

**Palomar College
Child Development
Department**

**CHDV 105
Observation, Assessment,
and Participation in Early
Childhood**

By Diane Studinka, MS

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Peer Reviewed by Kristin Beeve and Clinton Springer
Editors: Alexa Johnson & Trudi Radtke
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CHAPTER 1: OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION: THE KEY TO INTENTIONAL TEACHING

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. The Role of Observation
2. Becoming a Skilled Observer
3. Observations can be Spontaneous or Planned
4. Factors that Affect Observation

INTRODUCTION

To provide children with a safe and nurturing learning environment and to maintain program effectiveness, teachers must incorporate observation, documentation and assessment into their daily routines. To truly be effective, teachers must develop skills and strategies that are grounded in *best practices*.

Throughout this book, the "you" is considered either the observer and/or the teacher. "You" might be reading this book as a student taking an observation class through a college or university. "You" might be a teacher working in a classroom with young children zero to five years or zero to eight years. "You" might be a teacher or assistant in a classroom with young children referring to this book as you need to make observations on the children in your classroom. In addition to being a teacher, "you" might also be a student taking college-level classes. In other words, you are wearing two hats at once. So, the terms teacher and observer use throughout this textbook can be considered interchangeable depending on your role in the observation process.

In this chapter you will be presented with information that highlights how observation and documentation can be used as a key strategy to ensure intentional teaching. You will examine the initial steps to take to becoming a skilled observer, and you will reflect on how to objectively document the interactions that you see and the conversations that you hear. It is important to note that becoming a skilled observer takes time and practice, and that learning how to incorporate observation, documentation and assessment into your regular routines and daily duties requires some thoughtful consideration.

The Role of Observation

Observations are conducted every day in early childhood classroom environments. Teachers are constantly surveying the environment and completing safety checks to make sure the equipment and materials are safe for the children to use. Teachers also perform daily health

screenings to ensure their children are healthy enough to participate in program activities. Beyond the standard safety check and health screening, teachers have many other important tasks and duties that they must do in order to maintain a copasetic classroom environment.

Intentional teachers use their observations to plan and implement curriculum, set up engaging learning environments, monitor the children's social interactions, track behaviors, communicate with families, and assess each child's progress and development. Essentially, observations help teachers be more accountable.

By conducting regular observations intentional teachers can:

1. Make improvements to ensure quality practices
2. Plan and implement developmentally appropriate curriculum
3. Measure and assess a child's development
4. Evaluate program effectiveness
5. Evaluate teacher effectiveness
6. Develop respectful family partnerships
7. Understand the cultural practices and family structure
8. Select effective learning strategies to support and accommodate the diverse needs of children
9. Ensure ethical conduct and professional standards of practice
10. Teach with confidence

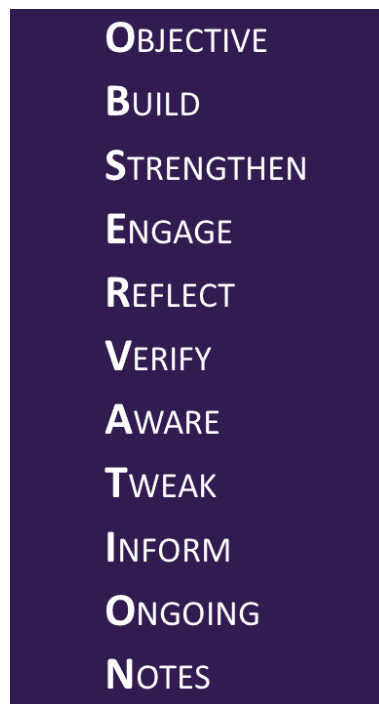


Figure 1.1: COC OER¹

¹ Image by [College of the Canyons ZTC Team](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)



Pin It! Observation

Observation is defined as “the process of gathering information about objects and events using senses of sight, smell, sound, touch and taste, noticing specific details or phenomena that ordinarily might be overlooked” (CDE, 2016 p. 64).²

According to Bentzen (2009) observation is “the ability to take in information through one or more of the five physical senses and to make sense of that information so that it can be used in meaningful ways” (p.4).

If we want to understand children, we must first watch them and listen to them. Then, we must try to make sense of what we observed and give it meaning. The role of observation is to provide teachers with information and evidence that they will need to make informed decisions on how to best support the children in their care. With each observation, you will get a glimpse into a child’s developing mind. Not only will you see a child’s personality emerge, you will be able to see what a child can do. As you watch your children, you will see how they problem solve when conflicts arise and how they cope with the stress from being in a group setting. You will learn about their individual needs and their cultural practices. When you watch children closely, their interests and abilities are revealed. With each observation, you will gain useful insight that will help you become an intentional teacher.

BECOMING A SKILLED OBSERVER

To truly observe a child, you must be present, knowledgeable, inquisitive and intentional. With every observation, you will sharpen your skills as you learn how to effectively gather objective evidence and detailed data.

Be present: To capture all the individual mannerisms, subtle social nuances, non-verbal body language and dynamic conversations that occur throughout the day you must be attentive, focused and ready to go at any given moment. Children move fast. When we blink, we are bound to miss some little detail or precious moment, that’s a given. Being present takes considerable effort and careful planning.

Be knowledgeable: Understanding the core concepts of early childhood education is extremely important if you are to set reasonable expectations and plan developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Familiarizing yourself with child development theories will help you understand and appreciate why children do what they do. Learning about the key principles in early care and education will provide you with a solid foundation and a wide range of instructional strategies to support a child’s development.

Be inquisitive: Think of yourself as a researcher. Your primary mission is to investigate the children in your care by routinely gathering evidence, using a variety of observation methods

² [The Integrated Nature of Learning](#) by the [CDE](#) is used with permission

and tools. As a good researcher you will need to ask some thoughtful questions. These questions will guide you as you plan purposeful observations and as you select your method of observation. Here are some sample questions you may ask yourself: *What activities interest Max? How many times did Stevie hit today? What skills did Hazel master today with this activity, and what skills need further support? How long did Zoey stay engaged while playing in the sandbox? What milestones will this activity support?* By asking thoughtful questions, you will learn more about the children in your care and you will do a better job at supporting each child's individual needs. Rather than fixating on a child's behavior, in time you will begin using focused observations to try and figure out the reasons why a child acts the way they do.

Be intentional: As you organize learning experiences, set up the classroom and outside environment, assess children's developmental progress, engage in activities, and interact with your children and families – you must have a thoughtful plan of action in place. "Intentional teaching means that everything you do as a teacher has a specific goal and purpose" (Gordon & Browne, 2016 p. 103). Even as spontaneous situations arise, intentional teachers must make the most of teachable moments. Intentional teachers conduct regular observations and gather objective documentation data to be accountable for the actions they take, the plans they generate and the assessments they make.

OBSERVATIONS CAN BE SPONTANEOUS OR PLANNED

Spontaneous observations occur all the time. Whether teachers are actively engaged with their children during an activity or in the background cleaning up after an activity, teachers have numerous opportunities to see and hear some wonderful developments as they randomly occur. According to Piaget, children require long uninterrupted periods of play and exploration so that they can discover things for themselves. If we truly believe that children are capable of socializing, problem solving, and creating complex systems with rules, then we can successfully use spontaneous observations to capture a child's development as it unfolds naturally.

As intentional teachers, we can also appreciate when teachable moments arise unexpectedly. These golden moments are noteworthy as well. For example, as we witness a child attempting to master a milestone, we may provide some verbal support or guidance to scaffold the child's learning. For example, when Abraham is becoming frustrated with not being able to get a piece of his puzzle to fit, a teacher might ask, "What happens when you turn the piece around?" During spontaneous situations, we must remember to simultaneously make mental notes so that we can later write down and reflect on a more formal plan of action that can be later used to help the child achieve their developmental goals.

Let's review the advantages and disadvantages associated with spontaneous observations.

Advantages: Being in the moment allows you to enjoy your children, and children appreciate your presence. When you are present, you can celebrate a child's success or provide positive

reinforcements to help them master major milestones. While being spontaneous, you can focus on the child's interests and pose thoughtful questions to extend and enrich their learning experience. When a teacher keeps a low profile, a child is less likely to be self-conscious or nervous.

Disadvantages: The longer you wait to document your spontaneous observation evidence, the harder it will be to remain objective and recall the vital details which is important when tracking behaviors or assessing development. Also, the more time that passes, the more difficult it will be to access accurate data. For example, by not documenting the children's dialogue or capturing their key quotes in a timely manner, you may find it difficult to remember their actual word choices and use of vocabulary which is essential for assessing a child's expressive language development.

Let's now discuss focused or **planned observations**. Becoming a skilled observer takes practice. At first you may be slightly overwhelmed with trying to incorporate an official observation time into your already busy schedule. You may struggle with finding that delicate balance between knowing when to interact with your children and realizing when to step back and observe. Once you do observe, you might be surprised by the amount of evidence you have collected on each child. What's more, you will have to sift through all the evidence, and that can be both time consuming and exhausting. Since your time is limited and you cannot possibly observe everything, incorporating a planned observation will help you navigate through your busy day and you will be able to gather more specific evidence (Grouland & James, 2013).

QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK YOURSELF AS YOU PLAN YOUR NEXT OBSERVATION

When should I observe?

From the moment a child walks into their classroom until the time they leave, opportunities to learn are occurring. Some observations will happen spontaneously, while others will be scheduled. To see a child's full potential, you will need to observe at various times throughout the day. For example, some children are slow-to-warm and it may take them some time to get acclimated before they can fully engage and interact with others. If a child is slow -to-warm, the morning drop-off may not be the best time to document their social development. You will want to track them throughout the day, at various times (including transition times and snack/meal times), to get a full picture of who they are and what they can do.

Where should I observe?

Many times, observations are centered around structured, teacher-directed activities. This is, in fact, a perfect time to witness what major milestones a child has mastered. However, observing a child while they are exploring in the dramatic play area (*inside*) or while they are in the sandbox area (*outside*) can prove to be just as enlightening. During child-directed play or open exploration, you will no doubt be able to document many of the developmental skills as

suggested in the DRDP or Rating Scales, especially how they communicate, cooperate, solve dilemmas and create. Because children can play and learn differently while they are inside as compared to when they are outside, it is necessary to observe in both environments. Likewise, it is important to observe in all activity areas and play spaces.

What observation method should I use?

Use a variety of methods to record and document your children. You will want to “try out” several tools and techniques to find your “go to” method. Because each tool has a specific purpose or focus, using a variety of methods will provide you with sound documentation data to better understand the whole child’s development. *Note:* In the next chapters, you will examine the various tools and techniques more closely.

Who should I observe?

You will want to observe each child as individuals, and you will want to track group interactions. Becoming aware of who is in your class is necessary if you are going to create a caring classroom community and respectful learning environment. *Look for those who are the leaders in your group; find out who needs more one-to-one support and who are your helpers; watch for who plays with who.* This insight can help you organize peer scaffolding opportunities which can free up some of your time.

As a gentle reminder, sometimes we connect with certain children for one reason or another, and other times a child may challenge us. Either way we need to regularly observe each child with an open mind and an open heart, and we need to look at children with a clear lens that is free of bias. Each child needs your attention; each child has unique gifts; and each child needs your support.

What is the focus of my observation, what am I looking for?

With focused observations, there usually is a specific goal in mind. For example, you might want to know what milestones a child has mastered. For that, you would use a developmental checklist to “check-off” all the skills the child was observed doing. Maybe you want to learn what the child’s interests are and what they like to play with. For that, you can use a frequency count to tally up all the areas and activities the child used during that observation. Keep in mind that you can observe several skills and competencies across multiple domains during one observation. For example, one day you might set out a math activity and the children are expected to create patterns using colorful beads and pipe cleaners. While they work and play, you can listen to the children’s conversations as they describe the patterns they are making; and you can note their fine motor development based on how well they string the beads onto the pipe cleaner; you can also see how they shared space and materials with their peers. Although this was a math activity, many other areas of development can be observed.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT OBSERVATION

Observation is not an easy task. It would be best if you considered personal and environmental factors that can affect your ability to observe young children effectively. These factors can be something temporary like you are not feeling well, or more life long, like a bias. Bentzen (2009) lists five areas that can affect your ability to observe in a classroom:

1. **Sensitivity and Awareness**- certain things will interfere with how you "see" the child. Some of us are more sensitive to certain things than others. Being aware of your sensitivity is essential to ensure accurate observations are being recorded.
2. **Fatigue, Illness, and Discomfort**- These factors can affect your ability to stay on task. You can become distracted and lose focus on what you are observing.
3. **Influence of Self or Personality**- Sorting out "you" from what you view. Individual attitudes, experiences, needs, desires, and fears act as filters that affect how you observe and what you notice when observing.
4. **Controlling our Biases**- Be aware of your biases. We all have them, so being aware of your biases can help you manage them. Be mindful of favorite children and children who display behaviors that challenge you. These children can cause us to lose our objectivity when recording observations.
5. **Setting and Situation**- These are factors that you generally do not have too much control over. A particular situation occurs in a setting. The setting is the physical space, and the setting is the social and psychological influences in a specific setting. The size of the room can make it difficult to hear a child across the room. If there are drums in the music area, it can also be challenging to listen to conversations. There is also a difference in the children on a rainy day versus a windy Santa-Ana day or a substitute teacher.

CONCLUSION

A new teacher can become overwhelmed during their first year of teaching. It takes time to become a skilled observer. You will find yourself spontaneously recording things children say and do on sticky notes and scrap pieces of paper. There will be times when a child displays behaviors that set off red flags or cause you concern. When this happens, you need to plan your observations ahead of time. The questions presented in this chapter will help you plan your classroom observations. If you are a student observer, you will use these questions to prepare for each method discussed later in this text. Lastly, no matter if you are a teacher, observer, or both, you will experience the various factors that affect observation. Know what the elements are so you can mitigate any consequences during your observation.

CHAPTER 2: OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION: THE KEY TO INTENTIONAL TEACHING

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. The Role of Documentation
2. Errors in the Observation Process
3. Objective Versus Subjective Observation Evidence
4. Recognizing Your Own Biases
5. Interpretation and Evaluation
6. Ethical Practices When Observing Children
7. Observation Dos and Don'ts

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces you to several important topics that you will be utilizing throughout the class. In order to be considered a high-quality program or classroom, a teacher must observe children on a regular basis to provide documentation to share with parents, administrators, and outside agencies like a state and local department of education. Various methods will be introduced to you here and expanded upon in upcoming chapters and sections of this book. It will take time for you to learn how to avoid errors in the observation process and write objective versus subjective observations. This chapter will introduce you to these concepts. It is essential to recognize your biases, as you observe. You want to be sure you are being fair and equitable to all children in your classroom or children you are observing. As you become more aware of any bias you might have, you will be able to interpret and evaluate children's behavior more accurately. Lastly, there are some ethical considerations and do's and don'ts that all teachers and observers of young children must abide by.

THE ROLE OF DOCUMENTATION

One of the cornerstones of a high-quality early care and education program is the practice of observing, documenting and assessing children's development. According to NAEYC (2009), in order to make formative decisions that will guide what goes on in the classroom, there needs to be an organized system in place to collect information. When we record our observations and collect data, we "hold in memory the actions, nonverbal communication, or comments that seem to be significant to children's thinking" (California Preschool Program Guidelines, 2015 p. 46). When we document children's learning and collect key artifacts, we create tangible evidence that we can share with the children and their families, along with administrators and stakeholders. There are many ways you can record and document children's learning. In fact, you should attempt to utilize several methods as part of your regular observation routines.

To collect and record data you can use the following methods:

- Running Records
- Anecdotal Records
- Time Sampling
- Event Sampling
- Frequency Counts
- Duration Records
- Checklists
- Rating Scales
- Collecting work samples
- Taking photos, videotaping, or audio recordings

To store your documentation

To safely store your collected data, you will need to have an organized system in place. Portfolios are a popular strategy used by intentional teachers. To create a portfolio, you can use a binder or notebook, a file or accordion-style folder, or a cardboard box. As you collect observation evidence for each child, it is vital that you date everything so you can organize it chronologically. This will help you track each child's progress throughout the school year more efficiently. Portfolios help you construct a well-rounded and authentic picture of each child in your class. Knowing the "whole child" you are better equipped to build on each child's individual interests, and you are more apt to plan developmentally appropriate activities.

Each child should have their own portfolio. Portfolios can either be hard copy, where you actually have physical documentation or digital, such as using a Google Doc or other digital format. In addition, there are other electronic resources, such as Learning Genie, which can assist a teacher in storing and sharing portfolio information with parents, paraprofessionals, administrators, and state agencies.

A well-organized portfolio will contain observations and artifacts of children's work that are collected at different time periods throughout the school year. It is recommended that you include some type of documentation that highlights each developmental domain. For example:

- **Gross Motor:** Take photographs of your child while they are engaged in outside activities like running, jumping, climbing, riding a bike or playing in the sandbox.
- **Fine Motor:** Keep a checklist of when your child learns to button, zip, and tie his shoes. Include work samples of their cutting, coloring, painting, and samples of emergent writing
- **Social-Emotional:** Write anecdotal notes when your child engages in open-ended, child-directed play. Take note of how they share and cooperate with others. Do a frequency count to see which centers your child chooses to spend their time in and tally their play patterns to see if they prefer to play alone or with others.
- **Cognitive:** Chart a science experiment and take photos. Photograph a completed puzzle. Use a video camera to record a child as she builds a block bridge. And, as she explains her process and she had to figure out all the steps to take so that the bridge wouldn't fall down – be sure to record that too.
- **Literacy and Oral language:** Save writing examples to track how the child writes her name. Include illustrations of stories they love and the stories they write themselves.

Write down quotes in your running record or make audiotapes of conversations during circle time.

- **Creative expression:** Videotape your child while playing in the dramatic play area or while performing a dance during music and movement. Photograph a clay creation, painting or block tower.

To be clear, it isn't the amount of documentation you collect for each portfolio that matters, it's the quality of information you gather. Portfolios tell a story of the whole child. There should be a beginning, middle, and an end. Each work sample, anecdotal note, checklist, frequency count and sampling should be used to showcase how a child processes information, develops relationships, and learns while playing.

To document children's learning

Whether you collect evidence through spontaneous or planned observations, you will use your documentation to ultimately assess a child's learning, growth, and development. With well-organized documentation, intentional teachers can effectively communicate with a child's family, using the evidence and artifacts they have collected over time. Families appreciate being able to see their child's progression and how they interact with others. Families also enjoy seeing the types of activities their child engages in during a typical day at school. Here are a few ways documentation can be used to showcase a child's learning, growth and development:

- rating scales and formal developmental assessments
- daily progress reports
- documentation boards

Header Information: As you begin to record observations and collect samples, it is important to record specific information for tracking and documentation purposes. This information is referred to as the header information. Every observation must include the following categories in the header:

1. Child's Name and Age- can use a code if there are concerns about confidentiality
2. Date – this is key in tracking development over time
3. Time – start time and end time of the specific observation
4. Setting – note the location (indoor or outdoor; center or play area)
5. Situation- social and psychological characteristics present in the setting
6. Domain of Development- Approaches to Learning, Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy Development, English Language Development (if applicable), Cognition including Math and Science, Physical Development and Health, History-Social Science, and Visual and Performing Arts. These domains of development are the same domains from the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) from the California Department of Education.

Here is an example of a way to set up the header for all of your observations:

Name:	Teacher:	Date:
Age:	Domain of Dev:	Time:
Setting:		
Situation:		



Pin It! Teacher Tips When Gathering your Documentation

- Record only the facts – Write down exactly what you see and hear
- Be as concise (to the point) as you can
- Record the FACTS and only the facts in the order as they occur
- Be descriptive and provide vivid details -create a visual picture so others can “see” what is happening
- Be specific and avoid vague or general terms – this is helpful when you go back to review your data

ERRORS IN THE OBSERVATION PROCESS

There are three common errors in the observation process: transmission, omission, and commission (Bentzen, 2009). It is crucial that you know and understand these errors to record objective observations of the children. These errors occur in the recording process.

