.



Personal, social and emotional development

Managing feelings and behaviour

30 – 50 months

Can usually adapt behaviour to different events, social situations and changes in routine.

Sophie is normally quiet, but she was able to adapt her behaviour in order to confidently take on the role of the magician.

Communication and language

Listening and attention

30 – 50 months

Focusing attention – still listen or do, but can shift own attention.

Sophie was able to pretend to listen to the puppet, maintain her role as the magician, and speak for the puppet.

40 – 60+ months

Two-channelled attention – can listen and do for short time span.

Understanding

40 – 60+ months

Understands humour.

Sophie realised that making the rabbit disappear was funny.

Speaking

30 – 50 months

Uses vocabulary focused on objects and people that are of particular importance to them. Uses information, rhythm and phrasing to make the meaning clear to others.

Sophie used language in the role-play to explain to her audience what she was doing. She was also able to project language onto the puppet; listening to what he was meant to say and then telling the children.

40 – 60+ months

Uses language to imagine and recreate roles and experiences in role-play situations.

Expressive arts and design

Being imaginative

30 – 50 months

Engages in imaginative role-play based on own first hand experiences.

Uses available resources to create props to support role-play.

Developing preferences for forms of expression.

Sophie was fully engaged in the role-play, using language she may have heard on the television. She chose her props to support what she wanted to say and do in the role of magician.

Recommendations

This observation shows that the environmental setting can provide the opportunity for children to succeed and show a level of confidence far exceeding their normal persona in a different environment. Children may be capable and confident but need a variety of settings to be able to feel secure and display their skills.

Observations have provided evidence that Sophie now needs encouragement to participate in a variety of role-play situations to build on her confidence and self-esteem. She will be able to join in with other children and enjoy their company, develop her skills and work towards the Early Learning Goal.

Early Learning Goal

Children use what they have learnt about media and materials in original ways, thinking about uses and purposes. They represent their own ideas, thoughts and feelings through design and technology, art, music, dance, role-play and stories.

Enabling Environments

Adults can:

- Make materials accessible so that children are able to imagine and develop their projects and ideas while they are still fresh in their minds and important to them.
- Provide for, initiate and join in with imaginative play and role-play, encouraging children to talk about what is happening and to act out the scenarios in character.
- Plan regular short periods when individuals listen to others, such as singing a short song, sharing an experience or describing something they have seen or done.

In practice, in your workplace these conclusions and evaluations may be verbal, but they should become a valuable tool for planning for individual need. You have therefore made use of your observation even though you had no set objectives at the outset. It cannot be stressed too often that observations are tools to be used to assist your learning and provide a basis for planning children's progression.



Types of observational technique

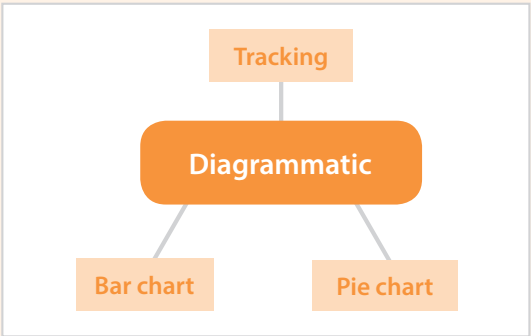
Now that you have practised the art of observing and interpreting the content from observations in written/narrative form, it is time to look at the variety of other methods in more detail. As a childcare practitioner you are fortunate to have the opportunity to use a wide range of methods, and to gain a realistic awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.

The following diagram shows four methods that can be used: diagrammatic, sampling, written and checklists. From this you should be able to see the learning you can achieve by observing children in a structured way. Whichever method you choose to carry out your observation, however, will require the same preliminary information (date, time, name, age) and an evaluation and conclusion as described in the written/narrative format. There should always be

a reason for undertaking the observation. Once it is completed you would normally make an evaluation and recommendations based around the EYFS developmental charts and reflections on your own work practice. Remember that your evaluation should be based on knowledge of child development and should never be judgmental. You also need to remember that children of the same age may have had different experiences and be at different levels. Your recommendations should be for the benefit of the individual child – you are looking at what they can do, and then how to build on that. For instance, if you are observing behaviour then you should be looking for recommendations that will assist the child to have a more positive experience.

If you feel that you have not achieved what you set out to discover by your observation, then you may need to try one of the other methods.

The following diagrams set out some of the formats for recording observations that are commonly used followed by suggestions of when you might use the different types of recording techniques. You will see that the examples build on the information given in Chapter 1.

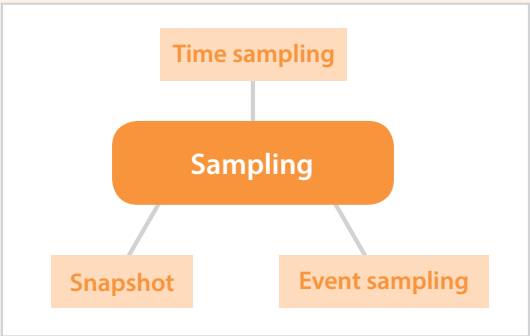


Diagrammatic

Tracking: Observing and recording a child or children’s movements around a limited area for a period of time, e.g. at nursery, in the classroom, in the playground.

Bar chart: A pictorial method of recording an observation of a whole group’s ability to undertake a specific task, or a way of showing blocks of time spent on an activity.

Pie chart: An alternative pictorial method of recording a time-sampling observation or bar chart.

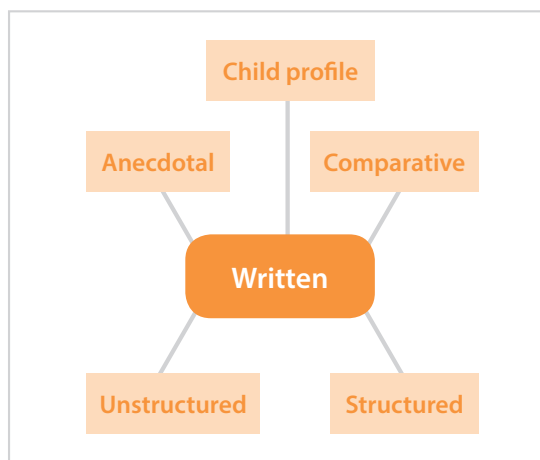


Sampling

Time sampling: Observing and recording what a child is doing every minute for a short time, e.g. 10 minutes, or at intervals during a set period of time, e.g. every 15 minutes over a morning.

Event sampling: Observing and recording certain events as they occur, e.g. aggressive behaviour or temper tantrums.

Snapshot: Observing and recording events at a particular moment. They are useful for comparing use of equipment at different times of the day or monitoring play areas in order to make the best use of equipment.



