

Evaluating Observations

Learning Objectives

To begin to understand the evaluation process for completed observations.

Observation Process

- * Observe child/young person or situation collecting background information.
- * Record observation using a running commentary of the facts taking place at the time.
- * Evaluate what has taken place and substantiate with supporting evidence.
- * Conclude what has taken place and make recommendations for the future development of the child/young person.

Video - Beginning to Evaluate Observations



Read through your commentary

By now you should have undertaken and recorded some observations. Read through your records.

Were you:

- * Objective
- * Precise
- * Descriptive but not judgemental
- * Using present tense?

Were you able to record:

- * Facial expressions
- * Interactions with materials
- * Interactions with people (adults/children)
- * Body movements
- * Body language
- * Spoken language (using quotes)
- * Attention span

Interpretation

Once you have observed a child and recorded data about her/him in a running record, the next step is to **interpret** the information.

We need to **step back** and be **impartial** and **objective**.

Evaluating Observations

- * A high level skill requiring a great deal of thought and information in order to draw conclusions about what has been observed and understood.
- * Needs to be approached with an open mind and no preconceived ideas about the child/young person.
- * Everything is ruled in before anything is ruled out.
- * Look at all the information and compare it with known facts about published stages of development/ milestones/learning outcomes and theoretical perspectives before making recommendations for the future.

Evaluating your observation

Consider literature

“The children were aware that there was a difference in colour. This supports Piaget’s five stage theory of cognitive development, whereby Piaget stated that children age 4 to 7 years ‘begin to associate objects with each other and become aware of differences’” (cited by Sharman et al. 2000, pg 20).

Normative Measurements

- * All areas of development are compared to published normative measurements/ charts to give a good understanding of the individual child/young person.
- * While evaluating the child/young person's holistic development we would compare their development, skills and behaviour against individual areas and stages of development – Physical, Cognitive, Language, Social and Emotional.

Why we make links

```
graph TD; A[Why we make links] --- B[To gain increased knowledge of children's development and behaviour]; A --- C[To make a better evaluation for individuals and so make appropriate recommendations]; A --- D[It informs on our practice with children]; A --- E[It helps us in our professional studies of children]; A --- F[It helps us to avoid pitfalls and offers ideas for excellence for working with children]; A --- G[It helps us to deal with problems or hindrances that may confront the child and the practitioner]; A --- H[It helps us to see things as they really are and to cope with difficulties];
```

To gain increased knowledge of children's development and behaviour

To make a better evaluation for individuals and so make appropriate recommendations

It informs on our practice with children

It helps us in our professional studies of children

It helps us to see things as they really are and to cope with difficulties

It helps us to deal with problems or hindrances that may confront the child and the practitioner

It helps us to avoid pitfalls and offers ideas for excellence for working with children

How to make links

*Familiarise
yourself with child
development
theories and
theorists*

*Familiarise
yourself with the
child and his or
her ways*

*Connect with
parents who will
know all there is
to know about
their child*

*Find out as much
as you can about
the individual
circumstances of
the child*

*Keep an open
mind when
observing and
making
evaluations*

*During the evaluation
process, look at all the
possibilities or reasons
for behaviour and
development and make
the link to the theories
based on the facts that
you have observed and
understood – not just
because you want to
make a theoretical link*

Limitations of Published Norms

- * Normative measurements are only guidelines.
- * Each individual child/young person develops at their own pace.
- * Some children may have additional/individual needs.
- * Widely accepted that the published norms may be flawed as they are based on children without additional needs and on Westernised white children.
- * Milestones may not always be relevant to children with additional needs or those from different cultural backgrounds.

Cultural Differences

- * Chinese babies tend to be lighter in weight and smaller than white babies.
- * In some cultures babies and toddlers spend all their time with their mothers, even sleeping with them, so will react more strongly to separation.
- * Not all families eat using knives, forks and spoons, some use their fingers or chopsticks.
- * It is important to take into account factors which influence development when comparing a child/young person's development to the normative measurements.

Class Discussion

- * In pairs or small groups discuss the following and feedback to class:
- * What factors should be looked at when evaluating an observation?
- * What is another name for normative measurement?
- * Why is it important that normative measurement is used as a guideline?
- * What are the implications of not doing so?

Drawing Conclusions

- * Always focus on the positive aspects of the development and behaviour of children and young people.
- * Don't just look for negative aspects where norms may not yet be met.



When to Become Concerned

- * Persistent behaviour indicators
- * When behaviour or development is holding a child back
- * Changes in behaviour patterns
- * The child is not thriving
- * Physical signs of neglect
- * Anything which makes you concerned about a child/young person, especially if there are no improvements, following interventions

Recommendations

Observations are a tool for assisting your learning and provide a basis for planning children's progression, thus **recommendations** can be made
e.g. continue to provide opportunities for imaginative play.

Recommendations

- * Must always be appropriate for the child/young person or situation.
- * Have to be achievable and enable the child/young person to progress, or the situation to improve in a positive unhindered way.
- * Need to be based on a thorough understanding of how children/young people develop and behave.

Recommendations

- * Recommend activities/ experiences which will support the observed child's ongoing development.
- * Link recommendations to specific milestones/ learning outcomes.
- * Support recommendations with relevant child development theories.
- * Consider the role of the adult and or other children in supporting the child's future development and factors which might potentially influence this development.
- * Support your comments with citations from relevant literature.

What would you recommend?

- * A child cannot put on his own coat.
- * A child has difficulty catching and throwing a ball.
- * A child is unresponsive and has difficulty following simple instructions.
- * A child struggles to finish anything.
- * A child has difficulty settling in and becomes upset when left.
- * During a music and movement activity children are reluctant to take part and are easily distracted.

In general:

- * Be specific in your comments
- * Refer back to your aim/objectives
- * Do not make sweeping statements or assumptions about a child
- * Try to always be objective in your findings
- * Make use of available literature (milestones, theories and research) to support your evaluations, conclusions and recommendations

References

BEATY, J. (2006). Observing Development of the Young Child. Seventh Edition. Pearson Education Inc.

Carlton, L. (2005) A Practical Guide to Teaching Child Observation and Assessment: Tutor Support Pack.
Kettering: Nelson Thornes