The first and most common error is the **error of transmission**. This is when you record behaviors out of sequence. For instance, you observe a child in the block area pick up a block and hit another child. What happened is the other child called the child who hit a "big bad guy." This happened just before the child picked up the block and hit the child who called them the name. In your observation, you record the following, "___ picked up a block and hit ___ in the block area. ___ called ___ 'big bad guy,' and the teacher came over to tend to the hurt child."

The name-calling should have been stated before the block hitting. This is an example of the error of transmission.

The second error in the recording process is the **error of omission**. This is when you leave out important information. This can happen when you are not carefully observing, coming onto the scene halfway through, or looking down as you are writing out the first part of the observation.

Many times, this error occurs with weak note-taking. It is difficult to observe and record at the same time. The more you observe and record, your skills will improve.

If you do not have enough information, maybe you should not record the observation. If we go back to the example above with the child who hit with a block and the child who called the other a name, an error of omission can be recorded like this, "___ said something to ___, and ___ picked up a block and hit them with it." The word "something" is omitting exactly what the child called the one who hit.

Leaving out "big bad guy" could prompt the reader to think the child, who hit was the instigator when, in reality, the name-caller is the one who provoked the child who hit.

The third error in the recording process is the **error of commission**. This is when the observer adds more to the observation. The observer may "think" something happened in one way and record "their version" instead of what happened. Another instance might occur when an inexperienced observer adds more to the observation because they think the director or parent will want more information. Using the same example, the observer will make the error of commission by recording the following observation, "___ was sitting in the block area playing with the blocks. ___ was playing with a car and driving it all around the block area. At one point, ___ said to ___, "You are a big bully, and I don't like you. You are a big bad guy." ___ picked up a block and hit ___ with it. If the child didn't say all of this, as the observer, you do not record what you think the child said. You only record what you heard and observed.

These three errors often occur, especially for the person just learning how to observe. It is important to remember to record just the facts, only the facts, and nothing but the facts! The more accurate you are in recording your observations will benefit the child.

OBJECTIVE VERSUS SUBJECTIVE OBSERVATION EVIDENCE

Intentional teachers must learn how to write objective observations. As you observe, it is best to write down all that you see and hear, and report just the facts. It takes practice to learn how to separate facts from opinions. Here are some helpful tips for you to review:

Table 1.1: Objective Observations vs. Subjective Observations

Objective Observations	Subjective Observations
Objective observations are based on what we observed using our senses, we record exactly what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell	Subjective observations are often influenced by our past events, personal experiences and opinions, and can be biased based on our cultural backgrounds

Objective Observations	Subjective Observations
Objective information is based on the facts we gather. If we don't see it, we don't report it. We report only details and provide vivid descriptions	Subjective information is based on our opinions, assumptions, personal beliefs, prejudice feelings or can be based on suspicions, rumors and guesses
Results are more likely to be valid and reliable from child to child	Results are often inconsistent and vary from child to child
Objective Terms that can be Used: Seems to be; Appears to	Subjective Words to Avoid: Just; because; but; always, never; can't; I think; happy, smart, helpful, pretty, angry, shy, likes, loves, hates, sad

RECOGNIZING YOUR BIASES

Google the word bias and this is what pops up: “prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair.”

Biases, we all have them. Biases stem from our upbringing. Every interaction and every experience we have had has shaped who we are. To some degree, our biases influence our beliefs and behaviors, they sway our attitudes, and they affect our personalities. Because our biases are so ingrained into who we are, it would be unrealistic to simply say “ignore your bias.” Therefore, a valuable exercise might be to do a self-check and examine your own biases. Look for those biases that are “triggers.” More specifically, think about the behaviors, temperamental traits, and moods that make you feel uncomfortable, frustrated, or annoyed.

It is important to note, that we might not be fully aware of all our biases. For example, when a child says, “give me some milk!” Our first response might be “Ummm, how do you ask?” We might not realize that manners (or lack of them) can make us react in a judgmental way. What’s important to recognize is that how we feel about the child’s behavior can taint how we see them. What’s more, our biases can influence how we gather our observation evidence. As intentional teachers we have to recognize our biases so we can treat all children with the respect that they deserve. According to NAEYC’s Code of Ethical Conduct and Statement of Commitment (2011),

P-1.3—We shall not participate in practices that discriminate against children by denying benefits, giving special advantages, or excluding them from programs or activities on the basis of their sex, race, national origin, immigration status, preferred home language, religious beliefs, medical condition, disability, or the marital status/family structure, sexual orientation, or religious beliefs or other affiliations of their families (p. 3).

So as not to lose our objectivity, it is important to keep an open heart, an open mind, and a clear lens. Rather than letting a child’s behavior trigger you, look beyond their behavior, look

beyond your bias. Focus on collecting objective observation evidence and use that data to reflect on what might be causing that behavior. Consider ways that you can support the child through redirection, modeling, scaffolding or positive reinforcements. As intentional teachers, one of our primary roles is to empower children, and to build meaningful relationships by creating warm, caring environments (Epstein, 2007).



Pin It! Common Mistakes to Avoid When Writing Observation Evidence

- **Making Conclusions:** Billie can't do anything by himself *because* he is the youngest in a large family and they do everything for him; Sharon's parents are getting a divorce, *so she is sad*
- **Making Assumptions:** Annie *never* shares; Denise *always* hits Thomas
- **Labeling:** Rosie *is mean*; Jeff is such a *good boy*
- **Comparing:** Tommy *can't* ride the bike *as well as* Sam; Zoey was *the best* listener at circle time
- **Focusing on Feelings or Emotions:** Max looks so *sad* today; Jax looks so *happy* as he slides down the slide
- **Adding Opinions:** Martha *really likes* playing dress up, she is in the dramatic play area every day; Suki *is shy* and never says anything during circle time.

INTERPRETATION AND EVALUATION

As humans, we interpret the world around us each minute we are awake. For instance, have you ever sat on a park bench and "people watched"? Of course, we have all watched other people interact as we sat by and made interpretations.

Interpretation means going beyond our own objective descriptions and explaining or giving them some meaning (Bentzen, 2009). For instance, if you were sitting on a park bench and saw an elderly woman fall and the person next to them helped pick them up, you might interpret that observation to yourself: "That person is very kind and caring. Not everyone would have wanted to get involved and help that woman." This is an example of interpreting an observation.

Another way of thinking about interpretation is to add an explanation. If you think about interpretation/explanation together, you can expand the definition to a way to attempt to provide additional information that might make your objective descriptions more meaningful (Bentzen, 2009).

If we go back to the example where the elderly woman fell, and your interpretation was the person who helped her up was "kind and caring," do you really know if this person was kind or caring? Not really.

You observed the person who helped in one situation. You cannot create an accurate interpretation after only one observation. To accurately interpret a person's ability or inability, one must observe multiple times in various situations before making any interpretation or explanation.

Observing young children more than once is required before you, as the observer can interpret or try to explain the child's behavior. If you interpret too early before you have made multiple observations, you could very well be mistaken. This mistake could lead to a faulty evaluation.

Evaluation is a very dangerous part of the observation process. This is where the observer applies their values and attitudes to the child's behaviors, characteristics, and personality (Bentzen, 2009). The evaluation process is a time when labels can be thrown out when discussing the child's behavior.

Labels can be damaging to the child and family. For instance, if you observe a four-year-old child during the first week of school and label the child "unwilling to participate," you could be judging the child without all the facts. Separation anxiety is very common in the first weeks of school for a young child, especially if this is the first time they are in a group care situation. A label of "unwilling to participate" was made too hastily, and the child was not given enough time to adjust to the new situation.

As you observe young children, you will be required to interpret and evaluate the child's behaviors. The interpretations/evaluations must be made after multiple observations have been recorded on the child. Then and only then, the observer must separate the objective description of the behavior from the interpretation/evaluation (I/E). There are multiple ways of formatting your observations to keep objective descriptions separate from interpretation/evaluation. One of the easiest ways is to include the interpretation/evaluation right after the observations.

The following chart gives an example of how to keep observations and I/E separate:

Name:	Teacher:	Date:
Age:	Domain of Dev:	Time:
Setting:		
Situation:		

Observation:

Interpretation/Evaluation:

Another example could be to use two boxes:

Observation	Interpretation/Evaluation

ETHICAL GUIDELINES WHEN OBSERVING CHILDREN

Every day, teachers observe, record and capture essential moments in a child's development. The evidence and artifacts that are gathered are then used to plan curriculum and assess development. Although we have highlighted the importance of gathering work samples and observation evidence as a key element to be an intentional teacher, we must also consider the perspective of the child. In the article "Who is Watching? Thinking Ethically about Observing Children" the authors highlight some of the ethical tensions that can arise within early childhood settings when trying to balance the rights of children, the responsibilities of teachers and the role of a student who is training to be a future teacher.

In most classrooms, a typical day includes teachers grabbing their cameras to take snapshots of the children in their care so that they will have ample documentation. Consider this - does the teacher's presence change the context of the child's experience? Does the thought of being monitored make the child behave any differently? How does the child feel about having their picture taken? Are teachers becoming overly concerned about capturing children in precious moments, rather than being engaged in teachable moments? As a "student" who is learning to observe and document a child's development it is important for you to consider the following guidelines when observing children:

- Take every precaution to maintain confidentiality and to ensure privacy
- Remember to ask if it is OK to take photographs of children and their work
- Understand that children have the right not to take part in activities
- Be respectful and keep a reasonable amount of space between you and the child so as not to interfere with their play and learning
- Be attuned to children's body language, temperament and styles of communication
- See each child as a unique individual who has their own perspective, set of feelings, interests, and way of socializing, along with their own cultural context, belief system, and values
- Be upfront and inform children about the purpose of your observation visit if you are approached
- Share information with the child about what you have observed when appropriate

- Write quotes down just as they were said without adding context, or trying to rationalize what the child may have meant
- Be aware that photos and observation data should be collected in a non-intrusive manner
- Ensure that observation evidence and photos are used only for the purposes intended
- Handle photos and data with care and sensitivity, and always store information securely
- Realize that a child's reactions, behaviors and conversations may not be what you expect and therefore you should refrain from being judgmental or tainted by your cultural biases

By following these guidelines, you are providing the children you observe with the respect they deserve while ensuring their dignity and safety. The centers and programs where you are observing are trusting you to act with integrity while you are at their site observing their children. Lastly, families will appreciate that you have their child's best interest at heart.



Figure 1.2³Observing the world through a different lens

³ Image by [Andrew Seaman](#) on [Unsplash](#)

OBSERVATION AND DOCUMENTATION DOS AND DON'TS

Whether performing a planned or spontaneous observation here are some helpful tips to ensure you are recording quality evidence:

Table 1.2: Observation and Documentation Do's and Don'ts

Observation and Documentation DOs:	Observation and Documentation DON'Ts
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Note the date, time, setting, and situation2. Note the child (or children) involved and ages3. Record only the facts – in a concise (to the point) manner4. Record the facts in the order as they occur and exactly as you see it5. Collect vivid details and quotes6. Use a variety of Observation Methods7. Observe with an open heart, an open mind and a clear lens, free of bias8. Be attentive and alert, and use all your senses9. Note what the child CAN DO rather than what he cannot do10. Keep a low profile and respect the children's space while they are playing	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do not interfere or pressure the children to perform2. Do not assume or state your opinion while recording evidence3. Do not record anything you do not see4. Avoid making the errors of transmission, omission, or commission5. Do not label behaviors, actions or feelings6. Avoid using subjective, bias or judgmental terms7. Avoid using exaggerations and conditional words8. Do not summarize information9. Avoid using generalizations or vague terms10. Keep interpretations and evaluations separate from the actual observation

CONCLUSION

To become a skilled observer takes time and practice (Gronlund & James, 2013). You will need to figure out your rhythm so that you can incorporate observation and documentation into your regular routine. As an intentional teacher, you will want to plan systematic observations so that you can document each child's unique qualities, interests, developmental strengths and needs, as well as uncover their cultural practices, approaches to learning and play preferences throughout the school year. As you gather evidence you will want to be as objective as you can be, and you will have to recognize your biases. As you collect your documentation on each child, you will want to organize it in a chronological manner and store it safely. Lastly, be sure to observe every child in your class, be aware that some children may catch your attention more than others for one reason or another. In the next chapter, we will examine several observation tools and techniques that you will want to use as part of your regular observation routine to ensure high-quality practices.

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CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF OBSERVATION

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. What is a Method for Observation?
2. Features of Methods of Observation
3. Types of Methods of Observation

INTRODUCTION

Going to the grocery store is one of those tasks we must do regularly. Have you ever noticed a difference in grocery shopping when you have a list versus when you do not make a list? When you have a list in hand, you go into the store with a plan of action. If you shop at that store regularly, you know where to start in the store, pick up the items you need efficiently, check it off your list, and leave knowing you purchased the things you need. When you go to the store without a listing, you end up wandering around, walking up and down every aisle, making sure you see all of the products not to miss something. A trip to the grocery store without a list tends to add more time to your trip and generally more items to your cart. It is not as efficient. We can apply some of these same concepts to the methods of observation.

WHAT IS A METHOD FOR OBSERVATION?

When we discuss methods in the observational process, we are talking about the "How to do it" part of the process. The word method refers to "a way, technique, or process of or for doing something; a careful or organized plan that controls the way something is done; a plan" (Merriam Webster, n.d.). In the context of observation, you must decide what method to use when observing a child.

We will discuss several methods in this text, and you will employ them as an observer and teacher. You must know which method is the best one to use, depending on the circumstances. Each method has unique characteristics. Some methods are better to use in certain situations. For instance, if you want to get a baseline for behavior modification, you would use a frequency count. If you are going to see how much a child is progressing with their language, you might use a checklist combined with anecdotes. Before choosing your method, you must make some initial observations to decide which method would work best depending on the behaviors you want to observe. From this point, you will plan and decide on the method to use in a specific situation based on the child's behaviors.

FEATURES OF METHODS OF OBSERVATION

For the new observer or teacher, picking the right method can be overwhelming. To help you decide which method will work best, you can refer to the following features that categorize methods into different groups. These features include open-ended versus closed-ended, degree of selectivity, and degree of inference. Each method has different levels or amounts of these features.

An observer can figure out if a method is **open-ended or closed-ended** by asking yourself, "Can I add more to the observation?" Adding more to an observation refers to raw data. **Raw data** are the descriptions, observations, documentation of the behaviors, and events as they initially occurred (Bentzen, 2009). Raw data is the objective description you record as your observation of the child. Your notes and the written documentation are raw data. As you begin to learn about the various methods for observing, you will find some methods are more open-ended, like the narrative and anecdotal, and other methods are more closed-ended, like the frequency count and rating scale. For instance, with an anecdotal, you can add more information to the method if you decide to observe for a longer time and document what you see and hear. On the other hand, a frequency count is tallying the number of times a child does something. There is no raw data (no objective description) when recording this method, so it is considered a closed-ended method.

Another feature of the methods of observation is the degree of selectivity. **Degree of selectivity** is a feature of observation and recording methods that determines how many behaviors are targeted for observing at one time (Bentzen, 2009). The question to ask yourself when considering the degree of selectivity is, "Am I observing everything the child is doing and saying, or am I only focusing on a specific behavior?" Methods of observation vary in their degree of selectivity. For instance, a narrative is unselective because you will observe all of the child's behaviors simultaneously. Everything the child does and says during the narrative observation should be written down. An example of a selective method would be an event sampling. When you observe a child using event sampling, you are focusing your observations only on one behavior. A teacher might choose to use an event sampling when a child in their classroom hits other children. The teacher would be selective in only observing the child and recording the event sampling when the child hits or acts aggressively toward other children. You will consider the degree of selectivity when deciding which observation method is best to use in a situation.

The final feature for the methods of observation is the **degree of inference**. According to Merriam Webster (n.d.) the definition of inference is "a conclusion or opinion that is formed because of known facts or evidence." As a teacher, you will use inference daily.

When you write your interpretation/evaluation, you are using inference. Inference is a conclusion based directly on observable data, premises, or evidence, but it is not directly observable (Bentzen, 2009). When you reach that conclusion or opinion, you do it as a cognitive process. To determine the degree of inference, ask yourself when observing a toddler, "Is 'blubblubbl' language or not?" The answer to this question is it depends. If the child says,

"bllbulubbl" while pointing to their bottle on the counter, we will infer the child is attempting to use language in this observation. Now, if the child says, "bllbulubbl" while running around the playground, we would infer the child is not using language. The sound bllbulubbl is more of an expression of excitement than a word in this situation. As the observer, we must infer how the child is using "bllbulubbl."

TYPES OF METHODS OF OBSERVATION

When a child demonstrates a behavior or type of behaviors, a teacher must decide which method of observation will be the best to use to gain the most raw data and objective descriptions to determine the next steps. There are some methods you will use daily and other methods that will be used less frequently. One example of a method used on a daily basis is the anecdotal record. Anecdotes are practical and useful for the classroom teacher. A method like time sampling can be used by classroom teachers, but on a much less frequent basis. There are eight methods that all early childhood educators should know, understand, and use in a classroom. These methods include:

- 1.) Running Records
- 2.) Anecdotes
- 3.) Time Sampling
- 4.) Event Sampling
- 5.) Frequency Counts
- 6.) Duration Records
- 7.) Checklists
- 8.) Rating Scales

The following chapters will include detailed descriptions on how to observe using the method, characteristics of each method, how to collect and organize your raw data, examples of formatting, and the advantages and disadvantages for each method.

CONCLUSION

Having a list before grocery shopping will keep you on track and make your experience more productive. When you observe young children, knowing your plan or method before you observe is critical to ensure you get the most from the observation. The observation process features, open-ended versus closed-ended, degree of selectivity, and the degree of inference are all critical for the observer to understand before observing. These features will be used when determining the appropriate method to use. The following chapters will explore each method in detail and give you specific examples of how to create a proper format for use in the classroom.

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CHAPTER 4: USING OBSERVATION METHODS, TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES TO GATHER EVIDENCE

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. Taking the First Step: Gathering Baseline Data
2. Understanding the Child
3. Let's Get Started
4. A Closer Look at Observation Methods, Tools and Techniques

INTRODUCTION TO CHAPTERS 4 TO 14

Observing children as they play, learn, and socialize with others is an integral part of every early educator's daily routine. According to the California Preschool Program Guidelines, when early caregivers and preschool teachers "regularly observe and document brief, subtle moments of children's learning through play, those records help parents and others understand how useful and important play is in helping children to learn and grow" (p. 32-33). In this chapter, we will examine the various observation methods, tools and techniques that can be used to gather information about the children in your care. Although teachers may favor one method over the other, it is recommended that teachers utilize several methods, tools and techniques so that they can gather a well- rounded perspective of each child. To truly understand the "whole child" it is important to realize that observation and documentation is an ongoing process that begins with gathering "baseline data."

TAKING THE FIRST STEP: GATHERING BASELINE DATA

In order to truly measure the learning, growth, and development of a child over time, there needs to be a *point of reference*, or a starting point. Baseline data provides a starting point. As recommended by the California Department of Education, in the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP), to establish a baseline, children should be observed "within 60 calendar days of enrollment and [formally assessed] every 6 months thereafter" (DRDP, 2015, p. ii). More specifically, any time a child starts your program, or any time you introduce a new concept, topic or theme, it would be beneficial to gather baseline data. With each observation the goal is to track - ***What the child can do***. Then, as we review each observation, we further consider ***what the child has the potential to do***. Knowing specific details about how the child responds to the activities we have planned, and how the child is interacting with their peers,

allows intentional teachers to make informed decisions that are in the best interest of the child. Baseline data allows us to create individualized activities and enriched learning opportunities and set up engaging environments where each child can feel empowered, challenged and well cared for.

Here is an example:

Aaron is 3.5 years old and this is his first time in preschool. To see whether Aaron can write his name, you would set out writing materials (markers or crayons, paper and possibly stencils), and you would observe Aaron at the writing center. To gather baseline data, you could use an Anecdotal Note to record how Aaron holds the markers – is he using the palmer grasp or the pincher grasp? Is he using his right or left hand? You would also want to note what Aaron created - did he write his name, draw a picture or scribble? If Aaron scribbled, he might not be ready to use lined paper to write his name or to journal a story. Rather than planning an activity that would require Aaron to write between the lines, it may be more beneficial to plan activities that would help him further develop his fine motor skills. Perhaps you would set out activities that would build his pincher grasp like play dough or stringing beads. Once you observe Aaron's progression and his "signs of readiness", then you would reintroduce writing between the lines.

UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD

Many of the same tools and techniques you use to gather baseline data, you will continue to use to support the whole child. This includes screening, planning curriculum, and assessing development. Every observation you complete provides valuable information that you can use to be more intentional and more responsive. When we observe the children in our care, we can learn about their:

- interests, abilities and preferences
- developmental skill level (cognitive, language, social, emotional, physical)
- Dual Language Learners (DLL)
- how they strategize in social situations
- how they approach learning opportunities (possible disability)
- personality and temperament

LET'S GET STARTED

Whether you are doing a planned observation, or you decide to do a spontaneous observation, you will need some essentials. An intentional teacher is a prepared teacher, and here are a few things you will need:

1. **Something to write on** – paper, sticky notes, color coded index cards, clipboard, notebook
2. **Something to write with** – colored ink pens, sharpie markers
3. **Something to record with** – photo camera, video camera, tape recorder, printer

4. **Something to store your documentation in** – a filing cabinet, accordion file folder, portfolio
5. **Blank observation tool templates** – checklists, frequency counts, ABC, anecdotal notes
6. **Some extras** – tape, stickers, paper clips, stapler, batteries, dictionary

A CLOSER LOOK AT OBSERVATION METHODS, TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

No single observation can give you all the information you will need about a child's development. In order to truly understand a child's unique attributes, preferences, personality and strengths, you must observe them consistently, using several documentation tools and techniques. Each observation method has strengths and limitations. In this section, we will review some of the more commonly used techniques and tools that teachers use to gather objective observation evidence: Running Record; Anecdotal; Time Sampling, Event Sampling Frequency Count; Duration Record; Checklists; Rating Scales; Work Sample; and Technology.



Figure 3.1 Notetaking is one of the oldest forms of recording observations⁴

As you begin to purposefully and objectively observe young children in the classroom, you will start to tune-in to the children in ways you have never before experienced. You will find yourself thinking about observation even before you write it down. The following chapters will detail the ten methods, so you will have a wide variety of tools to use at your disposal when observing young children.

⁴ Image by [Glenn Carstens-Peters](#) from Unsplash

CHAPTER 5: RUNNING RECORDS TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Running Records
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

RUNNING RECORD

One of the oldest observation methods used in early child education is the Running Record. Running Records are considered by some as an “informal method” of observation as compared to *Narrative Description* or *Specimen Records* which are considered to be a more “formal method” of collecting data. The primary difference between the two methods is that with a Running Record, evidence is gathered in a more spontaneous (informal) manner as it occurs, whereas with a Narrative Description a (formal) plan would be arranged in advance, prior to the observation. More specifically, you would schedule a day, time and setting, you would select a specific child or group of children, and you would decide on the purpose, reason or focus of your observation (e.g. cognitive skills, social interactions, play patterns). Both methods provide rich, detailed evidence and both methods provide written accounts of everything you see and hear a child doing during a specific timeframe (Bentzen, 2009).

For the purpose of this text, we will use the term Running Record and recommend that you, as an intentional teacher, conduct Running Records (whether spontaneous or planned, informal or formal) as part of your regular or routine observations. The primary goal for using a Running Record is to “obtain a detailed, objective account of behavior without inference, interpretations, or evaluations” (Bentzen, 2009, p.112). You will know you have gathered good evidence when you can close your eyes and you can “see” the images in your mind as they are described in your Running Record (Bentzen, 2009).

Collecting Your Data

All you need is time, paper and a pen to gather your observation evidence. The goal with a running record is to write down continuously (everything) you see and hear - exactly as it occurs, without adding any comments or attaching any opinions. As the saying goes, “just the facts, ma’am!” With the Running Record format, not only will you highlight children’s behaviors, you will record the “setting, situation and sequence” in which the behavior occurred.

Be as descriptive as possible and yet be as concise as possible. Children move quickly, so **you must write quickly**. When conducting a Running Record, you need to be out of ratio. You are to step back and observe from a distance. Do not interfere with the child's natural play, do not ask questions and do not run after them. Be as invisible as possible.

As you record your Running Record observations, think about how you can convey to your reader exactly what you are seeing and hearing the child do and say. The chief goal for a Running Record is **DETAIL**. Your reader should have a mental picture of the scene you are describing. This can be difficult, but with practice, your running record skills will improve.

Running records have no limits, but it is important to remember practical considerations. For instance, a teacher **continuously recording** what the child does and says for more than an hour straight is not practical. Most Running Record should be up to 20 minutes in length. Anything past 20 minutes is difficult for one observer to record both physically (hand begins to hurt) and mentally (you start to lose focus). This is when you can make errors of omission, transmission, and commission.

Running Records are considered an informal method of observation. Running Record are unselective since you are observing and recording everything the child is doing and saying. The amount of inference is minimal. Since you are observing everything during the 20-minute period, you do not need to infer if a behavior is something to record or not. Everything is being recorded.

Organizing your Data

As you collect rich, detailed data throughout the school year, you will begin to recognize patterns of development, and you will see each child's unique attributes, personalities, and abilities as they emerge. Be sure to date all your running records; having 12-24 children in your classroom can add up to a lot of running records. You will need to store your Running Records safely in a portfolio or file folder. When it comes time to assess a child's development, you will be able to look back and review all the evidence you have collected and to monitor the child's progress over time. If your program uses the DRDP, you will be able to incorporate the observations from the Running Records into one or more of the eight domains.

Note: A Running Record is an ideal observation method for "students". Classroom teachers may not always have the time or staff coverage to conduct a Running Record. Running Records should be used when you have a child whose behavior is puzzling to you. By recording for an extended period of time, you will get a better idea of their overall development.

Table 5.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Running Records

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provides detailed data about the who, what, where, and when2. Evidence is documented as it occurs, in a sequence3. Provides objective and descriptive evidence4. Appropriate for gathering baseline information about the child's interests, abilities and skill level5. Ideal for tracking a child's development over time6. Raw data becomes more valuable over time because you can compare past running records to current observations.7. Less structured, more-free flowing8. Evidence can be gathered formally or informally9. Interpretations and reflections can be added later	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Time consuming and staff energy2. Expense if teacher needs a substitute to remain in ratios, while they observe the child for an extended time3. May be difficult to keep up and follow along as children move quickly from one activity to another4. Not a practical technique for teachers who are in ratio5. Behaviors may not be typical for that observation day as compared to other days

Running Record Format Examples

Name:	Teacher:	Date:
Age:	Domain of Dev:	Time:
Setting:		
Situation:		

(This is just an example of a format. For college classroom purposes, you will be typing your observations.)

Running Record	
Observation	
9:00 AM	
9:03 AM	
9:05 AM...	
Interpretation/Evaluation	

Example Running Record:

Name: Amelia	Teacher: Sylvie	Date: August 30
Age: 4	COR: Geometry Shapes and Spatial Awareness	Time: 2:35 PM- 2:55 PM
Setting: San Marcos ECELS Inside classroom- Puzzle Area		
Situation: Children are given 30 minutes free playtime after naptime		

2:35 PM- Amelia is sliding a puzzle off the puzzle shelf prominently with her right hand while supporting it with her left. She successfully slides the puzzle out of the horizontal shelf without dropping any puzzle pieces. The puzzle is a 6'x 6' blue butterfly-shaped puzzle with approximately twenty pieces. She is holding the puzzle piece with both hands and takes three steps away from the shelf. She bends her upper body while extending both hands away from her torso and pushes the puzzle towards the floor. After Amelia places the puzzle on the floor, she rises back from the floor and sits crisscross applesauce in front of the puzzle. She flips the puzzle upside down, so all the puzzle pieces are still formed like a butterfly on the floor. She flips the board right side up and places it to the right of the puzzle pieces. She uses her right hand to pick up the first puzzle piece that belongs to the wing of the butterfly. She starts from the bottom of both wings using her right hand throughout the entire process, and sixty seconds later, she has completed the puzzle.

2:37 PM- After Amelia has completed the butterfly puzzle, she picks up the puzzle with both hands and places it on the horizontal shelf from where it was initially. She looks for another puzzle, extends her right arm, and slides it out. She takes three more steps and decides to sit 6' to the right of a boy. While holding the puzzle in her hands, she sits crisscross applesauce on the floor. She places the puzzle on the ground in front of her. She stares at a puzzle piece that does not belong to her puzzle, picks it up with her right hand, and throws it forward. The puzzle piece lands approximately two feet in front of her. After throwing the puzzle piece, she picks up the puzzle with both hands, this time, she flips it upside down diagonally to the left of her. She flips the puzzle board right side up, and she places it in front of her. She grabs a puzzle piece with her right hands and puts it in the correct spot. She looks up to look at the boy and says, "I'm doing the police one. Finish yours." While the boy is trying to complete his puzzle, Amelia finishes her puzzle in a minute.

2:40 PM Once Amelia finishes the "police puzzle" she stands up. She picks up the puzzle with both hands walks to the shelf and slides the puzzle back into the horizontal shelf. She looks at another puzzle that is on top of the shelf. After staring at it for six seconds, she lifts her hands and lifts it off the shelf. She turns around and takes three steps. Amelia places the puzzle on the floor first then she sits down behind it. She lifts the puzzle from the ground and flips it upside down, so the puzzle pieces lying on the floor. She picks up a puzzle piece and places it in the correct spot. Within a minute, she completes the puzzle with no distractions. She walks back to the shelf and places the puzzle back on the shelf with both hands.... The observation continues for a 20-minute block.

CHAPTER 6: ANECDOTAL RECORDS

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Anecdotal Records
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

ANECDOTAL RECORDS

An Anecdotal Record is “an informal observation method often used by teachers as an aid to understanding the child’s personality or behavior. It provides a running account of behavior that is either typical or unusual for the child” (Bentzen, 2009, p. 178). Anecdotal Records also referred to as "anecdotal notes," are direct observations of a child that offer a window of opportunity to see into a child's actions, interactions, and reactions to people and events. An Anecdotal Record is an excellent tool that provides teachers with a collection of narratives that can be used to showcase a child's progress over time. As compared to a Running Record, Anecdotal Records provide brief notes focused on a specific event or activity. Anecdotal Records are the most practical and useful of all of the observation methods for classroom teachers. These records focus on typical and atypical child behaviors.

Collecting Your Data

To gather useful observation evidence, you need to include the following components:

1. Accurate and specific details of the event (vivid descriptions **precisely** as you see and hear them happening - do not summarize, assume or make judgments)
2. The context, setting, and situation that surrounds the event (the where, when, who, what, and how)
3. Objective facts about the child’s behavior and interactions (report actions and conversations)
4. Write records in the past tense

Here are some examples of observation evidence you might want to gather:

- Social interactions with peers
- Everyday routines, like mealtime and transition times
- How they utilize materials at the various centers (block, math, science, art, music)
- How they engage in teacher-directed activities (structured learning opportunities)
- How they engage in child-directed activities (open exploration opportunities)
- How they are inside and how they are outside

Anecdotal Records are considered an informal method of observation. Since you are observing only a particular event or behavior, Anecdotal Records are selective. If you observe typical and/or atypical behaviors, you are also being selective in your recoding. The amount of inference is made when you are observing atypical behaviors. You need to infer if the behavior is typical or atypical for a child at that age.

Organizing your Data

Once you have completed the Anecdotal Record you will take a moment to interpret the data. You will look for **patterns**, and you will note whether the data reflects **typical or unusual behavior** for the child. To measure a child's developmental progress, you will look for their **strengths** (skills and milestones that have been mastered) and their **needs** (skills and milestones that the child needs further support with). The summary notes help you clarify instructional recommendations (adjustments that you will make to the environment to accommodate the child's learning style). The records you take can help you generate developmentally appropriate lesson plan activities and interactions. All Anecdotal Records need to be dated and stored safely in the child's portfolio or file folder.

Table 6.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Anecdotal Record

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provides vivid details about the who, what, when, where and how 2. Takes less time to write up an observation as compared to using Running Records 3. Evidence is documented as it occurs, in a sequence 4. Provides objective and descriptive evidence 5. Interpretation notes can be added afterwards 6. Evidence can be gathered formally (planned) or informally (spontaneously) 7. No special training is required 8. Provides qualitative data over time and is helpful in tracking changes in a child's development over time 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data can be tainted if it is not written in the moment 2. Focuses on one event, situation or behavior at a time and can miss or overlook important information 3. Does not provide quantitative data results 4. May not always report a child's typical pattern of development or behavior 5. Bias can affect the selection of events to record 6. Improper wording can lead to misinterpretations



Watch this video to learn [how to use an anecdotal note](#):

Anecdotal Record Format Examples

(This is just an example of a format. For college classroom purposes, you will be typing your observations.)

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Anecdotal Record Examples:

Examples without Interpretation/Evaluation:

Date	Time	Setting	Situation	Teacher	Child	Age	Domain
Sept 9	4:15-	Room 4 Outdoor	Comply to request	Carol	Rocky	3	Social Relations

Observation: Rocky is playing in the sandbox with his two other friends. A teacher calls him three times. He looks up then goes back to play. The fourth time he asks, “Why?” He starts walking up to the steps with his arms crossed over his chest, his eyes frowned and his lips protruded.

Date	Time	Setting	Situation	Teacher	Child	Age	Domain
Sept 9	4:15-	Room 4 Outside	Free choice	Carol	Rocky	3	Social Relations

Observation: At free play, a few boys are taking turns jumping and running down the wood planks. Rocky is next in queue to jump down. A boy comes from behind and pushes Rocky with 2 hands. R calls out, “I’m not done yet, get off!” He slips off the plank. Rocky gets back on the planks. He calls out louder, “It my turn. I’m not done yet!” The boy pushes Rocky again gently, and Rocky turns around to face the boy. With his two arms in the back, Rocky uses his stomach to push the other boy off the plank. Rocky and the boy are crying. The teacher hears the boys and walks to them and talks to them (can’t hear).

Example with Interpretation/Evaluation:

Child	Age	Teacher	Date	Time	Setting	Situation	Domain
Willow	2 years	Sari	February 2	8:39am	Room 2 Indoor	It is still Breakfast Time.	Developing Self-Help Skills

Observation: There are only three girls eating on the table. Willow is holding a slice of toasted bread on her left hand, and then, she just lifts her right hand, and picks up a small spoon that has some peanut butter. She places the spoon over the bread, and attempts to spread the peanut butter on the bread from right to left.

Interpretation/Evaluation: It seems like Willow likes to try things out by herself. I guess she observed or remembered someone spreading out the peanut butter on the bread and she wanted to do it as well. I believe it relates to Vygotsky theory in which there is an impact on social interactions the children are exposed to, and to cultural influences as well. It seems obvious that she knows that the peanut butter could be spread out on the bread, and that could be a result of a cultural practice that she has noticed on the people that surround her.

CHAPTER 7: TIME SAMPLING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Time Sampling
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

TIME SAMPLING

Some behavior children demonstrate appear on a more frequent basis. One method to teachers use to track frequent behaviors is a Time Sampling. Time Samplings are completely different than the previously discussed Running Records and Anecdotal Records where the observer describes the behavior. According to Wortham (2012),

The purpose of Time Sampling is to record the frequency of a behavior for a designated period of time. The observer decides ahead of time what behaviors will be observed, what the time interval will be, and how the behaviors will be recorded. The observer observes these behaviors and records how many times they occur during preset, uniform time periods. Other behaviors that occur during the observation are ignored (pg. 128).

Time Samplings are very selective in that you are only observing a specific behavior during a set time. For instance, a teacher might want to observe a child's ability to stay on task. The teacher sets up a Time Sampling for Task and creates categories such as intent on individual work, attentive to other children, attentive to teacher, disinterested, aimless wandering, verbally disruptive, and physically disruptive (Bentzen, 2009). The teacher decides to observe the child once every three minutes for two hours. The teacher can set a time to repeatedly vibrate in their pocket or watch every three minutes to remind them to observe the child's behavior and record what category of task the child is demonstrating at that time.

Time Sampling is considered a formal method of observation. Time Sampling consist of observing and documenting how many times the behavior occurs using uniform times to observe. In most observations, the observer collects minimal or no raw data. Maybe a comment or phrase is documented, but not a detailed description of the behavior. With no or minimal raw data collected, Time Sampling are more closed ended. Since you are observing only a particular behavior, Time Sampling are highly selective in nature. Behaviors and time intervals are predetermined. The amount of inference is made when you decide if the

observed behavior fits into your definition for the categories on the Time Sampling. As an observer, you must make a judgement if the behavior fits the category definition or not.

Collecting your data

Since there are so many variations for Time Sampling, you can create your own format based on the behavior and time intervals. It is important for the observer to observe for an extended period of time and designate enough time intervals to get a good representation of the child's behavior. The targeted behavior must be overt and frequent, occurring at least once every 15 minutes, to be a candidate for Time Sampling (Beaty, 2014). If you are unsure how often a behavior is demonstrated by the child, you might need to do some preliminary observations to see if a Time Sampling is the right method for the targeted behavior.

One observable behavior where a Time Sampling can be used is to determine the number of times a child participates in various play categories. Mildred Parten developed Six Classifications of Play or Social Interactions that young children participate in throughout their day. These Six Stages consist of the following:

1. Unoccupied Behavior- the child is not engaging in an activity or social.
2. Onlooker Behavior- most of the time the child watches other children play.
3. Solitary Play- the child plays alone and independent of what other children or adults are doing.
4. Parallel Play- the child is playing close to other children, using the same types of toys or materials, but not interacting with the other child/ren.
5. Associative Play- the child plays with other children, sharing materials, but no one is in control or in charge of the group.
6. Cooperative Play- the child plays in an organized group, where there are leaders and followers, roles and duties are assigned. Formal games fall into Cooperative Play.

Please see the chart on page 42 for more detailed information on Parten's Classifications.

Organizing your data

Time Samplings take some thought and require advanced preparation. It does not need to be complicated, but there is a process to follow. As you review the Time Sampling, ask yourself what can you interpret by collecting this data? Does the frequency of this behavior affect the child's ability to learn in other ways? What changes can be made to the classroom to lessen the undesired behavior? As you consider those questions, reflect on a plan of action that you might use to further support that child's development. How can you provide opportunities for the child to gain other skills? Using a Time Sampling is not a one and done type of method. Repeated use of the same Time Sampling over multiple days will establish representation needed to interpret and evaluate the child's behavior.

For additional information on Parten’s Play Classifications, check out this [YouTube video](#).

Table 7.1: Parten’s Play Classifications

Stage of Play	Description of Type of Play
Unoccupied Play	Children are relatively still and their play appears scattered. This type of play builds the foundation for the other five stages of play. Unoccupied play looks like babies or young children exploring materials around them without any sort of organization. This stage allows children to practice manipulating materials, mastering their self-control and learning about how the world works.
Solitary Play	This type of play occurs when children entertain themselves without any other social involvement. Children in solitary play may not notice or acknowledge other children. Adults might worry about children playing alone, but actually solitary play is very normal. When children engage in solitary play, they are able to explore freely, master new personal skills like new motor or cognitive skills, and prepare themselves to play with others.
Onlooker Play	Children who sit back and engagingly watch other children playing, but do not join in are onlookers. The active part of their play is watching others. Sometimes it’s easy to think children engaged in onlooker play might be lonely or scared to engage with other children, when in fact it is a very normal part of play development. Just as adults “people watch” at the coffee shop, children learn a lot by watching others. They learn about the social rules of play and relationships, they explore different ways of playing or using materials and they learn about the world in general.
Parallel Play	This occurs when children play next to each other, but are not really interacting together. For example, two children may drive cars on the carpet next to each other, but their play does not actually overlap. In this stage, children are not really engaging in a social exchange. Think of this stage like a warm up exercise – children work side by side on the same activity, practicing skills and learning new methods to engage together.
Associative Play	This type of play signifies a shift in the child. Instead of being more focused on the activity or object involved in play, children begin to be more interested in the other players. Associative play allows children to begin practicing what they have observed through onlooker and parallel play. They can start to use their newfound social skills to engage with other children or adults during an activity or exploration.
Cooperative Play	This is play categorized by cooperative efforts between players. Children might adopt group goals, establish rules for play. It’s important to remember cooperation is an advanced skill and can be very difficult for young children. Ironically, cooperative play often involves a lot of conflict. This is normal. It is sometimes difficult for young children to share, take turns and negotiate control in these types of play scenarios. You can support children engaged in cooperative play by staying close and helping them learn healthy expression of emotions and teach them problem solving skills.