Written

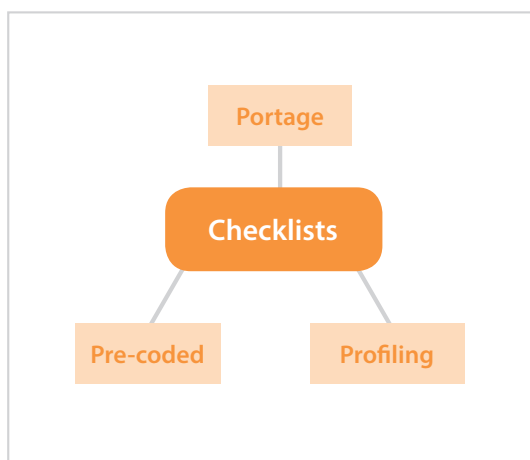
Child profile: Observing a child over a period of time to evaluate their overall developmental progress. This will normally include some details of the child's background and always needs parental permission. This may contribute to the child's summative assessment.

Comparative: There are two main types of comparative observation: observing two children and comparing their abilities, or observing one child over a period of time in order to evaluate their progress.

Anecdotal: A record of a child over a period of time that consists of a series of unstructured observations, also useful for the summative assessment and the linking-in of parental observation.

Structured: Observing and recording for a specific purpose with pre-planned aim and objectives, e.g. to discover a child's physical abilities when they first enter nursery.

Unstructured: Observing children without a predetermined aim. This type of observation is spontaneous and usually comes about from something interesting or unexpected happening. It may be more difficult to evaluate but could provide you with recommendations for a further observation. This type of observation is commonly recorded on a sticky note or iPad now, and used to update a child's records or provide evidence for planning.



Checklists

Pre-coded: Observing and recording specific aspects of development using a pre-coded checklist of developmental milestones. This could be an individual observation, but often forms part of an overall and ongoing profile of the child.

Profiling: The profiling record of children in the Foundation Stage can consist of checklists that are supported by short written observations. This allows a practitioner to comment on how and when a child does something.

Portage: Checklists are also commonly used when working with special needs children in order to monitor their progress. Portage is a system that breaks down the milestones into smaller steps, which are used to develop a plan for the practitioner and parent to work with the child. Checklists are then used to monitor how successfully the targets are being met. This enables the practitioner and parent to set new targets or redefine the task.

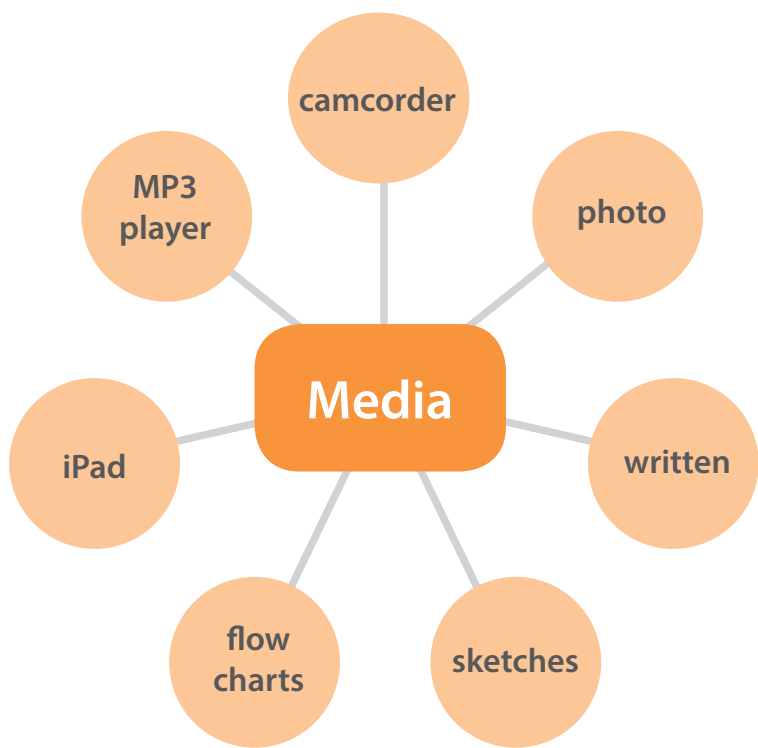


Other recording methods

You might also consider using different media to help you record your observation, but this should always be discussed with your supervisor and the child's parent in the interest of confidentiality.

The diagram below shows some of the different recording media you might use.

It is not possible to demonstrate the use of the camcorder or iPad in this book, but the following examples are written in different formats for you to use as reference. At the end of this chapter are some suggested aims and objectives for you to decide which method would be most suitable to enable you to assess the abilities of the child or children you are observing.



Observational techniques in practice

Diagrammatic

Tracking

As stated in Chapter 1, the usual reason for undertaking a tracking observation is to record the amount of time a child spends on an activity or the number of activities they choose. The following example illustrates its use to track a child to discover motor skills on a choice of activities. Before commencing, you would need to sketch a plan of the area that you are going to observe the child in. You will need to consider how you are going to record the movement, e.g. do you need to devise a code? You will also need to consider your objectives and how they are to be met. In the example in Chapter 1 (p.7), the objectives were likely to have been connected to the time the child spent on the activity, so it was important to note the times on the diagram. In the following example you will see that the principal objective is to discover which apparatus is chosen. You do not, therefore, need to note time. However, there is a second objective: to identify the skills used on the apparatus. There is not usually space on the diagram to write this, especially if you identify difficulties. You will therefore need to record this separately.

Observation

Date: 11.12.2013

Time commenced 10.50 a.m.

Time completed 11.05 a.m.

Number of children Whole class

Number of adults 2

Name of child Edward

Age 60 months

Aim To observe a 5 year old while in a formally arranged setting of the gym in the school hall.

Objectives To track the choice of apparatus.

To identify and record Edward's gross motor skills using apparatus.

Setting The school hall set out for P.E lesson to be used by the whole class.

Record of observation

☒	Climbing frame	☐	Horse	☐	Mat
☒	Ropes	☐	Hoops		



Used



Not used

Use of equipment

Ropes: Some difficulty climbing onto the end of the rope and not able to swing successfully, but spends several minutes trying.

Hoops, mat, horse: not used.

Climbing frame: Most time spent here. Climbs quite well initially but rather hesitant near the top of the frame. Descending is rather a problem. Edward feels carefully for each rung before moving.

Conclusion

From the tracking observation it is obvious that Edward prefers to work on the large apparatus – either the climbing frame or the ropes, and avoids the hoops, mat and horse. Edward found difficulty in climbing onto the knot of the rope and then swinging. On the climbing frame he moved alternate arms and legs, reaching up above his head with arms extended, and carefully watching where he was going. However, he appeared hesitant and apprehensive when near the top of the frame. The higher he climbed, the less fluent his movements were, and he stopped several times to watch other children. He climbed down haltingly, feeling for each rung before making a move.

Evaluation

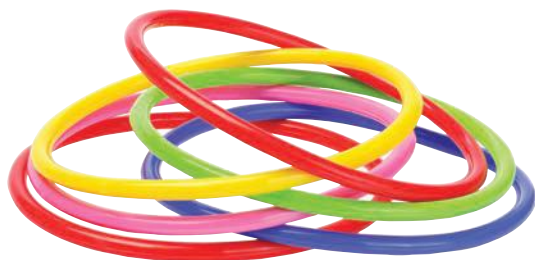
According to Development Matters guidance in the EYFS, children aged 40 – 60 months 'experiment with different ways of moving, travel with confidence and skill around, under, over and through balancing and climbing equipment.'

Although Edward is keen to participate in these activities and likes to use the large apparatus, he has not yet gained confidence and is not able to move fluently, as most children of this age would be able to do. The majority of the class enjoyed the vigorous physical play and used their bodies confidently and actively. Edward appeared hesitant and enjoyed activities where he had some success, returning to these, unlike many 5 year olds who are keen to master new skills and practise until they perfect them.

Recommendations

Edward needs more activities that will allow him to practice skills and gain confidence. He needs praise and encouragement to try new apparatus. Another suggestion could be building confidence using different activities such as role-play, which also involves outdoor opportunities for physical development as described in Chapter 5.

This record shows very clearly the value of observing children as individuals. In the general rush of the class activity it is easy to miss the fact that one child is having some difficulty. Experienced workers will usually spot that a child needs some extra help, but it is always useful to have recorded proof.



Bar chart

In Chapter 1 we looked at the bar chart as a method of recording a class's ability to complete a task. In the following example, the bar chart is used to give a pictorial representation of the time spent on different activities during a typical day at a day nursery for a 7 month old baby.

The times are recorded throughout the day and then transferred to the chart.



Observation

Date 11.07.2013

Time commenced 8 a.m.

Time completed 5 p.m.

Number of adults 3

Number of children being observed: 1 (6 other babies in the nursery)

Name of child Marc

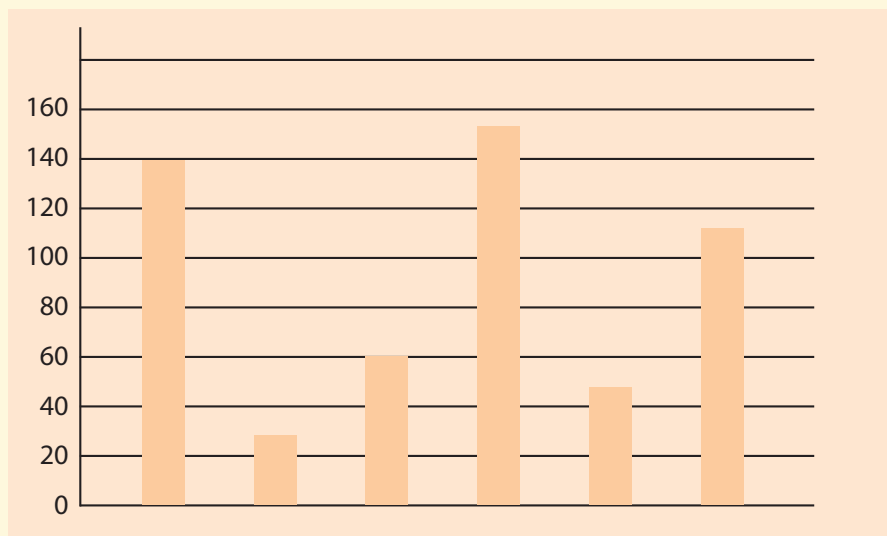
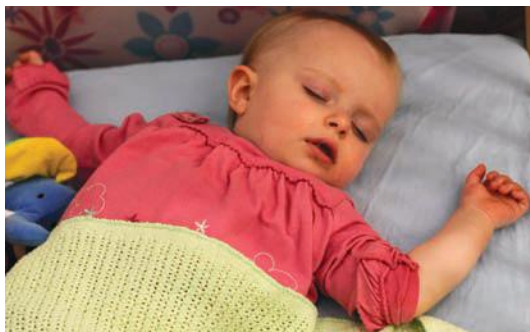
Age 7 months

Setting Baby room and outdoor area of day nursery.

Aim To observe the care plan of a 7 month old baby in a nursery setting throughout the day.

Objective To record in minutes the amount of time spent on social care and play on a typical day.

8.00 – 8.10	arrives at nursery for handover (exchange of information with parent)	12.00 – 12.30	freeplay
8.10 – 8.30	freeplay inside with soft toys	12.30 – 12.45	nappy change and hand washing
8.30 – 8.45	painting activity	12.45 – 1.15	lunch
8.45 – 8.50	hand washing	1.15 – 2.15	outing to the park
8.50 – 9.15	freeplay outside	2.15 – 2.30	nappy change and hand washing
9.15 – 9.30	stories and songs	2.30 – 3.30	sleep
9.30 – 9.45	nappy change and hand washing	3.30 – 4.00	water play
9.45 – 10.30	snack and bottle of formula	4.00 – 4.30	snack and formula feed
10.30 – 12.00	sleep	4.30 – 5.00	freeplay
		5.00	collected by parent and information exchanged



Bar graph showing time spent on each activity throughout the day

Evaluation

The daycare programme followed at this nursery is very similar to one recommended by Patricia Geraghty (1998), who states in the section about planning a child's day:

The core of the programme for the young child in day care is play, balanced by regular times allotted for routine purposes such as washing, lunch, snacks and a rest period.

A baby of 7 months should follow parent wishes, in this case two bottle feeds, finger feeding and a sleep twice a day. There was plenty of opportunity for different types of play and social interaction, with good staff ratio.

Recommendations

In order to evaluate the quality of the child's daily routine, some detailed written/ narrative observations of the play should be carried out.

Pie chart

Pie charts are a pictorial way of showing a period of time, or a number of children, divided up into percentages of a circle (360 degrees).

It would be possible to show the bar graph in the previous example as a pie chart format.

In Chapter 1 we looked at pie charts as a way of illustrating percentages of the class who could carry out a procedure. In this example we are using the chart to show the amount of time a child spends on different activities. This can cover any length of time, but it is likely that the younger the child, the shorter the time, as younger children are more liable to have a shorter attention span for one activity.