(Rymanowicz, 2015).

Table 7.2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Time Sampling

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. There are no set restrictions for the types of behaviors to observe 2. Provides quantitative data over time and is helpful in tracking changes in a child's behavior 3. Multiple observers can use the same form to track a child's behavior 4. It is practical and easy to use 5. When the observer makes a comment, the Time Sampling becomes more valuable over time 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The observer must create the Time Sampling before observing the child 2. It is not useful for infrequent behaviors 3. Observations must take place over a long period of time in order to get a representation of behavior 4. If no comment or raw data is collected, the sampling is merely a mark on a page and is less valuable over time

Time Sampling Example:

Name:			Teacher:			Date:	
Age:			Domain of Dev:			Time:	
Setting:							
Situation:							
Time	Unocc.	Onlook	Solitary	Parallel	Assoc.	Coop.	Comments

CHAPTER 8: EVENT SAMPLING TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Event Sampling
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

EVENT SAMPLING

Event Sampling is another beneficial observation method for classroom teachers. Events occur around us every minute of every day. For instance, the last time you drove to the grocery store, no matter how close to your home, you observed events. The events might have been rather small, like a bird flying in the sky or big like an accident along the roadside. The same is true in a classroom of young children. You will see child behaviors as events that are observable and recordable. The event might be rather insignificant, like a child picking up the block area at clean-up time or rather significant like a child who struggles to get along with other children shares a bike without asking or prompting.

Event Sampling differs from Time Sampling in that you are only focusing on one behavior and documenting that behavior whenever it occurs. Whereas, Time Sampling, you were focused on the time intervals and behaviors that were taking place during that time interval. The behavior may happen at odd times or infrequently (Wortham 2012). For Event Sampling, you will record the time of the day, but it is not as significant as when you were using a Time Sampling method. To use an Event Sampling, you must define the targeted behavior before you begin. You will also record EVERY time the specific event you chose for observation occurs, no matter the time interval (Beatty, 2014). When you observe the event, RECORD it.

Event Samplings are considered a formal method of observation. Depending on how you structure your Event Sampling, they are considered an open method, as you write narrative observational notes as you observe the behavior. If you are merely making a mark to record the event, you would be doing a Frequency Count (discussed in the next chapter). Raw data is collected. Since you are observing only a particular event or behavior, Event Samplings are highly selective. The amount of inference is made when you decide if the narrowly selected behavior fits into your definition for the observable behavior. As an observer, you must make a judgment if the behavior fits into your definition or not.

Collecting your data

Event Sampling data collection can happen using two different formats. In one format is known as the ABC analysis created by Bell and Low in 1977 (Wortham, 2012). This format is helpful when the observer wants to know the cause or trigger for the behavior the child is displaying. The A in ABC is the **antecedent** event, B is the target **behavior**, and C is the **consequent** event (Wortham, 2012). The ABC format is a narrative format. Here is an example of what an observation might look like using the ABC format:

Name: Darrell		Teacher:		Date:	
Age: 4		Domain of Dev:		Time:	
Setting:					
Situation:					
Behavior: Darrell cries multiple times a day.					
Time	Antecedent Event		Behavior		Consequent Event
8:35	Darrell’s dad drops him off in the classroom. Darrell is holding on tight to dad’s leg.		Darrell begins to cry as dad hug him and says good bye.		As the teacher comforts Darrell by squatting down next to him, Darrell stops crying five seconds after dad left and walks to the Lego area.
9:01	Teacher announces it is breakfast time.		Darrell is not picking up the Legos. When he is asked to save his work on a shelf and pick up the rest of the Legos, he sits down with his arms crossed and lower lip protrudes and begins to cry loudly.		The teacher walks to the Lego area and sits next to Darrell. The teacher puts their arm around him. He cries louder for 3 minutes before she gets him to stand up and walk to wash his hand for breakfast.

Collecting data using the ABC format for Event Sampling allows the teacher to analyze what happened before and after the targeted behavior was displayed. This format can be constructive when a teacher is trying to see the cause and effect of the child's behavior and is trying to help the child change unwanted behavior (Beaty, 2014).

Another Event Sampling format many classroom teachers use is similar to the Time Sampling format. Instead of the teacher recording the targeted behavior during uniform time intervals, the teacher will record the event (behavior) every time it occurs. Here is an example of what this type of Event Sampling format might look like:

Name: Darrell		Teacher:				Date:
Age: 4		Domain of Dev:				Time:
Setting:						
Situation:						
Behavior: Darrell cries multiple times a day.						
Time	Spontaneous Crying	Crying for Attention	Crying at Transitions	Crying to Get a Toy	Unknown Crying	Comments
8:35		XX				Dad drops off D. stops crying after five seconds.
9:01			XX			Cries when asked to pick up Legos before breakfast

Collecting data using this type of format tends to be easier for a teacher who is observing while working with the children. A chart can be kept close by, and recording only takes a few seconds. No matter which format you use for Event Sampling, both allow the observer to record the behavior and be analyzed to help the child diminish unwanted behaviors and increase new positive behaviors over time.

Organizing your data

Event Sampling is an efficient method of observation. An observer does not need to create a formal chart as displayed above. Gathering data using multiple charts for multiple children, could get overwhelming, so organizing your charts, whether using the ABC or checkmark and brief comment format, is a must. A binder with dividers for each child is one way to organize Event Samplings. Combining more than one chart on a page is possible, depending on the frequency of the targeted behavior. As you review your Event Samplings, what can you interpret from this data? How often is this behavior happening? What triggers the behavior? What is the outcome? As you consider those questions, reflect on a plan of action that you might use to further support that child's development. How can you change your behavior or the behavior of others to help this child? What adjustments need to be made to make the environment or schedule? What individualizations need to happen with this child?

Table 8.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Event Sampling

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. More time efficient than Running Records2. The observer only focuses on a targeted behavior at one time3. Adds raw data with a checkmark format4. Helpful when observing infrequent behaviors5. Interpretation notes can be added afterwards to try to change the cause and effect of the child's behaviors	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Focuses on one event, situation or behavior at a time and can miss or overlook important information2. It takes the event out of context (missing all of the raw data)

CHAPTER 9: FREQUENCY COUNTS

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Frequency Counts
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

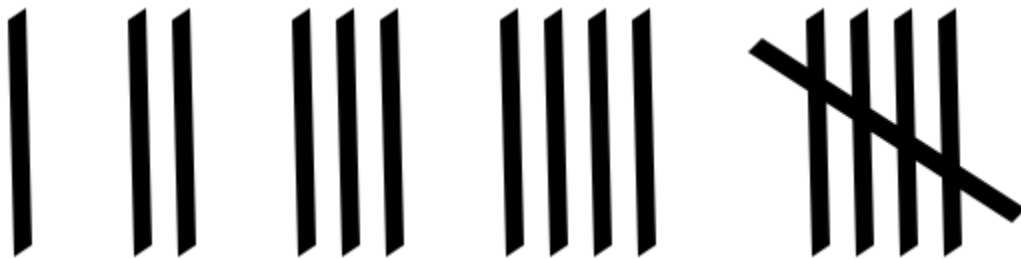


Figure 3.2 When is a frequency count used? Whenever you need to tally and record how many times a behavior is occurring.⁵

FREQUENCY COUNTS

A Frequency Count is an informal observation method used to gather information about a child's interests, social interactions, play patterns, and temperamental traits. As the teacher observes the children at play, a tally mark is made every time the noted behavior or action occurs within a set timeframe. Frequency Counts are also used to track undesirable or challenging behaviors, as well as ideal for positive behaviors.

As an observer, you must define in advance the behaviors you want to observe to tally with a Frequency Count. This method is used to get a baseline for behavior modification. Behavior modification is a way to increase positive behaviors and decrease negative behaviors (Marston, 2018). Behavior modification stems from the work of B.F. Skinner and Ivan Pavlov, both Behaviorists. Even though Skinner and Pavlov's early work was done on animals, their findings can be applied to human behavior. Using behavior modification techniques focus on changing a person's environment in ways that increase the likelihood that certain behaviors will occur, with the overall goal to change the behavior (Marston, 2018). When using a Frequency Count to get a baseline for a child's behavior, the observer records every time the child demonstrates

⁵ [Image](#) is in the public domain.

it. Once you find out how often the behavior occurs, the teacher can change the environment. After a period of adjustment to the new environment, the teacher will observe again using a Frequency Count. The goal is for less recorded behaviors on the second Frequency Count because the child's behavior has been modified or changed, so the child is not demonstrating the behavior that is being modified.

Frequency Counts are considered an informal method of observation. Frequency Counts consist of making a mark every time a behavior occurs, so no raw data is collected (no words, only marks). With no raw data collected, Frequency Counts are one of the most closed-ended observation methods. Since you are observing only a particular event or behavior, Frequency Counts are highly selective. The amount of inference is made when you decide if the narrowly selected behavior fits into your definition for the observable behavior. As an observer, you must make a judgment if the behavior fits into your definition or not.

Collecting your data

To create a Frequency Count, you must first decide on what social interactions, behaviors, interest areas, or types of play you want to monitor. You may choose to track your child during one focused activity or timeframe, or you may map out what a typical day might look like for your child and follow all the interactions and experiences they engage in throughout the day. Either way, as you observe your child, you will make a tally mark every time they play in a specified area or display one of the action items as listed on your Frequency Count.

Here are some examples of how you might use a Frequency Count to gather data:

1. **Sue has been hitting a lot lately and displaying other challenging behaviors.** You will want to track how many times she hits on a typical day and any other challenging behaviors. You will also want to track **where** the incidents are occurring – are there more incidents while inside the classroom, or are things happening during outside play? You will want to look at **when** the incidents are happening most often– are there more incidents earlier in the day or later in the day? You may want to observe what is happening at drop-off time, mealtime, and at naptime. Lastly, you may want to track **who** Sue is socializing with and **how** she plays with others. Does Sue display a consistent play pattern (parallel play, cooperative play, onlooker play)?
2. **Thomas is a new student, and his mother wants to know how he is doing.** You may want to observe which centers Thomas goes to most often throughout the day and track his interests. You may also want to track whether he plays alone or with other children.
3. **A child in your class is always challenging for you.** How can you create a supportive environment and provide a “goodness of fit?” You may need to track the child’s temperamental traits and observe how the child approaches activities and how they respond to social situations.

Organizing Your Data

After you have collected all the data for that timeframe, count the tally marks. Since the data you collected (number of marks) is quantifiable, you can create a bar graph or pie chart to share with other teachers or parents. What can you interpret from this data? What areas or action items received a high number of tally marks? What areas or action items received a low number of tally marks? Do you see any patterns? As you consider those questions, reflect on a plan of action that you might use to support that child further.

Table 9.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Frequency Data

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Quick and easy to use, and no training is required2. Can be personalized or designed to gather specific baseline data (play patterns, challenging behaviors, social situations, temperamental traits)3. Provides immediate quantifiable data4. Ideal for tracking behaviors over time and for noting an increase or decrease of incidents5. Can be useful when planning behavior modification strategies6. Data can be graphed or charted to find consistent patterns	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Does not provide rich details or context like anecdotal notes or running records2. There is no clear sequence of events regarding certain actions or behaviors3. (Although the behavior is tracked, information about the antecedent and the consequence is missing)4. Does not provide qualitative evidence, no raw data is collected5. Results may be misleading

Frequency Count Examples:

The next three pages are examples of Frequency Counts. Look at the format for the Frequency Count. A teacher can include any behavior on the left-hand side boxes. The formats are very easy to create and easy to use.

Frequency Count to Track Areas and Interests				
Child's Name:				
Observation Date:	INDOOR CYCLE		OUTDOOR CYCLE	
	Start Time:	End Time:	Start Time:	End Time:
Areas and Interests	Tally Marks	Total	Tally Marks	Total
Art				
Blocks / Legos				
Library / Reading				
Dramatic Play				
Math				
Writing / Journaling				
Science / Nature				
Sensory				
Quiet Corner				
Computer Lab				
Music / Movement				
Climbing Structure				
Bikes				
Organized Games				
Super-Hero Play				
Rough and Tumble				
Running / Chasing				

Frequency Count to Track Play Patterns and Social Interactions				
Observation Date:	INDOOR CYCLE		OUTDOOR CYCLE	
	Start Time:	End Time:	Start Time:	End Time:
Play Patterns and Social Interactions	Tally Marks	Total	Tally Marks	Total
Solitary Play: Plays alone – does not seek out peer social interactions				
Parallel Play: Plays next to someone, using similar materials but did not directly interact				
Associative Play: Shares materials and talks to others while engaged in an activity				
Cooperative Play: Plays with peers in an organized manner with rules, taking turns				
Peer Interactions: Plays with Boys				
Peer Interactions: Plays with Girls				
Interactions with Teacher: Talks to teacher / shares ideas / asks for help				
Bystander: Is yelled at, hit or involved in an altercation / incident				
Instigates / Initiates Disputes: Hits, takes toys, yells at peers, causes an altercation / incident				
Problem solves: Communicated and resolved disputes without teachers help				
Teacher Interactions: Teacher needed to help resolve peer disputes / altercations				

Frequency Count to Track Temperament and Behavior				
Observation Date	INDOOR CYCLE		OUTDOOR CYCLE	
	Start Time End Time		Start Time End Time	
Temperament Traits and Behavior	Tally Marks	Total	Tally Marks	Total
Appears Highly Active – Rarely sits still, moves around, fidgets A LOT, races through activities				
Appears Easily Distracted Changes activities before finishing task / looks around a lot				
Appears Focused Completes tasks before moving on to the next task / can tune others out				
Reacts Intensely Has high emotional energy when reacting to others – yells/cries				
Remains Calm Able to transitions and go with the flow/does not react to altercations				
Appears Sensitive Squirms when touched, holds ears, squints, doesn't seem to like to touch certain textures				
Appears Cautious Hesitates or needs time to warm up to people and activities before joining in				
Appears to be in a good mood Smiles/ laughs often, cooperates with others and seems pleasant				
Appears Moody Has difficulty making transitions, displays highs and lows, rarely smiles when interacting with others				

CHAPTER 10: DURATION RECORD

TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES TO GATHER EVIDENCE

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Duration Record
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

DURATION RECORD

A Duration Record is an informal observation method used to gather information about a child's interests, social interactions, play patterns, and temperamental traits. As the teacher observes the children at play, the teacher notes the length of time the behavior occurs within a set time frame. Duration Records are very similar to Frequency Counts. The only significant difference is instead of making a tally mark; the teacher records the start time and end time for the targeted behavior being observed. The teacher will use a Duration Record when the length of time is more important than the number of times.

As an observer, you must define in advance the behaviors you want to observe for the Duration Record. Some of the same behavior modification techniques that were discussed in Frequency Counts can be applied here. For instance, if a child rarely interacts or plays with other children, the teacher will want to see how long the child is by themselves and how long the child actually plays with others. The idea here is to try to lengthen the time interacting with other children over time.

Duration Records are considered an informal method of observation. The Duration Record consist of observing and documenting how long a behavior occurs. Again, no raw data is collected (no words only length of time). With no raw data collected, Duration Records are one of the most closed-ended observation methods. Since you are observing only a particular event or behavior, Duration Records are highly selective. The amount of inference is made when you decide if the narrowly selected behavior fits into your definition for the observable behavior. As an observer, you must make a judgment if the behavior fits into your definition or not.

Collecting your data

To create a Duration Record, you must first decide on what social interactions, behaviors, interest areas, or types of play you want to monitor. You may choose to track your child during one focused activity or timeframe, or you may map out what a typical day might look like for your child and track all the interactions and experiences they engage in throughout the day. Either way, as you observe your child, you will record how long they play in a specified area or display one of the action items as listed on your Duration Record.

Organizing Your Data

After you have collected all the time interval data for that timeframe, count the number of minutes. Since the data you collected (minutes) is quantifiable, you can create a bar graph or pie chart to share with other teachers or parents. What can you interpret from this data? What areas or action items received a high number of minutes with specific behaviors? What areas or action items received less time? Do you see any patterns? As you consider those questions, reflect on a plan of action that you might use to further support that child's development.

Table 10.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Duration Records

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Quick and easy to use, and no training is required2. Can be personalized or designed to gather specific baseline data (play patterns, challenging behaviors, social situations, temperamental traits)3. Provides immediate quantifiable data4. Ideal for tracking behaviors over time and for noting an increase or decrease of incidents5. Can be useful when planning behavior modification strategies6. Data can be graphed or charted to find consistent patterns	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Does not provide rich details or context like anecdotal notes or running records2. Duration Records are a little more complicated because you need to keep track of the time versus making a tally mark for a Frequency Count3. Does not provide qualitative evidence, no raw data is collected4. Results may be misleading

Duration Record Format Examples:

Name:		Teacher:		Date:	
Age:		Domain of Dev:		Time:	
Setting:					
Situation:					
Start Time	End Time	Solitary Play	Parallel Play	Associative Play	Cooperative Play
Total Time in Minutes					

Name:		Teacher:		Date:	
Age:		Domain of Dev:		Time:	
Setting:					
Situation:					
Start Time	End Time	Block Area	Library Area	Dramatic Play	Art Area
Total Time in Minutes					

CHAPTER 11: CHECKLIST TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Checklists
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

CHECKLISTS

Checklists are an efficient and practical way to collect information about a child's development. Checklists are based on "developmental norms" as determined by developmental theorists. There are certain expectations and skills that a child should be able to achieve with each age range. Checklists are designed to track a child's competencies in all the developmental domains, including physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional. With a Checklist, teachers can easily see what a child *can do* and note what areas of development need further support. Teachers can create their own checklists based on specific skill sets or download a formal developmental milestone checklist from a reputable source to look at a child's full range of development. Checklists can be used to track a large group of children or an individual child.

A Checklist is any record that denotes the presence or absence of something (Bentzen, 2009). Bentzen (2009) goes on to define it as a method that is used to record the occurrence of specific behaviors in a given context. The keywords here are **specific behavior** and **given context**. If the behavior does not occur in the environment where the observation is taking place, it should not be considered observable. A basic example of this would be observing how well a child takes a bath. Teachers in child care centers and early learning programs do not give children baths (unless there is a severe extenuating circumstance and where maybe a shower is necessary). Therefore, the category of Bath Time Routine should not be on the Checklist for the teacher to document behavior.

Checklists must be created ahead of time. It requires a great deal of structuring. Creating a valid Checklist is difficult for classroom teachers. It can be done, but developing and validating a Checklist is hugely time-consuming. So, in other words, use one that has already been created and verified. Why re-invent the wheel?

Checklists are considered an informal method of observation. Checklists can be either open-ended or closed-ended, depending on the amount of raw data or observation is written for each indicator or category listed on the Checklist. If the Checklist is merely a mark on the

paper with a checkmark or an X, then the Checklist is closed-ended. If the Checklists requires a comment or Anecdotal Record to accompany the checkmark, then it is open-ended. As far as selectivity, it depends on the categories listed on the Checklist. Since you are looking for specific behaviors, Checklists are considered selective. The inference is similar to previously discussed methods. The amount of inference is made when you decide if the narrowly selected behavior fits into your definition for the observable behavior in that category on the Checklists. As an observer, you must judge if the behavior fits into the definition listed on the instrument.

Collecting your data

Whether you design your own Checklist or download one, use it regularly to collect data. The Checklist can be utilized in two ways:

1. You can observe a child on a specific day while engaged in an activity (either child-directed or teacher-directed). As you observe, you will check off the skills or milestones that the child *can do* on that day, at that moment.
2. You can also review data from other observations (e.g., running records or anecdotal notes, work samples) that you collected, and ADD any other skills or milestones that were mastered during those previous observations.

*Note: You must note the dates that you observed the skills being mastered. A checkmark alone will limit the reliability and validity.

Organizing your data

Schedule a day and time to review your observation data regularly. Data collected from other observations (mastered milestones and developing skill sets) can be added to the Checklist so you can see a child's progress. You may use colored pens to track all the different dates that milestones were achieved. As you review the Checklist, what can you interpret from this data? Does the child demonstrate strengths in any of the developmental domains or areas of learning? Which milestones and skills need further support? As you consider those questions, reflect on a plan of action that you might use to further support that child's development. How can you provide opportunities for the child to gain more practice? What adjustments need to be made to make the activity more challenging? What extensions can be added to continue the learning pattern?⁶

⁶ Head Start ECLKC. (n.d.). Using Checklists Highlight Video. Retrieved from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/video/transcripts/000981-using-checklists-highlight-video.pdf>
[Learn the Signs. Act Early](#) by CDC is in the public domain.

Table 11.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Checklists

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Ideal for tracking a child's progress over time2. Different observers (the teacher, assistant or a support team) can check off skills that they observe the child doing3. Checklists can be created to measure specific areas of development, or a subset of developmental skills4. Checklists can be used to observe a group of children or an individual child5. Checklists are quick and easy to use, and no training is required6. Checklists can be used in conjunction with other observations7. Checklists highlight the developmental strengths a child has mastered, as well as those skills that need further support8. Developmental Milestone Checklists are readily available on-line through various agencies (i.e. Center for Disease Control)9. Data can help plan curriculum activities	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Checklists do not provide rich details or context like anecdotal notes or running records2. There is no clear sequence of events to regarding certain actions or behaviors3. Checklists focus on developmental norms and typical development with no regard for environment, family influences, cultural influences and individual development4. Teachers tend to focus on the skills and milestones that haven't been mastered, focusing on the deficits rather than highlighting the strengths. This can make the child and parents feel as if they have failed or add unnecessary stress5. Checklists must be updated regularly using other observation methods

Examples of Checklists:

Checklist for Physical Milestone Perceptual Movement

Skills	Can Do	Needs Further Support	Date and Evidence
Moves in a zig-zag pattern – able to change directions with ease			
Plays follow the leaders and mirrors others movements			
Moves body to music cues			
Speeds up and slows down while running or riding bike			

Gross Motor Movement

Skills	Can Do	Needs Further Support	Date and Evidence
Completes tasks on an obstacle course			
Changes directions and stops quickly while running			
Pumps legs on a swing			
Runs and uses arm and legs in opposition			
Climbs			
Walks up and down stairs with one foot on each stair step			
Hops on one foot			
Kicks balls			

Catches and throws (bean bags and balls)			
Pedals a 3-wheeled bike (tricycle)			
Bounces a ball several times			
Walks along a balance beam			
Jumps up and down, jumps forward using arms			

Fine Motor Movement

Skills	Can Do	Needs Further Support	Date and Evidence
Cuts with scissors			
Uses writing utensils (markers, crayons, pencils) to scribble			
Prints letters, numbers			
Uses stamps and stamp pad			
Strings beads			
Pours liquid into cup			
Manipulates, moves and picks up small objects			
Uses utensils to feed self			
Buttons and zips			
Peels a banana or orange			
Opens and closes a Ziploc baggie			
Scoops and pours materials (sand, dirt, rocks, beads)			

CHAPTER 12: RATING SCALES TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Rating Scales
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

RATING SCALES

As Duration Records were similar to Frequency Counts, Rating Scales share similarities with Checklists. When we rate something, we are assigning it a value or quality (Bentzen, 2009). Has this ever happened to you? When you go to the store and make a purchase, the cashier hands you a receipt and circles the code at the bottom and asks you to rate the service you received during your visit. Organizations like Consumer Reports rates everything from refrigerators to cars to laundry soap. As a consumer, you look at the product ratings you want to purchase and hopefully make the best decision based on quality, functionality, and price. The term scale is a little more challenging to define. According to Bentzen (2009), “a scale is simply an instrument with which to measure or record the relative degree to which children possess certain skills, abilities, behaviors, personality, characteristics, and so forth” (pg. 210). When we combine the two terms Rating Scale, we have a method of observation. We are distinguishing the differences among various categories of development demonstrated by the child through their skills, abilities, behaviors, etc.

Rating Scales are considered an informal method of observation. Rating Scales consist of rating or assigning a value or quality to a behavior. This is another method where no raw data is collected (no words only length of time). With no raw data collected, Rating Scales are one of the most closed-ended observation methods. Since you are observing only a particular category of behavior, Rating Scales are highly selective. Clearly defined categories of behavior are essential for the teacher to know where to put the mark on the continuum line. The inference is used on the part of the observer when you decide where to place the mark on the line. As an observer, you must judge if the behavior fits the category listed on the continuum.

Collecting your data

Collecting data for a Rating Scale is rather easy. Making a mark on a line is about as easy as it gets. Of course, where to make the mark on the line is extremely important. You must be accurate in your rating based on your previous observations. Below is an example of one category of behaviors (communicates with peers). An example of a Rating Scale could be their degree of communication with other children. A Rating Scale might look something like this:

Communicates with Peers: (October rating)

	X			
Seldom communicates with peers		Communicates by initiating conversation with peers		Frequently engages in 2-way conversations with peers

Example from the Palomar College Child Development Center Social Attitudes and Maturity Rating Scale

The **X** is where the teacher has observed the child's development when communicating with peers in the classroom during the month of October when the rating was recorded.

The teacher and parents can see the child's development over time by recording the observed data on the Rating Scale. You gather all of their previous observations and mark the scale where, to the best of your ability, the child's development is present during this rating period (October). As the teacher observes the child over the year, the second rating might use **XX** as the symbol and be rated in May. The second rating might look like this:

	X			XX
Seldom communicates with peers		Communicates by initiating conversation with peers		Frequently engages in 2-way conversations with peers

Example from the Palomar College Child Development Center Social Attitudes and Maturity Rating Scale

It is possible to create a Rating Scale. It is important to define the behaviors, skills, attitudes, personality clearly... to be rated. For this section, we will refer to behaviors as a term to include any from this list. A fundamental Rating Scale lists categories as yes/no/sometimes. In the above example, only three items are rated along a continuum (a line showing a range of behaviors). The number of categories on the continuum can be three, five, or even up to seven. The problem with having too many items is that the observer can have a difficult time distinguishing between the amounts or degrees between these categories. It is difficult to make fine distinctions between areas that can be too loose or too tight (Bentzen, 2009). For instance,

what is the difference between excellent, very good, good, standard, below standard, poor, unable to rate? We suggest no more than five categories per item rated.

The categories of behavior rated can be listed from high to low or from low to high. The example above lists low end or behaviors displayed by younger children to high end or behaviors presented by older children. No matter the direction you choose to rate the behavior, the creator of the Rating Scale must be consistent in direction (either low to high or high to low) or rating if more than one behavior at a time is included on the Rating Scale.

Organizing your data

Organizing your data for a Rating Scale should be done when you are organizing your child's observations. Since Rating Scales do not document raw data, you will use your previous observations to select which behaviors you are going to rate. As you review the Rating Scale, what can you interpret from your observations to rate? Does the child demonstrate strengths or areas of need in any of the developmental domains or areas of learning? Which milestones and skills need further support? As you consider those questions, reflect on a plan of action that you might use to support that child further. How can you provide opportunities for the child to socialize more? What adjustments need to be made to make to the classroom?

Table 12.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Rating Scales

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Quick and easy to use, and no training is required2. Can be used for classroom planning purposes, either for individualizing with a child or for the whole group3. Provides opportunity to compare development at multiple points during the year	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Does not provide rich details or context like anecdotal notes or running records2. No raw data is collected3. Results may be misleading4. Observer bias can affect the ratings due to the high level of inference involved in rating the child5. Categories for rating must be clearly defined for the observer to reduce an errors

CHAPTER 13: WORK SAMPLES TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Work Samples
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats



Figure 3.3 A Child's Masterpiece.⁷

WORK SAMPLES

Teachers have been collecting pieces of children's artwork and posting them on the classroom walls forever. Not only do the children enjoy seeing their work of art on display, parent's appreciate seeing their child's work as well! To create an official work sample however takes more effort than hanging a picture on the wall. What exactly is a work sample? A work sample is a tangible piece of evidence that showcases a child's effort, progress and achievement. More specifically, not only does a work sample highlight the final *product*, it can highlight the *process* as well, by highlighting the child's problem-solving efforts, experimentation methods or collaboration skills. Work samples are **authentic artifacts** that provide information about the child's learning experience.

⁷ Image by [Dragos Gontariu](#) on Unsplash.

Collecting your data

Work samples can be gathered throughout the school year. Typically, you would collect a variety of samples that highlight the child's overall development in each of the developmental areas: Physical; Cognitive; Language; Social -Emotional. More specifically, you might include a child's drawing or painting, a writing sample from their journal, a cutting sample, or photographs of the child engaged in activities such as building a block tower or sandcastle or riding a bike.

Organizing your data

Whether you post a work sample on the classroom wall (using a *documentation board*) or you collect a sample for a child's portfolio, you must add documentation. Not only will documentation help families recognize the value of play, it reinforces the concept that every activity is an opportunity to learn. For accuracy, be sure to include the following information: Child's Name; Date; Setting; and an Anecdotal Note with a description about how and why the sample was collected. Work samples should be organized in a chronological manner to showcase progress over time. Be sure to store work samples in a safe place like a file-folder or portfolio, or electronically in a computer file.

Table 13.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Work Samples

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provides tangible/ visible evidence that teachers can use to track a child's learning, growth and development over time2. Parents and children both enjoy seeing the work on display3. Provides authentic documentation which is ideal for assessment4. Teachers can use information to plan and adjust curriculum to help children achieve their learning goals5. Families can see how children learn through play6. Children can share their insights as to <i>how</i> they created the work sample and offer their perspectives as to <i>what</i> they were thinking (authentic evidence)7. Children enjoy seeing their work on display and they can feel empowered when their work is valued	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Can be time consuming adding anecdotal documentation and creating documentation boards2. Requires ample storage space3. Requires a financial investment in technology (camera, video or audio recorder)4. Concerns over confidentiality and privacy when using photos, audio or videos

Work Sample Template

(insert a photo of the work sample)	
Child: _____	
Date: _____	Time: _____
Setting: Indoor or Outdoor	Center or Play Area:
Activity: _____	
What activity choices were available that day:	
Anecdotal Notes: (objective facts, vivid and descriptive details, concise observation information)	
Developmental Milestones that were supported:	
1. 2. 3.	
Quotes / Child's Perspective	

CHAPTER 14: TECHNOLOGY TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

- 1.) Introduction to Technology
- 2.) Collecting Your Data
- 3.) Organizing Your Data
- 4.) Advantages and Disadvantages
- 5.) Sample Formats

TECHNOLOGY

Finding ways to utilize technology into regular routines can make collecting observation evidence much more efficient for busy teachers. Photographs, video, and audio recordings can authentically capture children's explorations, investigations, play and learning experiences in the actual moment. With this type of documentation, teachers can replay key moments in a child's day to look for specific interactions, play patterns, developmental milestones, struggles and accomplishments. With this technique, teachers can also listen for language development by recording actual conversations that children are having with their peers. Teachers can also monitor how children problem solve and can tape special moments as well as capture every day moments. As with work samples, teachers can share their observation evidence with the children. Children are fascinated with seeing and hearing themselves. This type of documentation provides the most authentic evidence of all the observation methods.

Even though the use of audio or video recording or taking pictures provides lasting documentation of the child's development, if you rely too heavily on it, you will not develop "soft eyes" (Gonzalez-Mena, 1997 cited in Bentzen, 2009). Soft eyes are the ability that involves a kind of "seeing" that enables one to look at a particular child while taking in what is happening in the entire classroom (Bentzen, 2009). This is a critical skill for teachers to develop. Soft eyes are the teacher's ability to sit at a table with a young child working with playdough and hear two children in the block area where their conversation is getting heated. As the teacher hears the conversation, the teacher stands up and starts walking to the block area, but stops a child whose shoe is untied and ties it on their way. All the while, the teacher is still visually focused on the block area. Not all teachers are born with the ability of soft eyes. It can increase as the teacher gains more experience, but some teachers will never get it.

Collecting your data

There are numerous ways to incorporate technology into your classroom. It is important to keep in mind that each early care and education program would have their own protocol, policies and procedures regarding the use of technology to document children's learning,

growth and development, so be sure to verify what you can and cannot do. Here are a few suggestions that you may want to incorporate:

- Use a camera, laptop, tablet, or smartphone to record observations and take pictures
- Ask a child to dictate a story and you can type it up on a computer or use an audio recorder
- Scan or make copies of children's work, such as drawings or writing, to create a visual timeline that shows a child's skill development over time.
- Use email or a parent communication app to post work samples
- Use voice-to-text software to document important discussions. For example, children can explain how they created their piece of art.
- Take pictures of three-dimensional work. For example, woodworking projects, block towers, sandcastles, and culinary creations.
- Film dramatic plays and musical performances that the children produce.
- Use a video camera to document how children are progressing with their developmental milestones in each of the domains. For example, look at playful interactions to track social-emotional development; watch children on the playground to track physical development; observe how children tackle science or math activities to track cognitive development.⁸

Organizing your data

Observation data can be conveniently stored on a computer and each child can have their own digital portfolio or file folder. For every child, you would include photos of them at play, photos of their work samples, and any audio recordings or video clips that you may have collected (as suggested above). When using smartphones to take photos or videos, you can easily upload information to your computer or transfer information to other devices. Some teachers may want to use an app to formally organize observation evidence, and some schools may purchase a program that links families to daily observations. Some centers may even use an electronic assessment program (e.g. the Desired Results Developmental Program – DRDP or Learning Genie) to track children's developmental progress and teachers would regularly upload observation evidence as part of the assessment process. Here are a few added suggestions on how you can organize and use stored electronic observation evidence:

- Photos can be scanned, printed and posted in the classroom
- A photo slideshow can be created for family nights or as a screen saver
- The children can watch a video montage of a themed project they completed
- Children can look at "old" photos to monitor their own developmental progress and can make comments regarding their work, their thought process and their developmental outcomes.⁹

⁸ Blagojevic, B. and Garthwait, A. (2020). Observing and Recording Growth and Change. Retrieved from <https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/observing-and-recording-growth-and-change/>

⁹ West Sussex County Council. (2019). Effective Practice: Observation, Assessment and Planning. Retrieved from https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/media/5555/effective_poa_and_planning.pdf

Table 14.1: Advantages and Disadvantages of Technology

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provides tangible/ visible evidence that teachers can use to track a child’s learning, growth and development over time2. Parents and children both enjoy seeing the work on display3. Captures authentic documentation which is ideal for assessment4. Teachers can use information to plan and adjust curriculum to help children achieve their learning goals5. Families can see how children learn through play6. Children can share their insights as to <i>how</i> they created the work sample and offer their perspectives as to <i>what</i> they were thinking (authentic evidence)7. Children enjoy seeing their work on display and they can feel empowered when their work is valued8. Display and they can feel empowered when their work is valued9. With using multi -media, children can be observed in their natural settings10. Works well for teacher-training purposes	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Can be time consuming adding anecdotal documentation and creating documentation boards2. Requires ample storage space3. Requires a financial investment in technology (camera, video or audio recorder)4. Teacher must know how to use the technology either through training or time to self-learn5. Concerns over confidentiality and privacy when using photos, audio or videos6. Recordings do not give the observer the actual atmosphere of the classroom (the situation)

CONCLUSION FOR CHAPTERS 4 TO 14

An intentional teacher is a skilled and thoughtful observer. With each observation, whether a running record, anecdotal note, video recording, checklist, frequency counts, learning story, or work sample, they are watching and listening, considering *what I know about this child, and how I can best support them*. As teachers gather and organize their observation data, they begin to see each child for who they are as an individual and as a member of the classroom community. With that information, intentional teachers can set realistic expectations of what children can do. Ideally, teachers will utilize the documented data to develop developmentally appropriate activities and create an exciting and stimulating learning environment designed to promote play, socialization, growth, and development. Now that you have been introduced to some of the tools and techniques that are used to gather information and document a child's development, in the next chapter, you will delve deeper to review the concepts of typical development and atypical development, and you will learn about some additional tools that can be used to track a child's development.¹⁰

¹⁰ [Preschool Program Guidelines](#) by the [California Department of Education](#) is used with permission

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CHAPTER 15: THE PURPOSE, PROCESS AND PRACTICE OF MONITORING, SCREENING AND EVALUATING

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. The Purpose of Monitoring, Screening and Evaluating Young Children
2. The Process of Monitoring
3. The Process of Screening and Evaluating
4. The Practice of Monitoring
5. The Practice of Screening and Evaluating
6. Public Policies on Including Children with Special Needs

INTRODUCTION

It is essential that Early Childhood Educators be able to recognize typical from atypical development. With typical development, there are certain behavioral expectations and developmental milestones that children should master within certain age ranges. Any behavior and development that falls outside of the standard norms would be considered atypical. As early care providers, how do we know whether a child's development is happening at a normal, excellent or delayed pace? How can we be certain that we are providing an optimal learning space for each child? As intentional teachers our goal is to accommodate all the varied skill levels and diverse needs of the children in our classrooms. Additionally, we must provide a safe, nurturing and culturally respectful environment that promotes inclusion so that all children can thrive. In this chapter we will examine the purpose, process and practice of monitoring, screening and evaluating young children. If we are to effectively support the children and families in our care, we must be able to identify a child's capabilities and strengths early on, as well as recognize any developmental delays or developmental areas that may need additional support. Additionally, we must be aware of the resources and services that are available to support children and families.



Figure 4.1 Building Blocks¹¹

THE PURPOSE OF MONITORING, SCREENING AND EVALUATING YOUNG CHILDREN

Because many parents are not familiar with developmental milestones, they might not recognize that their child has a developmental delay or disability. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “In the United States, about 1 in 6 children aged 3 to 17 years have one or more developmental or behavioral disabilities, such as autism, a learning disorder, or attention deficit / hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).” What’s more concerning is that many children are not being identified as having a delay or disability until they are in elementary school. Subsequently, they will not receive the appropriate support and services they need early on to be successful at school. It has been well-documented, in both educational and medical professional literature, that developmental outcomes for young children with delays and disabilities can be greatly improved with early identification and intervention (Squires, Nickel, & Eisert, 1996; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). While some parents might be in denial and struggling with the uncertainty of having a child with special needs, some parents might not be aware that there are support services available for young children and they may not know how to advocate for their child. Thus, as early child educators we have an obligation to help families navigate through the process of monitoring, as well as provide information and resources if a screening or evaluation is necessary.

¹¹ [Image](#) by [Markus Spiske](#) on Unsplash

The Process of Monitoring

Who can monitor a child's development? Parents, grandparents, early caregivers, providers and teachers can monitor the children in their care. As previously stated in Chapter 3, one of the tasks of an intentional teacher is to gather baseline data within the first 60 days of a child starting their program. With each observation, teachers are listening to how a child speaks and if they can communicate effectively; they are watching to see how the child plays and interacts with their peers; and they are recording how the child processes information and problem solves. By monitoring a child closely, not only can we observe how a child grows and develops, we can track changes over time. More importantly, we can identify children who fall outside the parameters of what is considered normal or "typical" development.

When teachers monitor children, they are observing and documenting whether children are mastering "typical" developmental milestones in the physical, cognitive, language, emotional and social domains of development. In particular, teachers are tracking a child's speech and language development, problem-solving skills, fine and gross motor skills, social skills and behaviors, so that they can be more responsive to each child's individual needs. Even more so, teachers are trying to figure out what a child can do, and if there are any "red flags" or developmental areas that need further support. As early caregivers and teachers, we are not qualified to formally screen and evaluate children. We can however monitor children's actions, ask questions that can guide our observations, track developmental milestones, and record our observations. With this vital information we can make more informed decisions on what is in the child's best interest.

What is this Child Trying to Tell Me?