Observation

Date of observation 12.11.2013

Time commenced 10.45 a.m. Time completed 10.55 a.m.

Number of adults 1 Number of children 3

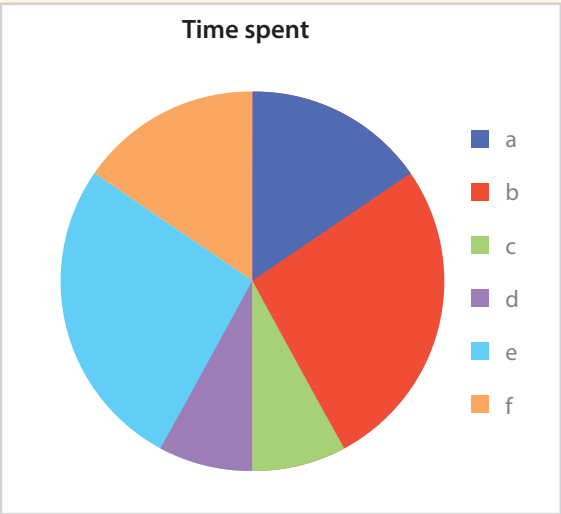
Name of child Joseph Age 3½ (42 months)

Setting The quiet area of the nursery, set out with various activities.

Aim To observe a 3½ year old during a free choice session.

Objectives To observe and record his concentration span at different activities.

Record of observation



A pie chart showing the percentage of time spent on each activity (a – f)

Activity a (2 minutes): Joseph goes into the home corner and begins to make dinner. He gets a dish out of the cupboard and searches through the food basket to find the pizza. He puts pizza into the dish, then into the oven. "It's hot now," he says. He goes over to the drawer and gets the oven glove to take pizza out. He puts it on the table, takes off oven glove then walks away.

Activity b (2 minutes): Joseph walks round the room and finally stops at the Lego. He puts both hands into the box and moves the bricks around while watching Daniel, who is building a tower. He moves over to the dolls house and watches as Matthew replaces the bedroom furniture.

Activity c (1 minute): Joseph moves back to the Lego and fixes two pieces together then walks around looking at what others are doing before going back to the house.

Activity d (1 minute): Joseph picks up a ladder and carefully places it between the two floors. He moves around the dolls house on his knees then stands up and moves away. He wanders around and the nursery nurse asks if he would like to do a puzzle. He answers "yes", and goes to sit down.

Activity e (3 minutes): Joseph sits down at the table with the nursery nurse. He tips the pieces out of the puzzle board and then begins to put them back into the right spaces. He does not need help but looks to the nursery nurse for encouragement at intervals. He completes the puzzle and smiles.

Activity f (1 minute): Joseph goes over to the train set and crouches down. He watches Matthew pushing a train along. He stands up and steps over the track, then walks back towards the home corner.

Conclusion When given a free choice of activities, Joseph took some time in choosing, and even when he settled in to an activity it could not hold his attention for longer than a minute or two, after which he would walk around the room before stopping briefly to play with another activity. With the help of an adult Joseph found it easier to concentrate for longer.

Evaluation Joseph has only been attending nursery for half a term and is still overwhelmed by the wide choice of activities available. After he was offered guidance he felt reassured, and sat and concentrated for longer. Having been in nursery for such a short time he is only just beginning to explore the nursery environment, and prefers to stand and watch other children rather than join in.

He says very little and appears not to have yet reached the stage where he 'Can play in a group, extending and elaborating play ideas, e.g. building up a role-play activity with other children', nor does he yet 'Demonstrate friendly behaviour, initiate conversations and form good relationships with peers and familiar adults' (EYFS, Personal, social and emotional development: Making relationships, 30 – 50 months).

Recommendations Joseph will need to be provided with activities that will extend his concentration. For the time being he needs to be guided in his choices. He also needs to be encouraged to join in with small group activities such as sand and water play, which has several benefits as described in Chapter 5.

Sampling

Time sampling – target children

Using a target child or children for an observation concentrates on making a detailed record of the behaviour and language of one or two children. Advantages of using the time-sampling method for one or two children, rather than the written/descriptive type, is that it helps you to focus on:

- Who talked to whom;
- Whether the target children are following instructions accurately;
- Who initiates social interaction;
- How long does they spend on the activity – were they concentrating on the given task?

Observation

Time sampling – observing two target children

Date 24.03.2013

Time commenced 11 a.m.

Time completed 11.25 a.m.

Number of adults 2

Number of children 20

Names of children Mylie

Age 4 years 5 months (53 months)

Jessica

Age 4 years 8 months (56 months)

Setting Reception class of an infant school set up for an art activity. Tables have been covered and each table has a supply of paper, paint, brushes and an assortment of objects to print with, e.g. cotton reels, bricks, corks and combs.

Aim To observe two target children, Mylie and Jessica, during an art activity – observing M and J every 5 minutes for 25 minutes.

Objectives To observe M and J's ability to follow directions and complete a task.
To observe M and J's social skills during an activity.



Time (mins)	Activity	Others present	Additional information for M	Additional information for J
5	Whole group seated on the mat as teacher explains the task – to make a picture using shapes. She shows the children a cotton reel and asks if anyone knows what shape it is. She demonstrates how to use the paint on the shapes and print.	18 children 1 teacher 1 NN	M answers the question about shape. Correctly names that the cotton reel is round. She appears to be listening and watching what the teacher is doing.	J's attention appears to be wandering. She looks round the classroom. Needs to be reminded by NN to look at what the teacher is showing.
10	Putting on aprons and finding a space on a table (4 children per table)	18 children 1 teacher 1 NN	Walks straight over to the aprons and puts it over her head. Asks for help to fasten. Quickly finds a space at a table.	Collects apron and stands holding it out to NN who asks her to "put over your head and then I'll help". Goes and stands next to M.
15	Printing/washing hands	2 children 1 NN	M asks J to pass the cork. She covers the end with paint and makes a series of prints around the edge of the paper to make a pattern.	Passes cork to M. Decides to paint hand and print. NN says "that's lovely, but we are painting shapes now". Asked to wash hands.
20	Printing	2 children 1 NN	M has used the different shapes and almost covered the paper. She talks to NN, naming circle, square and triangle.	With encouragement from NN, J is now painting the shapes and can name 'round' and 'triangle'.
25	Washing hands In table groups of 4	2 children 1 NN	Takes off apron and washes and dries hands.	Takes off apron and washes hands.

Conclusion

Mylie showed good concentration in order to follow directions and complete the task of shape printing. She interacted with the teacher and NN to answer questions about shape correctly, and spoke to the children on her table. She was able to put on the apron and wash and dry her hands competently.

Jessica needed reminding to concentrate when the teacher was describing the task. She was able to put the apron on but needed encouragement. Initially she had her own ideas about what to paint, but was able to complete the task when encouraged by the NN.

Evaluation

According to EYFS Development Matters at 40–60 months:

Mathematics

Space, shape and measures 40 – 60 months

Uses familiar objects and common shapes to create and recreate patterns and build models.

Selects a particular named shape.

Mylie
was able to name shapes
and to use them to make patterns
confidently. Jessica needed encouragement,
but was able to name shapes and print
with them.

Personal, social and emotional development

Making relationships 40 – 60 months

Initiates conversations, attends to and takes account of what others say.

Explains own knowledge and understanding, and asks appropriate questions of others.

Mylie
was able to listen to what
teacher said and interact to answer
questions. She spoke to the other
children on the table.

Jessica
needed a reminder to
attend to what the teacher was
saying. She responded to Mylie's
request and interacted with the
NN.

Recommendations

Continue to give Mylie opportunities to experiment with shape and patterns, including ordering by size, shape and number. Provide opportunities for role-play and other interactions in a group.

Encourage Jessica to listen in a big group by giving praise and asking questions.

Event sampling

Event sampling is usually linked to observations of children who have a tendency to behave in an anti-social way, such as having temper tantrums or bullying. The aim is to record any incident, if

possible – what preceded it, and what followed. This should demonstrate if there is any pattern to the behaviour. This will hopefully allow a strategy to be devised to help support the child to modify their behaviour.

Observation

- Date

9.7.2012

Time

Throughout the day
- Number of adults

3

Number of children

15
- Name of child

Ben

Age

3 years, 10 months (46 months)
- Setting

Pre-school room of day nursery.
- Aim

To observe Ben's behaviour throughout the day in a nursery setting.
- Objectives

To record any incidents of unsociable behaviour.

To identify if anything is triggering the behaviour.

To record what happens after the incident.



Record of observation

Time	Incident	Previous observation	Who was present	What followed	Comment
11.20 a.m.	Ben snatched a pencil from James, and James took it back.	Ben and James were in the art area using colouring pencils to draw a picture of their choice.	Two other children were working at the table, and the NN was nearby.	Ben called James a name and hit him on the arm. James shouted and the NN intervened. She asked Ben to say sorry for hitting.	Ben needs to learn that it is not acceptable to just take what he wants. Ben needs to control his anger and ask adult for help if necessary.
11.25 a.m.	Previous incident repeated.	Colouring quietly again after the previous incident had been addressed.	Ben and James were alone at the table. NN in book corner.	James called the NN to intervene and Ben was moved to the other side of the table with his own set of pencils.	Ben reminded again to ask before taking.
1.20 p.m.	Elliot pushed Ben from behind and Ben fell over.	Children were changing for a music and movement activity.	All the children were changing and the NN was assisting where necessary.	Ben jumped up and pulled Elliot's jumper. Elliot shouted and the NN intervened to find out what had happened.	In this instance Ben was not the instigator of the incident.
1.50 p.m.	Ben screamed because he thought someone had taken his socks. He ran round picking up socks and throwing them.	Children were changing back after the activity.	All the children were present.	Several children backed away from Ben, looking quite scared. The NN intervened and found the socks. Ben asked to sit to one side to get dressed.	Ben needs to find an acceptable way to express himself.

Conclusion

Ben reacted very quickly if someone aggravated him. He tended to take what he wanted without asking. Ben used very little language throughout the day; he was much more likely to use actions. Ben was not always the first to provoke the incident.

Evaluation

According to EYFS Development Matters (Making relationships), at 30 – 50 months the child 'Demonstrates friendly behaviour, initiating conversations and forming good relationships with peers and familiar adults'. At 40 – 60 months, the child 'Takes steps to resolve conflicts with other children, e.g. finding a compromise.'

Ben did not demonstrate an ability to use friendly behaviour towards his peers and showed little understanding of ways to resolve conflict. He is only 46 months but his inability to use words rather than blows is not usual at this age. However, the other children do seem to have learned this and can provoke Ben to retaliate.

In Development Matters (Managing feelings and behaviour), at 30 – 50 months the child is 'Aware of own feelings, and knows that some actions and words can hurt others' feelings. The child also 'Begins to accept the needs of others and can take turns and share resources, sometimes with support from others.'

Ben demonstrates little understanding of realising his actions cause distress to others. He finds it difficult to share without support of an adult.

Recommendations

Encourage Ben to express his feelings in acceptable ways, e.g. clay, water, role-play.

Listen to both children's explanations after an incident.

Reward good behaviour.

The nursery SENCO will be able to help by working with staff to establish a programme for everyone to follow. This will mean that Ben's behaviour will be treated consistently while he is in nursery. The programme should also be discussed with the parents.



Snapshot

As the name suggests, a snapshot observation samples what is happening at a given moment in time in a specific area. The most usual reason for this type of observation is to discover which areas of the nursery or classroom are being used. It can also provide a method of seeing which children are playing together.

The method of recording is quite flexible. You can actually take a photograph or series of photographs and study them at a later date. You can draw a diagram of the setting, as you would for a tracking observation, and mark in where the children are at a certain time, or you can write a description. The following example is a written description of a nursery class.



Observation

Date 6.2.2014

Time commenced 10.15 a.m.

Time completed 10.20 a.m.

Number of adults 4

Number of children 22

Ages of children 2 years 9 months (33 months) to 4 years 3 months (51 months).

Setting Pre-school room of day nursery.

Aim To observe and record what children are involved in doing, within the different areas of the nursery during free-flow play.

Objective To see if any alterations are required to the arrangement of activities available.
To see if numbers at an activity need to be limited for access or safety.

Record of observation

The nursery teacher is organising a finger-painting activity. Sarah, Robert, Phillip and Shaheeda are working with her.

James, Ben and Candy are listening to a story read by the nursery nurse.

Sophie and Jasmin are playing in the sand tray.

Sam, Angela, Helen, Nicola and Neil are in the home corner. Sam and Angela are dressed up as nurses and Nicola has a stethoscope round her neck. Helen and Neil are lying down on the beds.

Julia and Reuben are putting the railway track together and running Thomas the tank engine along it.

Stephanie is wandering from the home corner to the finger-painting activity.

Naomi, Pat and Kelly are being supervised in the water play by the student. They are pouring the water onto a wheel and watching it turn.

Conclusion

All of the children were involved with an activity with the exception of Stephanie, who had just left the home corner for the finger painting. No activity appeared overcrowded, although the home corner was busy and could not have taken any more children.