With 12-24 busy children in a classroom, there are bound to be occasional outbursts and challenging behaviors to contend with. In fact, a portion of a teacher's day is typically spent guiding challenging behaviors. With all the numerous duties and responsibilities that a teacher performs daily, dealing with challenging behaviors can be taxing. When a child repeats a challenging behavior, we might be bothered, frustrated, or even confused by their actions. We might find ourselves asking questions like:

"Why does she keep pinching her classmate?"

"Why does he put his snack in his hair?"

"Why does he cry when it's clean up time or when he has to put his shoes on?"

"Why does she fidget so much during group time?"

Without taking the time to observe the potential causes and outcomes associated with the challenging behavior, we may only be putting on band-aids to fix a problem, rather than trying to solve the problem. Without understanding the *why*, we cannot properly guide the child or support the whole-child's development. As intentional teachers we are taught to observe, document, and analyze a child's actions so we can better understand what the child is trying to "tell" us through their behavior. Behavior is a form of communication. Any challenging behavior that occurs over and over, is happening for a reason. If you can find the "pattern" in the behavior, you can figure out how to redirect or even stop the challenging behavior.

How do I find the patterns?

To be most effective, it is vital that we record what we see and hear as accurately and objectively as possible. No matter which observation method, tool or technique is used (e.g. Event Sampling, Frequency Counts, Checklists or Technology), once we have gathered a considerable amount of data we will need to interpret and reflect on the observation evidence so that we can plan for the next step. Finding the patterns can be instrumental in planning curriculum, setting up the environment with appropriate materials, and creating social situations that are suitable for the child's temperament.



Think About It...Patterns

If Wyatt is consistently observed going to the sandbox to play with dinosaurs during outside play, what does this tell you? What is the pattern? Is Wyatt interacting with other children? How is Wyatt using the dinosaurs? How can you use this information to support Wyatt during inside play? Here are a few ideas:

To create curriculum: To encourage the child to go into the art center, knowing that he likes dinosaurs, I might lay down some butcher paint on a table, put a variety of dinosaurs out on the table, and add some trays with various colors of paint.

To arrange the environment: Looking at my centers, I might add books and pictures about dinosaurs, and I might add materials that could be used in conjunction with dinosaurs.

To support social development: I noticed Wyatt played by himself on several observations. I may need to do some follow up observations to see if Wyatt is initiating conversations, taking turns, joining in play with others or playing alone.

As you can see these are just a few suggestions. What ideas did you come up with? As we monitor children in our class, we are gathering information so that we can create a space where each child's individual personality, learning strengths, needs, and interests are all taken into account. Whether the child has a disability, delay or impairment or is developing at a typical pace, finding their unique pattern will help us provide suitable accommodations

What is a Red Flag?

If, while monitoring a child's development, a "red flag" is identified, it is the teacher's responsibility to inform the family, in a timely manner, about their child's developmental progress. First, the teacher and family would arrange a meeting to discuss what has been observed and documented. At the meeting, the teacher and family would share their perspectives about the child's behavior, practices, mannerisms, routines and skill sets. There would be time to ask questions and clarify concerns, and a plan of action would be developed. It is likely that various adjustments to the environment would be suggested to meet the

individual child's needs, and ideas on how to tailor social interactions with peers would be discussed. With a plan in place, the teacher would continue to monitor the child. If after a few weeks there was no significant change or improvement, the teacher may then recommend that the child be formally screened and evaluated by a professional (e.g. a pediatrician, behavioral psychologist or a speech pathologist).

The Process of Screening and Evaluating

Who can screen and evaluate children? Doctors, pediatricians, speech pathologists, behaviorists, Screenings and evaluations are more formal than monitoring. Developmental screening takes a closer look at how a child is developing using brief tests. Your child will get a brief test, or you will complete a questionnaire about your child. The tools used for developmental and behavioral screening are formal questionnaires or checklists based on research that ask questions about a child's development, including language, movement, thinking, behavior, and emotions.

Developmental screenings are cost effective and can be used to assess a large number of children in a relatively short period of time. There are screenings to assess a child's hearing and vision, and to detect notable developmental delays. Screenings can also address some common questions and concerns that teachers, and parents alike, may have regarding a child's academic progress. For example, when a teacher wonders *why* a child is behaving in such a way, they will want to observe a child's social interactions and document how often certain behaviors occur. Similarly, when a parent voices a concern that their child is not talking in complete sentences the way their older child did at that same age. The teacher will want to listen and record the child's conversations and track their language development.

Developmental Delays – is the condition of a child being less developed mentally or physically than is normal for their age.

Developmental Disabilities – According to the CDC, developmental disabilities are a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. Some noted disabilities include:

- ADHD
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Cerebral Palsy
- Hearing Loss
- Vision Impairment
- Learning Disability
- Intellectual Disability¹²

¹² [Developmental Disabilities](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain.

The Practice of Screening Young Children

To quickly capture a snapshot of a child's overall development, early caregivers and teachers can select from several observation tools to observe and document a child's play, learning, growth and development. Systematic and routine observations, made by knowledgeable and responsive teachers, ensure that children are receiving the quality care and support they deserve. Several observation tools and techniques can be used by teachers to screen a child's development. Because each technique and tool provides limited observation data, it is suggested that teachers use a combination of tools and techniques to gather a full panoramic perspective of a child's development. Here are some guidelines:

- Monitoring cannot capture the complete developmental range and capabilities of children, but can provide a general overview
- Monitoring can only indicate the *possible* presence of a developmental delay and cannot definitively identify the nature or extent of a disability
- Not all children with or at risk for delays can be identified
- Some children who are red-flagged may not have any actual delays or disabilities; they may be considered "exceptional" or "gifted"
- Children develop at different paces and may achieve milestones at various rates

Tools and Techniques to Monitor and Screen Children's Development

Let's briefly review some of the options more commonly used to monitor children's development.

Developmental Milestone Checklists and Charts

There are many factors that can influence a child's development: genetics, gender, social interactions, personal experiences, temperaments and the environment. It is critical that educators understand what is "typical" before they can consider what is "atypical."

Developmental Milestones provide a clear guideline as to what children should be able to do at set age ranges. However, it is important to note that each child in your classroom develops at their own individualized pace, and they will reach certain milestones at various times within the age range.

Developmental Milestone Charts are essential when setting up your classroom environments. Once you know what skills children *should* be able to do at specific ages, you can then plan developmentally appropriate learning goals, and you can set up your classroom environment with age appropriate materials. Developmental Milestone Charts are also extremely useful to teachers and parents when guiding behaviors. In order to set realistic expectations for children, it is suggested that teachers and parents review all ages and stages of development to understand how milestones evolve. Not only do skills build upon each other, they lay a foundation for the next milestone that's to come. Developmental Milestone Charts are usually organized into 4 Domains: Physical, Cognitive, Language, and Social -Emotional.

Table 15.1 - Gross Motor Milestones from 2 Months to 2 Years¹³

Typical Age	What Most Children Do by This Age
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can hold head up and begins to push up when lying on tummy • Makes smoother movements with arms and legs
4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds head steady, unsupported • Pushes down on legs when feet are on a hard surface • May be able to roll over from tummy to back • Brings hands to mouth • When lying on stomach, pushes up to elbows
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rolls over in both directions (front to back, back to front) • Begins to sit without support • When standing, supports weight on legs and might bounce • Rocks back and forth, sometimes crawling backward before moving forward
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands, holding on • Can get into sitting position • Sits without support • Pulls to stand • Crawls
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gets to a sitting position without help • Pulls up to stand, walks holding on to furniture (“cruising”) • May take a few steps without holding on • May stand alone
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walks alone • May walk up steps and run • Pulls toys while walking • Can help undress self
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands on tiptoe • Kicks a ball • Begins to run • Climbs onto and down from furniture without help • Walks up and down stairs holding on • Throws ball overhand

¹³ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

Table 15.2 - Fine Motor Milestones from 2 Months to 2 Years¹⁴

Typical Age	What Most Children Do by This Age
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Grasps reflexively ● Does not reach for objects ● Holds hands in fist
4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Brings hands to mouth ● Uses hands and eyes together, such as seeing a toy and reaching for it ● Follows moving things with eyes from side to side ● Can hold a toy with whole hand (palmar grasp) and shake it and swing at dangling toys
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reaches with both arms ● Brings things to mouth ● Begins to pass things from one hand to the other
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Puts things in mouth ● Moves things smoothly from one hand to the other ● Picks up things between thumb and index finger (pincer grip)
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reaches with one hand ● Bangs two things together ● Puts things in a container, takes things out of a container ● Lets things go without help ● Pokes with index (pointer) finger
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Scribbles on own ● Can help undress herself ● Drinks from a cup ● Eats with a spoon with some accuracy ● Stacks 2-4 objects
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Builds towers of 4 or more blocks ● Might use one hand more than the other ● Makes copies of straight lines and circles ● Enjoys pouring and filling ● Unbuttons large buttons ● Unzips large zippers ● Drinks and feeds self with more accuracy

¹⁴ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

Table 15.3 - Cognitive Milestones from 2 Months to 2 Years¹⁵

Typical Age	What Most Children Do by This Age
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pays attention to faces • Begins to follow things with eyes and recognize people at a distance • Begins to act bored (cries, fussy) if activity doesn't change
4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lets you know if she is happy or sad • Responds to affection • Reaches for toy with one hand • Uses hands and eyes together, such as seeing a toy and reaching for it • Follows moving things with eyes from side to side • Watches faces closely • Recognizes familiar people and things at a distance
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looks around at things nearby • Brings things to mouth • Shows curiosity about things and tries to get things that are out of reach • Begins to pass things from one hand to the other
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watches the path of something as it falls • Looks for things he sees you hide • Plays peek-a-boo • Puts things in mouth • Moves things smoothly from one hand to the other • Picks up things like cereal o's between thumb and index finger
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explores things in different ways, like shaking, banging, throwing • Finds hidden things easily • Looks at the right picture or thing when it's named • Copies gestures • Starts to use things correctly; for example, drinks from a cup, brushes hair • Bangs two things together • Puts things in a container, takes things out of a container • Lets things go without help • Pokes with index (pointer) finger • Follows simple directions like "pick up the toy"

¹⁵ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Knows what ordinary things are for; for example, telephone, brush, spoon ● Points to get the attention of others ● Shows interest in a doll or stuffed animal by pretending to feed ● Points to one body part ● Scribbles on own ● Can follow 1-step verbal commands without any gestures; for example, sits when you say “sit down”
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Finds things even when hidden under two or three covers ● Begins to sort shapes and colors ● Completes sentences and rhymes in familiar books ● Plays simple make-believe games ● Builds towers of 4 or more blocks ● Might use one hand more than the other ● Follows two-step instructions such as “Pick up your shoes and put them in the closet.” ● Names items in a picture book such as a cat, bird, or dog

Table 15.4 - Language Milestones from 2 Months to 2 Years¹⁶

Typical Age	What Most Children Do By This Age
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coos, makes gurgling sounds ● Turns head toward sounds
4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Begins to babble ● Babbles with expression and copies sounds he hears ● Cries in different ways to show hunger, pain, or being tired
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Responds to sounds by making sounds ● Strings vowels together when babbling (“ah,” “eh,” “oh”) and likes taking turns with parent while making sounds ● Responds to own name ● Makes sounds to show joy and displeasure ● Begins to say consonant sounds (jabbering with “m,” “b”)
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understands “no” ● Makes a lot of different sounds like “mamamama” and “bababababa” ● Copies sounds and gestures of others ● Uses fingers to point at things

¹⁶ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responds to simple spoken requests • Uses simple gestures, like shaking head “no” or waving “bye-bye” • Makes sounds with changes in tone (sounds more like speech) • Says “mama” and “dada” and exclamations like “uh-oh!” • Tries to say words you say
18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Says several single words • Says and shakes head now • Points to show others what is wanted
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Points to things or pictures when they are named • Knows names of familiar people and body parts • Says sentences with 2 to 4 words • Follows simple instructions • Repeats words overheard in conversation • Points to things in a book

Table 15.5 - Social and Emotional Milestones from 2 Months to 2 Years¹⁷

Typical Age	What Most Children Do By This Age
2 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begins to smile at people • Can briefly calm self (may bring hands to mouth and suck on hand) • Tries to look at parent
4 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smiles spontaneously, especially at people • Likes to play with people and might cry when playing stops • Copies some movements and facial expressions, like smiling or frowning
6 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows familiar faces and begins to know if someone is a stranger • Likes to play with others, especially parents • Responds to other people’s emotions and often seems happy • Likes to look at self in a mirror
9 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be afraid of strangers • May be clingy with familiar adults • Has favorite toys
1 year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is shy or nervous with strangers • Cries when mom or dad leaves • Has favorite things and people • Shows fear in some situations • Hands you a book when she wants to hear a story • Repeats sounds or actions to get attention • Puts out arm or leg to help with dressing • Plays games such as “peek-a-boo” and “pat-a-cake”

¹⁷ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likes to hand things to others as play • May have temper tantrums • May be afraid of strangers • Shows affection to familiar people • Plays simple pretend, such as feeding a doll • May cling to caregivers in new situations • Points to show others something interesting • Explores alone but with parent close by
2 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies others, especially adults and older children • Gets excited when with other children • Shows more and more independence • Shows defiant behavior (doing what he has been told not to) • Plays mainly beside other children, but is beginning to include other children, such as in chase games

Table 15.6 - Gross Motor Milestones from 3 Years to 5 Years¹⁸

Typical Age	What Most Children Do by This Age
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climbs well • Runs easily • Pedals a tricycle (3-wheel bike) • Walks up and down stairs, one foot on each step
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hops and stands on one foot up to 2 seconds • Catches a bounced ball most of the time
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stands on one foot for 10 seconds or longer • Hops; may be able to skip • Can do a somersault • Can use the toilet on own • Swings and climbs

Table 15.7 - Fine Motor Milestones from 3 Years to 5 Years¹⁹

Typical Age	What Most Children Do by This Age
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies a circle with pencil or crayon • Turns book pages one at a time • Builds towers of more than 6 blocks • Screws and unscrews jar lids or turns door handle

¹⁸ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

¹⁹ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pours, cuts with supervision, and mashes own food • Draws a person with 2 to 4 body parts • Uses scissors • Starts to copy some capital letters
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can draw a person with at least 6 body parts • Can print some letters or numbers • Copies a triangle and other geometric shapes • Uses a fork and spoon and sometimes a table knife

Table 15.8 - Cognitive Milestones from 3 Years to 5 Years²⁰

Typical Age	What Most Children Do by This Age
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can work toys with buttons, levers, and moving parts • Plays make-believe with dolls, animals, and people • Does puzzles with 3 or 4 pieces • Understands what “two” means
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Names some colors and some numbers • Understands the idea of counting • Starts to understand time • Remembers parts of a story • Understands the idea of “same” and “different” • Plays board or card games • Tells you what he thinks is going to happen next in a book
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counts 10 or more things • Knows about things used every day, like money and food

Table 15.9 - Language Milestones from 3 Years to 5 Years²¹

Typical Age	What Most Children Do By This Age
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows instructions with 2 or 3 steps • Can name most familiar things • Understands words like “in,” “on,” and “under” • Says first name, age, and sex • Names a friend • Says words like “I,” “me,” “we,” and “you” and some plurals (cars, dogs, cats) • Talks well enough for strangers to understand most of the time • Carries on a conversation using 2 to 3 sentences

²⁰ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

²¹ [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knows some basic rules of grammar, such as correctly using “he” and “she” • Sings a song or says a poem from memory such as the “Itsy Bitsy Spider” or the “Wheels on the Bus” • Tells stories • Can say first and last name
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaks very clearly • Tells a simple story using full sentences • Uses future tense; for example, “Grandma will be here.” • Says name and address

Table 15.10 - Social and Emotional Milestones from 3 Years to 5 Years²²

Typical Age	What Most Children Do by This Age
3 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies adults and friends • Shows affection for friends without prompting • Takes turns in games • Shows concern for a crying friend • Dresses and undresses self • Understands the idea of “mine” and “his” or “hers” • Shows a wide range of emotions • Separates easily from mom and dad • May get upset with major changes in routine
4 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoys doing new things • Is more and more creative with make-believe play • Would rather play with other children than by self • Cooperates with other children • Plays “mom” or “dad” • Often can’t tell what’s real and what’s make-believe • Talks about what she likes and what she is interested in
5 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wants to please friends • Wants to be like friends • More likely to agree with rules • Likes to sing, dance, and act • Is aware of gender • Can tell what’s real and what’s make-believe • Shows more independence • Is sometimes demanding and sometimes very cooperative

²² [Developmental Milestones](#) by the [CDC](#) is in the public domain

Time Sampling or Frequency Counts

When a teacher wants to know *how often* or *how infrequent* a behavior is occurring, they will use a Frequency Count to track a child's behavior during a specific timeframe. This technique can help teachers track a child's social interactions, play preferences, temperamental traits, aggressive behaviors, and activity interests.

Checklists

When a teacher wants to look at a child's overall development, checklists can be a very useful tool to determine the presence or absence of a particular skill, milestone or behavior. Teachers will observe children during play times, circle times and centers, and will check-off the skills and behaviors as they are observed. Checklists help to determine which developmental skills have been mastered, which skills are emerging, and which skills have yet to be learned.

Technology

Teachers can use video recorders, cameras and tape recorders to record children while they are actively playing. This is an ideal method for capturing authentic quotes and work samples. Information gathered by way of technology can also be used with other screening tools and techniques as supporting evidence. (Note: it is important to be aware of center policies and procedures regarding proper consent before photographing or taping a child).

Event Sampling and the ABC Technique

When an incident occurs, we may wonder *what triggered* that behavior. The Event Sampling or ABC technique helps us to identify the social interactions and environmental situations that may cause children to react in certain ways. If we are to reinforce someone's positive behavior, or change someone's negative behavior, we must first try to understand what might be causing that particular behavior. With an ABC Analysis, the observer is looking for and tracking a specific *behavior*. More than the behavior itself, the observer wants to understand what is causing the behavior – this is antecedent. The antecedent happens **before** the behavior. It is believed that if the observer can find the “triggers” that might be leading up to or causing the challenging behavior, then potential strategies can be planned to alter, redirect or end the challenging behavior. In addition to uncovering the antecedent, what happens **after** the behavior is just as important, this is the “consequence.” How a child is treated after the incident or challenging behavior can create a positive or negative reinforcement pattern. In short, the ABC technique tells a brief story of what is happening before, during, and after a noted behavior.

The ABC observation method requires some training and practice. The observer must practice being neutral and free of bias, judgement and assumption in order to collect and record objective evidence and to portray an accurate picture. Although it may be uncomfortable to admit, certain behaviors can frustrate a teacher. If the teacher observes a child while feeling frustrated or annoyed, this can possibly taint the observation data. It is important to record just the facts. And to review the whole situation before making any premature assumptions.

Collecting your data

If you have a concern about a child's behavior or if you have noticed a time when a child's behavior has been rather disruptive, you will schedule a planned observation. For this type of observation, you can either video record the child in classroom environment, or you can take observation notes using a Running Record or Anecdotal Record technique. To find a consistent pattern, it is best to tape or write down your observations for several days to find a true and consistent pattern. To document your observations, include the child's name, date, time, setting, and context. Observe and write down everything you see and hear before, during and after the noted behavior.

Organizing your data

Divide a piece of paper into 3 sections: A – for Antecedent; B – for Behavior; and C- for Consequence. Using your observation notes you will organize the information you collected into the proper sections. As you record the observation evidence, remember to report just the facts as objectively as possible. Afterwards, you will interpret the information and look for patterns. For example, did you find any “triggers” *before* the behavior occurred? What kind of “reinforcement” did the child receive *after* the behavior? What are some possible strategies you can try to minimize or redirect the challenging behavior? Do you need to make environmental changes? Are their social interactions that need to be further monitored? With challenging behaviors, there is not a quick fix or an easy answer. You must follow through and continue to observe the child to see if your strategies are working.