None of the children had chosen to use the construction area or outside where balls and hoops were available.

Recommendation

There is no need to change the activities at the present time, but the sand and water trays could be moved further apart as the children were a little crowded. They could also be moved outside. It is important to allow the children to take the lead in their learning; by providing activities that enable them to move freely about, we should be fostering this. However it is important to keep monitoring what children are doing and listening to their ideas, so that we can continue to provide for them to extend their play.

Written

The structured and unstructured forms of the written narrative were described at the beginning of the chapter. We will now consider the other forms listed.

Comparative

The comparative observation can be used to evaluate two children of the same age at the same time, and a possible method would be a checklist. For example, you might be assessing the children's ability to carry out tasks or perform physical activities and comparing the results with each other as well as the developmental norms. You could also compare a child's

ability on two different occasions. This is often used to monitor any changes in behaviour or development when working with children would have special needs.

The following example illustrates its use to compare a child's ability to indicate a need to use the toilet. Children who have a special need are regularly monitored, so a baseline is often available if a change is noted. This allows a second observation to be undertaken and an objective evaluation to be made. In the example, both the original narrative record and the comparative observation are shown.

Observation

Original observation

Date 8.9.2013

Time commenced 10.25 a.m.

Time completed 10.31 a.m.

Number of children 1

Number of adults 1

Name of child Hayley

Age 4 years, 4 months (52 months)

Setting In the toilet area. One toilet has been adapted so that the less physically able children can be encouraged to be independent.

Aim To observe the ability of a new, physically disabled entrant to the reception class to ask for and use the toilet.

Objectives To observe and record Hayley's ability to convey a need for the toilet.
To observe and record Hayley's ability to use the toilet herself.



Record of observation

Hayley is wriggling about and holding herself. She touches the assistant's hand and asks her something. The assistant takes her hand and they walk slowly and a little unsteadily to the toilet together. Once in the toilet area Hayley walks to the adapted cubicle and pushes the door open. Using the step and handle bar she is able to step up and position herself near to the toilet. She indicates to the assistant that she needs the training seat. Hayley has not attempted to pull down her clothing, but with encouragement she is able to do so and is praised by the assistant. Hayley lifts her arms and the assistant lifts her onto the toilet. The assistant explains that she is going to help the child in the next cubicle and will be back in a moment. While sitting on the toilet Hayley's back is bent towards her knees. When she has finished she is able to wriggle off the seat and onto the step with her trousers and pants round her ankles. She manages to step down using the bar and shuffles to the door. The assistant returns and asks if she has finished. Hayley nods. The assistant bends down and verbally encourages Hayley to pull up her pants and trousers. Hayley still stands, but when invited to try again she moves closer to the wall and proceeds to pull up her pants but the trousers are too tight so the assistant helps, telling Hayley what a good girl she is.

Conclusion

Hayley is aware of when she needs to use the toilet, and is able to tell the assistant. She needs a lot of encouragement, but is able to pull down her trousers and pants. She is not able to get on the toilet herself, but is able to be left alone for a short period. Hayley is able to get off the toilet but makes no attempt to dress herself. If the clothing is loose, e.g. her pants, Hayley is able to pull them up with encouragement, but with tightly fitting clothes like her trousers she needs help.

Evaluation

Hayley is usually able to make her toileting needs known to an adult, although she still occasionally has an accident. Due to her physical disabilities, which affect her motor skills, balance and coordination, Hayley often has difficulty removing tight clothing. She also needs prompting to help re-dress. According to the EYFS guidelines for the development of health and self-care: at 30-50 months the child 'Gains more bowel and bladder control and can attend to toileting needs most of the time themselves'. This shows that Hayley is actually not delayed, except in her ability to get onto the toilet by herself.

Recommendations

Continue to offer praise and encouragement for self-help skills. Speak to mother about ways that different fastenings could help Hayley remove clothes more easily, e.g. Velcro. Give assistance in structured way – use of 'backward chaining' – a system for defining a goal and starting several steps back.

Hayley attended the nursery on a morning only basis for the first term. After Christmas she came full time. It was noticed that now she was often found wet when toileted at the usual times, and that she no longer asked to use the bathroom. It was decided to carry out an observation over a period of a week to see if Hayley had regressed since attending the school on a full time basis. The observation would consist of a tick chart for staff to complete at each scheduled toileting time, or when Hayley asked to use the toilet.

Observation

Comparative observation

Date 14.01.2014 **Time commenced and to be completed** 14.01.14 – 18.01.14

Number of children 1 **Number of adults** 3

Name of child Hayley **Age** 4 years, 8 months (56 months)

Setting The classroom and toilet area.

Aim To re-assess Hayley's ability to ask for, and use, the toilet.

Objectives To record the number of times Hayley asks to use the toilet.
To record the number of times Hayley uses the toilet successfully.
To record the number of times Hayley is found to be wet when toileted.

Record of observation

Staff were asked to record if they took Hayley to the toilet: a) when asked by Hayley, b) when they noticed she was wriggling, c) at the normal toileting times.

The tick chart was to be filled in for one week.

Record of chart commenced 14.01.2014

Routine toileting times							
<i>Monday</i>							
09.00		10.30		11.30		12.30	
✓	∅	✓		#✓		#	
						1.30	
						#	∅
							✓
<i>Tuesday</i>							
09.00		10.30		11.30		12.30	
✓	#	✓	∅	✓		#	∅
						1.30	
						#✓	
							✓
<i>Wednesday</i>							
09.00		10.30		11.30		12.30	
✓		✓		✓		#✓	∅
						1.30	
						#	
							✓
<i>Thursday</i>							
09.00		10.30		11.30		12.30	
✓	#	✓		✓		✓	∅
						1.30	
						∅	∅
						✓	
<i>Friday</i>							
09.00		10.30		11.30		12.30	
✓	#	✓	∅	✓		✓	
						1.30	
						#✓	
							✓

Code

- ✓ used toilet at routine toileting time
- ∅ taken to toilet when seen to be wriggling
- # found to be wet
- ★ Hayley asked to go to the toilet

Conclusion

Hayley did not ask to use the toilet once this week.

The staff noticed that Hayley needed the toilet on many occasions and usually also used it at normal times.

Hayley was found to be wet most often after lunch.

Evaluation

Hayley is no longer asking to go to the toilet, which she was able to do 4 months ago. She appears to have gone backwards in her self-care training, and no longer falls within expected limits.

Recommendations

Discuss the problem with Hayley's parent to see if she is able to make her needs known at home.

If Hayley is also having toileting accidents at home there is a possibility of a urinary tract infection so she should seek advice from GP.

If the problem is only occurring at school, encourage Hayley to ask for the toilet by rewarding her when she does e.g. use of a star chart.

All staff should be working together to support a child who has SEND*. Parents should also be involved at all times.

For children with SEND*, the setting will develop additional relationships with other professionals. It is vital that communication between all professionals and the child's parent is strong so that a clear picture is gained of the child's learning and development.

**Special Educational Needs and Disability, EYFS profile handbook 2013*



Checklists

The example given in Chapter 1 showed a checklist for recording a group of children’s physical abilities. The following example shows how checklists can be used for individual

children. It compares a child’s physical development with those set out in a recognised developmental scale and requires you to prepare a list of those norms to be completed.

Observation

Date 8-11-2013

Time commenced 10.45 a.m.

Time completed 11.30 a.m.

Number of adults 2

Number of children 1

Name of child Sofia

Age 3 years, 8 months

Aim

To observe Sofia’s gross motor skills when using soft play equipment.
To observe if a child of 3 years and 8 months meets the ‘norms’ for her developmental progress.
To use a checklist for gross motor development from a recognised source (*From Birth to Five Years*, by Mary Sheridan).

Setting

Nursery with soft play equipment, climbing frame with things to crawl through, jump through and ropes to walk through. Other children are using the equipment. Sofia will be observed over a period of time in order to complete the tasks.



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Record of observation

Activity / skill Age 4 years	Yes	No	Making good progress?	Comment
Walks or runs alone up and down stairs – one foot to one step.	✓			When S walks up stairs she walks up them with confidence.
Navigates self-locomotion skilfully turning sharp corners, running, pushing and pulling.	✓			Moves around the room with apparent ease; was not seen to push or pull throughout the observation.
Climbs ladders and trees.	✓	✓		Not observed climbing tree but climbed a rope ladder and rope web.
Can stand, walk and run on tiptoe.	✓			Runs and stands on tiptoe and reaches for a bar.
Sits with knees crossed.	✓			Sat down and crossed her legs.
Activity / skill Age 5 years				
Walks easily on narrow line.	✓		✓	Uses her arms to balance herself as she walks confidently in a straight line.
Runs lightly on toes.	✓		✓	Does run on toes sometimes.
Grips strongly with either hand.	✓			Hangs from a bar and makes monkey noises. Switches from one hand to the other.
Active and skilful in climbing and sliding.	✓			Climbs, slides and climbing frame.

Conclusion

From the observation, can conclude that Sofia is able to walk and run forwards, changes direction and is successful in navigating herself around a large, busy room, avoiding obstructions and people.

Sofia is able to walk and run on her tiptoes but she does not do this consistently; she sometimes walks on her feet normally and sometimes runs on her feet placing all the sole of her feet firmly onto the ground.

Making a comparison to children age 5 yrs, Sofia is able to use a variety of large equipment, e.g. swings, and slides. She is able and confident in running quickly around the room – she did not collide with anybody or anything. Sofia successfully used the slides and large equipment in the room.

Sofia ran up and down steps using one foot on each step. She also walked up and down steps with one foot on each step.

Evaluation

The method used for the observation was a checklist. It was an easy and quick method to record the information. A disadvantage can be that the information is closed data and the information collected does not give a holistic picture of the child but of the performance only at the time of the observation. To overcome this, a comments column is useful in order to enlarge on whether the skill is well developed or emerging.

From this observation it is evident that Sofia is a physically able and active child. She is reaching and exceeding the development norms for her age and some of the 5 years old stages of development.

Recommendations

Adults can provide opportunities to play and socialise with children of a similar age and a little older. By interacting with other children in a physically stimulating environment, Sofia will benefit from having the support of, and fun with, her friends as well as developing physically.

Some children are able to join gymnastic and swimming clubs, which would encourage her to learn new skills such as balancing on beams and moving around in different ways. Joining a physically challenging group would enable her to become stronger, more skilled and increase her confidence and self-esteem.



Progress checks and child profiles

Child profiles can be undertaken in any format. Children born in England and Wales will automatically have a record book for health professionals to record weight, immunisations, developmental checks etc. Most parents also keep a record of when their child takes first steps, says first words, etc.

Within the nursery and reception class, formal assessments of progress are made in the child's second year, and in the summer term before the commencement of Key Stage 1. This profile is an assessment of the three characteristics of learning and seventeen Early Learning Goals. Evidence can come from staff, parent and the child themselves. There is no designated format for the profile but it should be able to demonstrate everything that the child has achieved.

Detailed profiles for an ongoing child study are normally only undertaken when there is a concern. This may be in one area, such as language, or cover a general developmental delay. Case studies always contain details of the child and background information such as any birth difficulties. The actual recording method for the observations and the interval between recordings will depend on the initial reason for undertaking the study. Sociologists studying groups of children may carry out the observation by interview or questionnaire, and these may continue at yearly intervals for many years. In the case of a child who is receiving training for a speech delay, the study may require a review every month and the checklists would be very specific to speech.



Observations using other media for recording

The diagram on page showed various media for recording your observations. We have demonstrated the use of graphs, diagrams and written material. It is not possible to show you the use of camcorders, MP3s and iPads, although these may be the method of choice in your nursery, as they allow quick observations to be made in a format which can be repeatedly played back in order to make evaluations. MP3 players are obviously very useful for observing language and recording children's understanding of why things happen, e.g. using them to record their ideas about where rain comes from. You might need to practice this with the children to get them used to being recorded.

Important: In order to protect children and staff it would be best practice using electronic equipment that is always kept in the nursery to record your observations. The use of personal mobile phones to take photographs should not be allowed.

The last observation uses a photograph to record the results. In most nurseries, parents give permission for photographs to be used for their child's records, but if you need a photo for evidence of children to be used in a portfolio for outside use, e.g. part of study for a course you are undertaking, you would need permission from the parent.



Observation

Date of observation 11.03.2014

Time commenced 10.10 a.m.

Time completed 10.20 a.m.

Number of children 1

Number of adults 2

Name of child Grace

Age 4yrs, 10months (58 months)

Aim To observe Grace during a period of choice in a Foundation Stage classroom.

Objectives To observe which area Grace has chosen to work in.
To observe how she concentrates and completes any tasks.

Setting The class follows a Highscope approach where children plan, carryout and review what they have done in a work area of their choice. Grace has chosen to work on the art table, which this morning has been set out with pencils, crayons, fibre tip pens and paper of different sizes and colours.