Pin It! *The ABC Method*

(A) Antecedent: Right *before* an incident or challenging behavior occurs, something is going on to lead up to or prompt the actual incident or behavior. For example, one day during lunch Susie spills her milk (this behavior has happened several times before). Rather than focusing solely on the incident itself (Susie spilling the milk), look to see what was going on *before* the incident. More specifically, look to see if Susie was in a hurry to finish her snack so she could go outside and play? Was Susie being silly? Which hand was Susie using – is this her dominant hand? Is the milk pitcher too big for Susie to manipulate?

(B) Behavior: This refers to the measurable or observable actions. In this case, it is Susie spilling the milk.

(C) Consequence: The consequence is what happens directly *after* the behavior. For example, right after Susie spilt the milk, did you yell at her or display an unhappy or disgusted look? Did Susie cry? Did Susie attempt to clean up the milk? Did another child try to help Susie?

Watch this video for more information on the [ABC model](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVKb_BXEp5U):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UVKb_BXEp5U

The Practice of Screening and Evaluating

Beyond monitoring, once a child has been “red-flagged” they will need to be assessed by a professional who will use a formal diagnostic tool to evaluate the child’s development. Families can request that a formal screening be conducted at the local elementary school if their child is 3 to 5 years old. Depending upon the nature of the red flag, there are a battery of tools that can be used to evaluate a child’s development. Here are some guidelines:

- Screenings are designed to be brief (30 minutes or less)
- A more comprehensive assessment and formal evaluation must be conducted by a professional in order to confirm or disconfirm any red flags that were raised during the initial monitoring or screening process
- Families must be treated with dignity, sensitivity and compassion while their child is going through the screening process
- Use a screening tool from a reputable publishing company

Screening Instruments and Evaluation Tests

The instruments listed below are merely a sample of some of the developmental and academic screening tests that are widely used.

Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ), *Brookes Publishing Company (available in Spanish, French, and Korean)*

Battelle Developmental Inventory Screening Test, *Riverside Publishing*

Developmental Indicators for Assessment of Learning (DIAL) III, *Pearson Assessments (includes Spanish materials)*

Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), *University of Oregon Center on Teaching and Learning*

Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R), *Pearson Early Learning (includes separate scoring for preschool and kindergarten)*²³

²³A Guide to Assessment in Early Childhood; Infancy to Age Eight. Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2008.

http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/assessment_print.pdf



Pin It! *Reliability and Validity Defined*

Reliability means that the scores on the tool will be stable regardless of when the tool is administered, where it is administered, and who is administering it. Reliability answers the question: Is the tool producing consistent information across different circumstances? Reliability provides assurance that comparable information will be obtained from the tool across different situations.

Validity means that the scores on the tool accurately capture what the tool is meant to capture in terms of content. Validity answers the question: Is the tool assessing what it is supposed to assess?

PUBLIC POLICIES ON INCLUDING CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Throughout the past 40 years there have been some significant changes in both state and federal laws, as well as with public policy and social attitudes towards integrating children with special needs and learning disabilities into typical classroom settings. Stigmas from the past have dissipated and more inclusive practices are in place. In addition to Federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), there are national associations such as the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) who rally to protect the rights of children with disabilities or other special needs. As stated in their joint position on inclusion, the DEC and NAEYC believe:

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (p. 141; DEC and NAEYC 2009, 1)

When early caregivers and preschool teachers practice monitoring as part of their regular routines, they demonstrate accountability and responsive caregiving. Nearly 65% of children are identified as having a special need, disability, delay or impairment, and will require some special services or intervention. As early educators our role is twofold:

1. Provide an environment where children feel safe, secure and cared for
2. Help children develop coping skills to decrease stress and promote learning and development

Individualized Education Plan?

Some children may need more individualized support and might benefit from specialized services or individualized accommodations. Children who are over the age of 3 who qualify for special education must have an individualized education program (IEP) in place. As required by both federal and state laws, IEPs must have clearly identified goals and objectives that can be regularly monitored. IEPs are designed by a TEAM that usually includes the child's parents or guardians, the preschool teacher, special education professionals (e.g. behaviorists, speech pathologists, occupational therapists). Together the team plans appropriate accommodations, modifications and makes recommendations that will help the child meet their developmental goals.

While everyone on the team has a role, the teacher's role is to integrate approaches that can best support the child while in class. For example, if the IEP notes that the child needs support with language development, the teacher would consider finding someone in class who could provide peer to peer scaffolding. The teacher would want to find someone who has strong language skills, and who is cooperative and kind to others. She would then partner the two children up throughout the day so that the typical child could model ideal language skills to the child with the IEP. The teacher would also provide regular updates to parents, continue observing and monitoring the child's development, and would provide access to alternative resources and materials as much as possible.²⁴

Creating Inclusive Learning Environments

To ensure that all children feel safe, secure and nurtured, teachers must strive to create a climate of cooperation, mutual respect and tolerance. To support healthy development, teachers must offer multiple opportunities for children to absorb learning experiences, as well as process information, at their own pace. While one child may be comfortable with simple verbal instructions to complete a particular task, another child may benefit from a more direct approach such as watching another child or adult complete the requested task first. Teachers who are devoted to observing their children are motivated to provide experiences that children will enjoy and be challenged by. The classroom is not a stagnant environment - it is ever-changing. In order to maintain a high-quality classroom setting, it is essential to utilize your daily observations of children and the environment to monitor the experiences and interactions to ensure there is a good fit.²⁵

²⁴ [Preschool Program Guidelines](#) by the [California Department of Education](#) is used with permission

²⁵ Morin, A. (2020). Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): What You Need to Know. Retrieved from <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/special-education-basics/least-restrictive-environment-lre-what-you-need-to-know>

CONCLUSION

Monitoring, screening and evaluating children is both necessary and takes time and practice. Rather than waiting until there is a major concern, intentional teachers should conduct observations on a regular basis to closely monitor each child's development. By watching children, we can find patterns. Once we understand the patterns, we can better understand why children do what they do, and ideally, we can create an inclusive learning environment that meets the needs of all our children. Understanding that over half of the children in your classroom may potentially have some special need, disability, delay or impairment is crucial. Recognizing that unless we observe regularly, we won't be able to refer families in a timely manner to get the support services and professional help that they need is essential. Research tells us that children who receive early intervention are more likely to master age-appropriate developmental milestones, have increased academic readiness and are more apt to socialize with their peers. It is important to remember that everyone in the classroom, including teachers, assistants and directors and supervisors, should be involved with monitoring a child's development. As you continue to read this text, you will discover how observations are essential in planning effective curriculum, documenting children's learning, assessing development and communicating with families.²⁶

REFERRALS, AGENCIES AND SUPPORT GROUPS²⁷

[Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities \(AIDD\)](#)

AIDD seeks to improve and increase services for individuals with developmental disabilities that promote independence and inclusion in society. This website contains information on AIDD's programs and other helpful resources, such as a developmental disabilities program directory by state and grants and funding information.

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

The American Academy of Pediatrics comprises pediatricians committed to the health of infants, children, adolescents, and young adults. The website contains general information about children's health, as well as more specific information about guidelines, policies, and publications. This organization also hosts a website specifically for parents

[Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#)

The CPIR serves as a central resource of information and products to the community of Parent Training Information Centers and the Community Parent Resource Centers, so that they can focus their efforts on serving families of children with disabilities.

²⁶ The Early Learning Institute. (2018). Top 5 Benefits of Early Intervention. Retrieved from <https://www.telipa.org/top-5-benefits-early-intervention/>
[Preschool Program Guidelines](#) by the [California Department of Education](#) is used with permission

²⁷ [Developmental Disabilities](#) by [CDC](#) is in the public domain.

[Department of Education](#)

The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) has resources to assist with the educational needs of children with developmental disabilities.

The DOE's [Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network \(TA&D Network\)](#)

Provides links to a variety of other websites and online resources that focus on special education issues, such as policy, technology, curricula and parent trainings.

The DOE's [Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services \(OSERS\)](#) Provides support to parents and individuals, school districts, and states in three main areas:

- *Special education: [Office of Special Education Programs \(OSEP\)](#)[external icon](#)*
- *Vocational rehabilitation: [Rehabilitation Services Administration \(RSA\)](#)[external icon](#)*
- *[DisabilityMeasures.org](#)*
DisabilityMeasures.org is an online resource with measurement tools for assessment, screening, and research concerning individuals with disabilities.

[First Signs](#)

First Signs is dedicated to educating parents and professionals about early identification and intervention for children at risk for developmental delays and disorders, including autism.

[Insure Kids Now!](#)

Each state provides no-cost or low-cost health insurance coverage for eligible children through Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program. This website has basic facts about these programs. It also has links to each state's insurance program for children, where you can learn who is eligible for the programs, how to apply, and what services are covered. Information is available in English and Spanish.

[MedlinePlus](#)

MedlinePlus, a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health, provides information on many different types of developmental disabilities, as well as resources on prevention and screening, research, statistics, law and policy, and more.

[My Child Without Limits](#)

My Child Without Limits provides resources for families of young children from birth through 5 years of age with developmental delays or disabilities, as well as for professionals who work with these individuals. The site also has a national resource locator where visitors can find local service providers, community organizations, and government agencies.

[National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities \(NACDD\)](#)

The NACDD supports state and territorial councils in implementing the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act and promoting the interests and rights of individuals with disabilities and their families.

[National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research \(NIDILRR\)external icon](#)

NIDILRR is a federal government grants-making agency that sponsors grantees to generate new disability and rehabilitation knowledge and promote its use and adoption.

[National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#)

Several institutes within the NIH conduct and fund research about developmental disabilities. They also offer information to the public and educational programs for health professionals. They include:

[National Eye Institute \(NEI\)](#)

The NEI studies ways to prevent and treat eye diseases and vision problems and to improve the lives of people with these conditions.

[National Institute of Child Health and Human Development \(NICHD\)](#)

The NICHD conducts and supports research on all stages of human development to better understand the health of children, adults, families, and communities, including those with developmental disabilities.

[National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders \(NIDCD\)](#)

The NIDCD studies hearing loss, deafness, and problems with speech and language.

[National Institute of Mental Health \(NIMH\)external icon](#)

The NIMH studies mental illness and behavior problems, including such conditions as autism, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and learning disabilities.

[National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke \(NINDS\)external icon](#)

NINDS studies the causes, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of brain and nervous system disorders such as cerebral palsy and epilepsy.

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CDC. (n.d.) Developmental Monitoring. Retrieved from
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/childdevelopment/screening.html>

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<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/pdf/Dev-Mon-and-Screen-English-and-Spanish-P.pdf>

CHAPTER 16: HOW TO PLAN EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL CURRICULUM

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. What is Curriculum?
2. Benefits of Implementing Meaningful Curriculum
3. A Teacher's Role
4. A Closer Look at the Curriculum Planning Cycle

INTRODUCTION

One of the highlights of being a preschool teacher was setting up my classroom environment at the beginning of each new school year. There was so much anticipation and excitement as I thoughtfully organized my classroom, stocked the learning centers with new materials, and planned curriculum activities. I especially enjoyed purchasing a new lesson plan book and writing up activity plans for each month. I gathered ideas from various teacher resource books that primarily focused on seasonal themes and kindergarten readiness skills – like language arts and math. As I carefully considered topics for each month, I planned for indoor and outdoor activities, music and movement activities, along with a variety of play opportunities. I thought about creative art projects and planned for engaging circle time discussions. I created quiet corners, learning centers, decorated the walls with store-bought posters, and strived to make the classroom environment safe and welcoming. Some twenty years later, as I write this text and reflect on my own experiences as a preschool teacher, there are a few questions that come to mind:

1. Who was I planning curriculum for – me, the children, their families or my program director?
2. How could I possibly have planned meaningful curriculum if I didn't even know the children who were being placed in my care?
3. How could I be intentional if I didn't even know the children's individual interests, abilities and needs?

In this chapter, we will examine how observation and documentation are used to develop effective curriculum. We will explore what curriculum is and we will discuss the benefits of planning developmentally appropriate curriculum. Additionally, the teacher's role will be examined. Lastly, we will discuss how to plan effective and meaningful curriculum using observation, documentation, interpretation, and reflection as best practices.

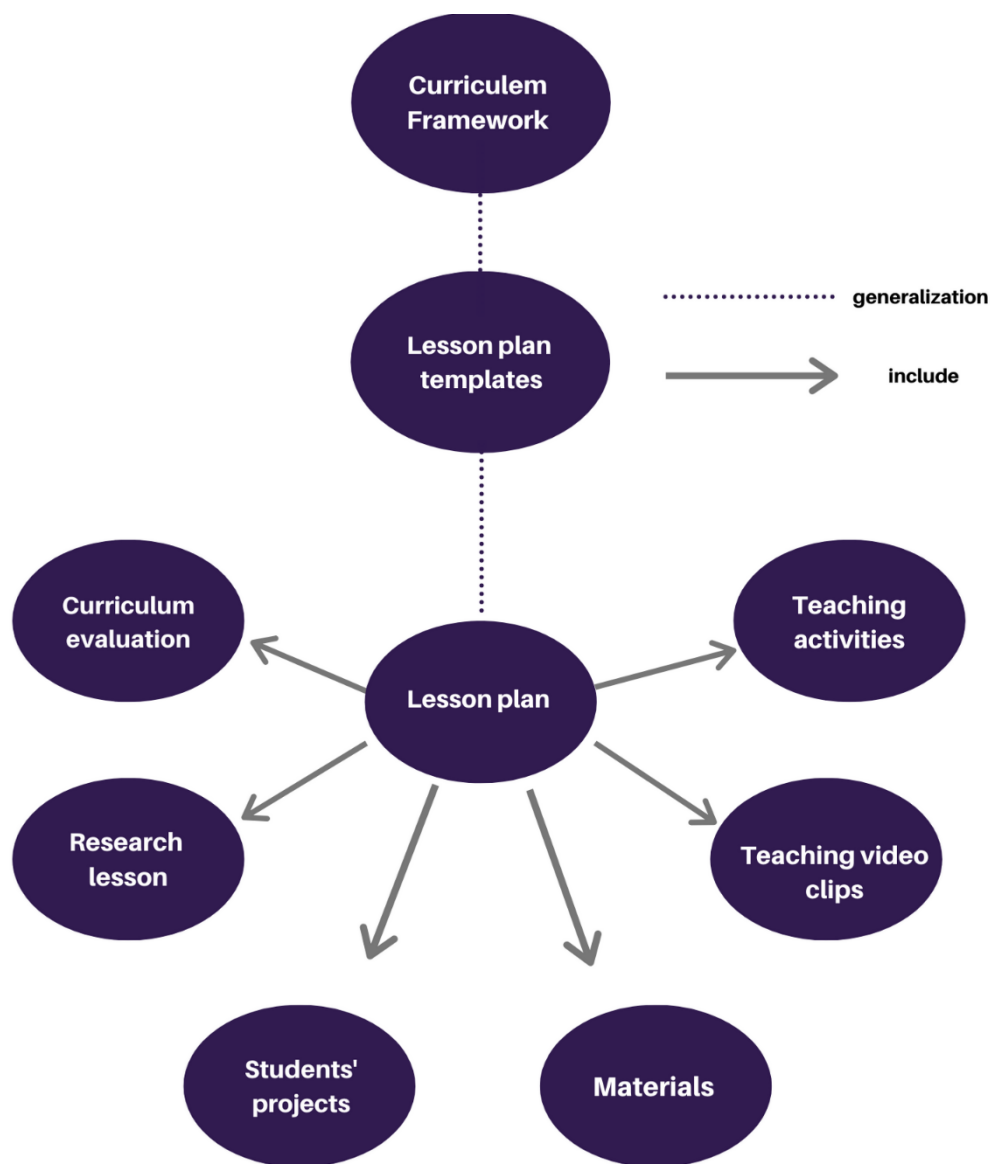


Figure 16.1 Lesson Plan Concept Mapping.²⁸

WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

In early care and education, we value how children process information, we recognize how important their feelings are, and we place great significance on how children learn to socialize with others. As intentional teachers, our primary goal is to incorporate curriculum that supports the “whole-child” in all domains of development including social, emotional, physical, and intellectual. The word “curriculum” can mean different things to different people. For some, curriculum can provide the framework for learning, for others it can be a variety of planned activities, still for others curriculum is a way to drive learning outcomes, goals and objectives.

²⁸ Image by [College of the Canyons ZTC Team](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

Curriculum can be developed by teachers, or it can be purchased as part of a prefabricated program. Curriculum can be child-directed, and it can be teacher-directed. According to a joint position paper by the National Association for the Education of Young Child (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Department of Education (NAECS-SDE), “Curriculum is an organized framework that delineates the content children are to learn, the processes through which children achieve identified curricular goals, what teachers do to help achieve these goals, and the context in which teaching and learning occur” (2009). In other words, curriculum helps teachers organize the day to day activities, it outlines the learning goals and outcomes that teachers need to assess, and lastly, curriculum provides teachers with the guidance and structure that they need to teach.²⁹

Lesson Planning With an Emergent Curriculum				
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu
Language & Literacy				
Cognition & Knowledge				
Social & Emotional				
Physical & Motor				
Approaches to Learning				

Figure 16.2 Lesson Planning with an Emergent Curriculum.³⁰

²⁹ Patterson, S. (2013). How Do We Define an Early Childhood Curriculum? Retrieved from <https://soprislearning.wordpress.com/2013/02/19/how-do-we-define-an-early-childhood-curriculum/>

³⁰ Image by [College of the Canyons ZTC Team](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING MEANINGFUL CURRICULUM

From the moment a child is born, each interaction and experience affects their brain development and lays the foundation for future success. Research on brain development shows that early experiences are essential. It is suggested that if children are not interested in what they are learning, and if it is not meaningful or connected to their cultural practices, they will not create new neural pathways in which to store new knowledge. Subsequently, children will not retain information or learn as intended. As suggested in the California Early Learning Foundations, well planned curriculum provides opportunities for children to use, build, and master skills. With every engaging activity, children are encouraged to investigate key concepts in mathematics, science, and literacy, explore their creativity, establish relationships with peers, and develop self-efficacy skills.³¹

It is important to note that thoughtful curriculum planning does not just impact children for that present moment. A high-quality program that incorporates meaningful curriculum can provide long-lasting benefits. As demonstrated with the Abecedarian Project, a vastly recognized longitudinal research study that followed a group of 111 children into adulthood, not only did the children who received high-quality child care outperform their peers in math and reading, 30 years later project participants continued to exhibit significant merits as compared to their counterparts in the control group. More specifically, children that participated in the Abecedarian Project were four times more likely to earn a college degree. Additionally, it was reported that “Twenty-three percent of the participants graduated from a four-year college or university compared to only 6 percent of the control group.” Other significant benefits included:

participants were more likely to have been consistently employed (75 percent had worked full time for at least 16 of the previous 24 months, compared to 53 percent of the control group) and less likely to have used public assistance (only 4 percent received benefits for at least 10 percent of the previous seven years, compared to 20 percent of the control group). They also showed a tendency to delay parenthood by almost two years compared to the control group. Project participants also appeared to have done better in relation to several other social and economic measures (including higher incomes) but those results were not statistically significant.³²

³¹ [From Early Child Development](#) by World Bank, Public Disclosure Authorized.

³² Virginia Tech. (2012). Benefits of high-quality child care persist 30 years later. Retrieved from <https://research.vtc.vt.edu/news/2012/jan/19/benefits-high-quality-child-care-persist-30-years/>



Figure 5.3 Robust Curriculum³³

A TEACHERS ROLE

With curriculum being the cornerstone for children’s learning, how can we be certain that children are receiving reputable curriculum that reflects their varying academic abilities, learning styles, personalities, interests, background knowledge, cultural experiences and levels of motivation for learning? Teachers are the linchpin. As stated in the article “Observing, Planning, Guiding: How an Intentional Teacher Meets Standards through Play” by Patricia McDonald, “teachers are researchers, observing children to decide how to extend their learning both in the moment and by planning new play environments” (p.3).³⁴ For all intents and purposes, teachers play a pivotal role in setting up the environment, providing the learning experiences and guiding children so they can construct concepts, develop new skill sets, and discover who they are. Additionally, teachers are active participants in a child’s development as they watch, listen and think about what each child needs to thrive. As teachers monitor numerous situations throughout the day, they must consider when to step in and engage the children, and when to step aside and allow students to scaffold one another. At the center of it all, teachers who really *know* their children are better equipped to find the right balance of how to engage, motivate and challenge learners. So then, how do teachers learn about the intricate details of what each child needs? Let’s take a closer look at how observation, documentation, interpretation, and reflection are used to support children’s learning, growth, and development.