Record of observation

Grace sits at the table and chooses a strip of orange paper. She takes a green fibre tip pen and carefully draws some lines down the paper. She replaces the lid and takes a purple fibre tip pen to draw dots beside the lines to form a pattern. She is concentrating well and does not look up when another child joins her at the table. The photo below shows the result.

Conclusion

Grace told the teacher that she intended to work in the art area, and she moved there immediately when the class were instructed to go to their chosen activity. She was decisive when choosing paper and writing materials. As the photograph shows, she held the pen correctly and concentrated very well to produce a detailed pattern.



Evaluation

According to the EYFS Development Matters (Exploring and using media and materials) at 40-60 months, a child 'manipulates materials to achieve a planned effect' and 'uses simple tools and techniques competently and appropriately.'

Grace used the pens correctly and competently to achieve her desired effect. The method used for this observation is a photograph and it clearly shows how Grace held the pen and completed her pattern. It demonstrates a good use of a photograph as evidence.

Recommendations

Continue to offer Grace the opportunity to work with different mediums by providing a variety of art materials.

In conclusion

You have now had the opportunity to read examples of the various types of observation that you can use to record and evaluate children's development. However, at times there could be some limiting factors when undertaking observations. Factors that could be affecting children on the day of the observation may include the following:

- The child may be unhappy and/or be worried about something in their home life.
- Weather conditions may affect where the observation is to take place – it could be too hot/sunny, wet/raining or cold/snowy – thus preventing outdoor play, or affecting conditions inside adversely.
- Is the classroom conducive to undertaking the observation; is it too noisy/busy or are there any interruptions or disruptive factors?
- The child may be unwell, or have just returned to nursery/school following an absence through illness.
- The child might be hungry or tired.
- The child may simply not be interested in completing a task at that time.



When recording or evaluating an observation, it is important to include aspects that have been given consideration, which might have affected the outcome. It is also important to remember that all observation methods have limitations, for example a checklist may have insufficient detail to demonstrate a child's individual abilities, and this should also be noted.

There now follow some suggestions for aims and objectives that you might like to use to practice the skill for yourself. First, decide which method you think will give you the best result. There are no 'right' answers; you should try them out and see. If you find one method unsuitable then try another.



Suggested aims and objectives

1. **Aim:** To observe the physical ability of a 7 month old baby.

Objective: To record movement from the supine to prone position and to observe the head, shoulder and neck movements.

2. **Aim:** To observe the balance and movement of a 9 month old baby.

Objective: To record if a 9 month old can reach the sitting position without help and if they can sit without support for a considerable time.

3. **Aim:** To observe the hand-eye co-ordination and fine motor skills of a 2 year old.

Objective: To record the ability of a 2 year old to guide hand movement with the eyes and see if a preferred hand is used.

4. **Aim:** To observe a new entrant to the reception class.

Objective: To record how the child socialises and integrates with the other children and to identify what helps the child settle into the new group.

5. **Aim:** To observe the language skills of a 4 year old.

Objective: To observe the vocabulary, the conversational ability and the questioning that a 4 year old is using.

6. **Aim:** To observe a 5 year old's social development.

Objective: To observe a 5 year old's ability to relate to adults and to integrate into small and large groups of children.

7. **Aim:** To observe why children are attracted to an activity in the nursery setting.

Objective: To see what initially attracts the child; what keeps them at the activity and whether the activity has a successful outcome.

8. **Aim:** To observe a group of 4 year olds in the role-play area.

Objective: To see if the children interact and engage in elaborate and prolonged imaginative play.

9. **Aim:** To observe a small group of 5 year olds playing with clay.

Objective: To observe and record the manipulative skills and imagination of children using this tactile material.

10. **Aim:** To observe a 3 year old who is painting.

Objective: To record how the child experiments with paint and brush.

11. **Aim:** To observe the gross motor skills of a reception class.

Objective: To record their ability to balance, climb and control a ball.

12. **Aim:** To observe the social skills of a 3 month old baby.

Objective: To identify how a young baby communicates and interacts before language emerges.

13. **Aim:** To observe how a group of 4 year old children use a small-scale train set.

Objective: To observe and record imaginative play, co-operative play and language used.

14. **Aim:** To observe 3 year old's social skills at lunchtime.

Objective: To identify the child's ability to respond to others and to use cutlery effectively.



Having decided which method to use remember, your observations need to include the following details, so that you can demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of how to meet the individual needs of the child/children:

- Date and immediate environment for the observation.
- Clear aims and objectives for the observation.
- Maintenance of confidentiality.
- Record of the observation presented clearly and appropriately.
- Appropriate conclusions that include information that links to: ages and stages of development, child development theory or norm where appropriate.
- An evaluation of the results of the observation in relation to identified theories or norms of child development.
- A description of how you would promote the child's development as a result of the observation, giving practical suggestions.
- Evidence of an understanding of anti-discriminatory/anti-bias practice where appropriate.

Suggestions for answers to the activity on p63.

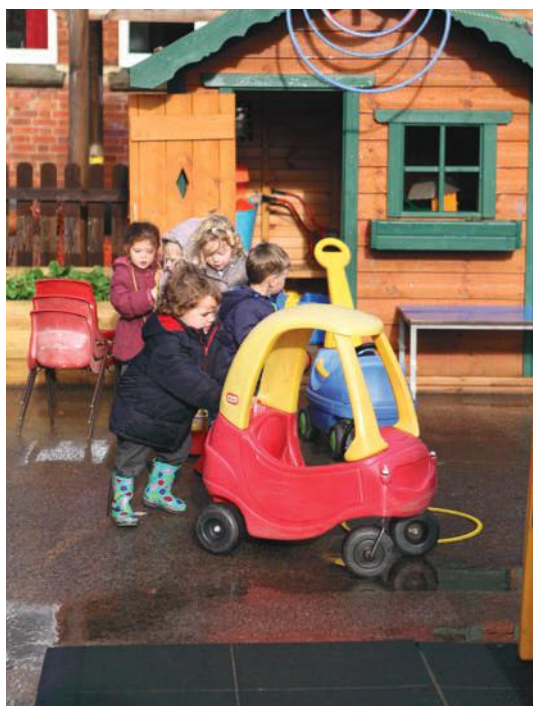
Some of the things you might have learned about Leah by reading the observation are:

Physical

- Good fine manipulative skills – pincer grasp.
- Good eye-hand co-ordination using implements.

Intellectual

- Good concentration.
- Understands concept of number.
- Understands mimed gestures.
- Shows imaginative skills – seeds in the pot become a 'cake'.
- Can spell out the letters of own name.
- Language essentially correct in pronunciation and tense.



References

- Development Matters in the EYFS* (2012)
- EYFS Profile Handbook* (2014): The British Association for Early Childhood Education
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