³³ [Image](#) on Pixabay

³⁴ McDonald, P. (2018). Observing, Planning, Guiding: How an Intentional Teacher Meets Standards through Play. Retrieved from: <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/pubs/yc/mar2018/observing-planning-guiding>

THE CURRICULUM PLANNING CYCLE AT A GLANCE

Observation: Looking and Listening

- May be Spontaneous or Planned
- Watch and listen to children while they explore, investigate, play, problem solve, interact and socialize
- Keep an open mind as you gather evidence and artifacts, and look for what children CAN DO

Observe children during daily routines, transition times, mealtimes, and while inside and outside

Documentation: Recording and Collecting Objective Evidence

- Record what you see and hear
- Include date, time, and location
- Include child's first name
- Include who else is engaged in the activity
- Document the purpose of the activity – highlighting what the child is supposed to do
- All recorded evidence should be concise, factual and have descriptive details
- Use a variety of observation and documentation methods and tools to collect evidence

Record actual evidence as you see it (avoid summarizing or assuming)

Interpretation: Analyzing Data

Ask questions: What is this action telling me?

- How did the child approach the activity and how long did the child stay engaged?
- Is this behavior typical for the child or unusual?
- Would this child benefit from peer scaffolding?
- Does this child need more individualized support?
- Does this child have more feisty, flexible or fearful temperament traits?
- How can I motivate this child?
- Were there any new play patterns or social interactions?
- Did the child master any new skills or milestones?
- Are there any skills or milestones that need further support?
- Were there any “red flags”?

When analyzing behavior, consider the ABCs: the Antecedent (What happened BEFORE), the Behavior (as it happens) and the Consequence (what happened AFTER)

Review previous observations to monitor progress over time

Reflection: Planning for the Next Step

- How can I set up the environment to incorporate the children's interests?
- What resources and materials will I need?
- What milestones, learning goals and objectives can I further support with this activity?
- How can I create a "good fit" for this child's temperament?
- Did I acknowledge children when they met expectations, and did I provide genuine praise to reinforce positive behaviors?
- Am I setting clear expectations?
- Do I need to change the routines or schedule?
- Have I incorporated all the developmental domains and considered the whole child?
- Did I plan for individual activities, small group, and larger group opportunities

Implementation: Applying Best Practices

- Create quiet and active spaces
- Plan for indoor and outdoor learning experiences
- Provide a variety of materials that will encourage open-ended play and exploration
- Follow a consistent routine and schedule
- Plan teacher-directed activities and create centers based on children's interest
- Consider the project approach and allow concepts to develop over time rather than a one and done
- Create a balance of play-based learning opportunities and skill-based learning opportunities?
- Plan to accommodate the diverse needs of each child
- Create a respectful and caring classroom environment that is supportive and nurturing to all learners

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE CURRICULUM PLANNING CYCLE

Children reveal who they are and how they think through their actions and behavior. How they play with others, how they use materials, and even the types of activities they choose to tell us a story. Each child has their own story to tell and it is up to us, as intentional teachers, to gather essential evidence and artifacts that can be used to inform our decisions on how to best support each child's learning, growth and development. Curriculum should be thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically

responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.³⁵ To guide our decision making and to effectively implement meaningful curriculum we must utilize the *Curriculum-Planning Process*. Let's examine and discuss the 4 steps of the cycle.

Step 1: Observation – Looking and Listening

To develop effective curriculum, quality observations must be conducted. Whether spontaneous or planned, formal or informal, in-depth observations provide teachers with an advantage point. With each observation, teachers gain valuable insight that helps them gauge a child's zone of proximal development, and with that information, teachers can decide on how to best scaffold that child's learning. Likewise, teachers who conduct ongoing observations discover each child's baseline knowledge, and with that data, they can develop curriculum that supports children's play and learning in a developmentally appropriate manner. Furthermore, a teacher who regularly observes can track children's interests which in turn helps her to select materials and resources that will fascinate, intrigue, challenge and engage the children. Thus, when teachers take detailed notes and record objective facts, they recognize each child's individual pace, temperament, capabilities, interests and needs. It is with this vital data that they can ultimately meet children where they are at developmentally and map out where they need to go by intentionally setting reasonable expectations and goals.

To truly discover a child's intent, teachers need to be fully attentive to what children are doing and saying while they are playing and interacting with others. To be fully attentive requires a particular state of mind. Rather than being actively engaged with children or guiding their behavior or directing their play, teachers need to find moments where they can *focus on looking and listening*. Teachers need to approach each observation with an open mind - free of bias and preconceived notions, and they need to have an open lens to see what children are actually doing. Sometimes we can only look and listen for a brief moment; sometimes we can look and listen for a longer timeframe. Either way, we need to take in all that we are seeing and hearing so that we can discover a window into the child's thinking and find clues as to what they are capable of.

An observation is often prompted by a question. Here are a few questions that might guide your next observation:

"In what ways are the children using the new materials in the block area?"

"Which children can cut a zig-zag line with scissors?"

"Who will recognize their name tag that is posted on the outside table?"

"Will Sofia play with a peer today or keep to herself?"

"I wonder how Jackson will do at drop-off today?"

"I'm curious to see how the children will react to painting with fall leaves and who will try?"

"What activity area are the children using the most while outside?"

³⁵ [Ages and Stages of Development](#) by [CDE](#) is used with permission.

As teachers observe to find answers to questions like those mentioned above, they will need to record what children are doing and saying. No matter which tool, technique or method is used, teachers need to document what they are observing.

Step 2: Documentation – Recording Evidence and Gathering Artifacts

Documentation provides the vital evidence and visual artifacts that teachers need to accurately track each child's learning, growth and development in order to plan developmentally appropriate curriculum. Documentation helps teachers hold into memory the significant moments of play, exploration and learning. To gather data, teachers can opt to use several tools and techniques. Whether a teacher uses an anecdotal note, frequency count, or checklist to gather documentation, the goal is to have an extensive collection of factual evidence, along with work samples, that highlight each child's actions and behaviors, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, social interaction and intellectual abilities.

Let's take a moment to reiterate information that was discussed in a previous chapter about how to write effective evidence. First, all documentation needs to be factual. Teachers need to write down exactly what the children do and say. Second, it is suggested that you record as many descriptive details as you can, while remaining as objective as possible. Third, document the whole child's development. More specifically,

1. Look for what children "can do" and note the milestones that have been mastered
2. Track language development by recording pertinent conversations
3. Track play patterns to see who engages in cooperative play and who prefers to play alone
4. Watch the interactions and social dynamics between peers
5. Next, in order to track a child's development over time, remember to include the following information: date; time; location and setting; activity; and note the children that are engaged in the activity. Lastly, to plan meaningful curriculum, you will need to regularly review all the documentation you have collected so that you can ponder and interpret what was observed.



Pin It! Documentation Sample

Date: 2/10/19

Time: 9:30 -9:45

Location and Setting: Inside during Active Investigation Time. The following centers were open: Science – magnifying glass and leaves, Art – painting with pom poms, blocks with transportation vehicles, computer station – Clifford the Big Red Dog.

Activity: Science Area

Children Present: Hannah and Zoey

Hannah and Zoey were in the science area. They scooted their chairs up to the counter where the class pet gecko was perched. "Hello, Gex. How are you today? What are you eating? Asked Hannah. I love Gexy Gex don't you?

Zoey asked Hannah. “Yeaaaah,” said Hannah. “I wish I had Gex,” said Zoey. “Me too!” Said Hannah. The 2 girls sat next to Gex the Gecko until it was clean up time (about 10 minutes). Hannah sat with her back to Zoey. Zoey played with Hannah’s hair (brushing it with her fingers maybe braiding it or putting it in a ponytail). They continued to chat back and forth to each other.

What are you able to interpret from this interaction?

You can learn more about documentation in this video by First 5 California [“For the Record: Documenting Young Children’s Learning and Development”](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-W4y474XE6s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-W4y474XE6s>

Step 3: Interpretation – Analyzing Observation Data

Before a teacher can reflect and plan developmentally appropriate curriculum, they must first interpret and analyze the documentation they have gathered. Ideally, as you observe and document, you are in the moment gathering snippets of detailed information and writing down objective facts. Once you have collected your data, only then will you begin to analyze “what does this all mean?”. As you review your documentation, you begin to think about each child’s individual actions, mannerisms, and behaviors, as well as ponder over peer interactions and group dynamics. Planning developmentally appropriate curriculum is somewhat like putting a puzzle together. As you wonder about the “why, who, what, when and how” you begin to put the pieces in place and generate potential curriculum ideas. First, you think about what the child can do on their own, and the milestones they have already mastered. Next, you think about if you are meeting each child where they are at developmentally. Then, you look for the areas of development that need further support. Lastly, you think about the zone of proximal development and how you might scaffold the children’s learning so they can reach their potential learning goals. Ultimately, your interpretations will guide your planning efforts. Let’s review the chart below:³⁶ The three zones of proximal development.

³⁶ [The Integrated Nature of Learning](#) by [CDE](#) is used with permission.



Figure 16.4 Learning Zones.³⁷

Besides analyzing documentation on your own, you can share information with your co-teachers. With factual notes and work samples that document what a child does or says, teachers can collectively discuss what they think, and they can pose additional questions. For example, at some programs, one teacher works a morning shift and a co-teacher works in the afternoon. Although they each will have their own set of observations, having the opportunity to collaborate and share information about the children in their care will only enhance their effectiveness when planning curriculum. Here are some possible questions they can ask each other:

- “What growth do you see?”
- “Are the peer interactions the same in the afternoon as they are in the morning?”

³⁷ Image by [College of the Canyons ZTC Team](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

- “What are your thoughts on this behavior?”
- “How did you handle this transition?”

The high-quality practice of collaborating with co-teachers provides both professional and ethical support. When co-teachers are able to meet and discuss their observations, not only are they able to share their successes, they can also share their struggles. A co-teacher who is working alongside you will be familiar with the children and may have valuable insight that will help with your curriculum planning. They may be able to offer suggestions from a different perspective, as well as provide encouragement and empathy as needed. Another benefit of collaborating with a co-teacher is having the opportunity to share resources and materials with each other. Shared resources can extend curriculum possibilities.³⁸

Whether you analyze your data on your own or collectively with a co-teacher, it is the careful interpretation of observations and documentation that generates ideas for the next steps in planning curriculum.³⁹

Step 4 Reflection: Planning for the Next Step

It is during the reflective process that interpreting the meaning of children’s behaviors and interactions becomes important. These interpretations give us insight into each child’s story. Each child’s story informs our responsive practice. With this valuable insight, we can:

- Adapt the environment
- Modify the daily schedule and/or routines
- Make decisions about how to guide the children’s learning based on what the child knows and can do as well as what the child is ready to try.⁴⁰

Curriculum planning requires a considerable amount of time. Teachers need time to observe and collect documentation, they need time to interpret their data, and they need time to reflect on how to use that data to plan effective strategies that will foster a child’s learning. High-quality preschool programs that support intentional teaching allocate time in teachers’ schedules for them to reflect and plan curriculum individually and collectively as a team.⁴¹

As we reflect, we must ask ourselves a wide range of questions. The answers to these questions lead to individualized care and learning. Let’s look at a few questions you may ask yourself as you begin to plan developmentally appropriate curriculum:

- What skill or activity does the child appear to be working on?
- What learning strategies is the child using to play with different toys?
- Does the child engage with objects or people differently than a month ago? What has changed? What has not changed?

³⁸ Davis, L. (2019). Teacher Collaboration: How to Approach it in 2019. <https://www.schoolology.com/blog/teacher-collaboration>

³⁹ [The Integrated Nature of Learning](#) by CDE is used with permission

⁴⁰ [Observation: The Heart of Individualizing Responsive Care](#) by the Office of Head Start is in the public domain

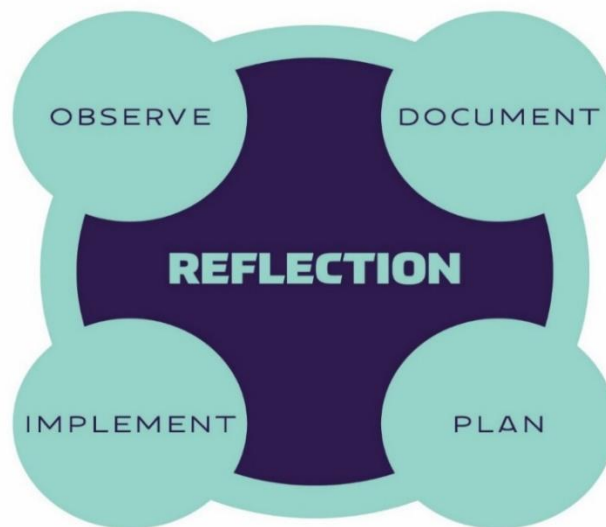
⁴¹ [Preschool Curriculum Framework Volume 1](#) by the California Department of Education is used with permission

- Do my actions affect the outcomes of the child's experience? How so?
- How does the information relate to goals for the child? The family's goals? The program's school readiness goals?

Once we have reviewed all our data we can plan meaningful curriculum. The most effective curriculum will:

- Motivate children to explore their environment
- Inspire children to investigate various centers and activities
- Encourage children to create with new materials
- Allow children to engage in conversations and prompt them to ask questions
- Prompt children to interact with peers
- Permit children to problem solve
- Celebrate diversity and embrace uniqueness
- Accommodate each child's learning styles and individual needs

As teachers reflect on children's play, they discover possibilities for designing curriculum to sustain, extend, and help children's play to be more complex and, consequently, support the children's continual learning. Teachers review ideas for possible next steps in the curriculum. Possible steps might include adding materials to interest areas, books to read with large or small groups, activities to do in small groups, or a topic to investigate over time with the children. With clear ideas or objectives in mind, teachers plan curriculum that includes strategies to enhance the learning of all children in a group, as well as strategies to support the learning of individual children.



*Figure 16.5 Reflection is the center of curriculum planning.*⁴²

⁴² Image by [Ian Joslin](#) is licensed under a [CC-BY 4.0](#).

**Pin It! Observation and Documentation****Date:** 10/10/19**Time:** 10:45 – 10:55 am**Location and Setting:** Inside during open exploration the following centers were open – easel painting, blocks with fall materials, dramatic play with firefighter and homelife, math center with pumpkin cut outs for counting**Activity:** Dramatic Play Area and Library Area**Children Present:** Joey

- Joey played in the dramatic play area. He was dressed up in the firefighter outfit. He held the toilet paper roll in his left hand and pointed it towards a basket of stuffed animals. As he waived the toilet paper roll back and forth (side to side) he said “pssshhhhhssshhh.” After a minute or so, Joey dropped the toilet paper roll and picked up a stuffed doggie from the basket. He took the stuffed animal to the table. As he pet the doggie, he said “You’re ok, You’re ok aren’t ya.” He then kissed the doggie on the nose, picked it up and carried it over to the library area where he sat down on the carpet square. He put the dog in his lap and started to look through a book.

Interpretation:

- With the recent fires, I wonder if Joey saw firefighters on the news or working in his neighborhood?
- I wonder if Joey has family members that are firefighters?
- I wonder what other community helpers would be interesting to explore?
- Joey has not been observed reading before, I’m curious to see what milestones he has mastered? Can he turn the pages? Can he recognize letters or words? Can he recall information?
- Joey played by himself. In previous observations he played with Martin. I wonder if they had a disagreement with Martine. I wonder if Joey needed time to himself. Maybe Martin wasn’t interested in playing firefighters.

Reflection:

- What materials can I add to the dramatic play area to extend Joey’s interest in pretending to be a firefighter?
- Are there storybooks about community helpers that highlight firefighters?

Step 5: Implementation

Once a plan has been formally written, teachers will implement it accordingly. While implementing the plan, teachers watch and listen to determine if the curriculum was effective. They will watch how children respond to the activities, materials and resources, and how they interact with peers and the environment, and how they process new information. In essence, teachers are looking for “the light bulb to go off.” It is during the implementation step that the curriculum planning cycle begins again.



Think About It...Consider this Case Study

For the past few weeks, children in Miss Emily’s class (ages 3-5 years) have been watching the crops across the preschool grow. During lunchtime, Miss Emily heard the children talking about what they had for lunch. Later in the day, the children watched the sprinklers water the yard and ask the teacher about how the water gets to the sprinklers to water the grass. While playing outside at the sensory table, four children are fascinated with pouring and dumping water into pipes and seeing how far it can travel.



Figure 16.5⁴³

Observation: Lucas is somewhat cautious in joining others in play. He stands to the side and watches others as they play.

Interpretation: Lucas appears to want to join the play, but may need just a little bit of support. I plan to watch for moments when he is on the sidelines of play, and find ways to invite him into the social play, and stay with him to support him in his encounters with the other children.

Questions to Consider

What can you infer about the children’s interests?

What can you infer about their knowledge base?

It would be safe to say that these children understand that for plants to grow, you need to water them. It would also be safe to infer that the

⁴³ [Image](#) by Nathan Lipscomb is in the public domain.

children are most likely interested in how water travels, as you observed their actions at the water table and their questions of where and how water gets to sprinkler systems. As an intentional teacher, with your observations, you would maybe consider doing your next unit on water systems where you can incorporate all developmental domains, based on the children's interests.

CONCLUSION

While some planned curriculum activities might be based on a teacher's knowledge of age-appropriate developmental milestones, other activities might be prompted by children's interests or ideas, while other activities might be suggested by the children's families. To plan meaningful curriculum teachers are encouraged to utilize the curriculum planning cycle. Through careful observation, documentation and interpretation teachers collect evidence and gather artifacts that prompt inquiry as to what children know and need. With that information teachers can reflect, plan and implement effective curriculum so that children can thrive as they master the major developmental milestones and meet school readiness goals and objectives.

To ensure high-quality practice, teachers should consider incorporating daily routines, structured and unstructured activities, as well as space for self-discovery. Curriculum should be designed to encourage children to explore their classroom environment, socialize with others, and challenge themselves to reach new levels. As suggested by NAEYC, when planning curriculum teachers should consider using an assortment of materials that are appropriate to each child's age and stage of development. Well-planned curriculum considers each child's individual needs and includes adaptations for children with special needs and disabilities. Lastly, for curriculum to be truly meaningful and engaging it should be reflective of each child's cultural background and home-life practices.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ NAEYC. (n.d.). 3 Core Considerations of DAP. Retrieved from <https://www.naeyc.org/resources/topics/dap/3-core-considerations>

CHAPTER 17: USING DOCUMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT TO COMMUNICATE WITH FAMILIES

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. Documentation Boards
2. Portfolios
3. Assessing Children's Development
4. Family Conferences

INTRODUCTION

From the moment a child walks into their classroom, they are *learning*. They are learning from their peers, their teachers, their families and through their own trials, errors and explorations. How can we best communicate what children are learning to their families in a respectful and reassuring manner? How can we convey that a child's academic progress is just one aspect, as we strive to develop the whole child? In this chapter, we will discuss how intentional teachers use documentation and assessment to effectively communicate with families. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how we connect observation, documentation and assessment all together to provide quality learning experiences for the children and families that we serve, and that there is value in everything we do as intentional teachers.

DOCUMENTATION BOARDS: NOT JUST FOR DISPLAYING ART

When you walk into a classroom what do you typically see on the walls? Quite possibly you will see colorful posters, charts, family photos, and lots and lots of artwork. Have you ever wondered why we post things on our walls? Is it to make our classrooms more aesthetically pleasing? More colorful and eye-appealing? Do we want to motivate our children to do their best work because it will be posted for all to see? Are we trying to create a cozy space where our children can feel comfortable and feel like they belong? Are we hoping our parents see all the great work that we are doing? Everything that is posted on your classroom walls should communicate a message. Documentation Boards help us to convey important messages. A central message that I believe to be most important is that "Children Learn Through Play!"

When parents drop off and pick up their child, they may see their child playing with blocks, puzzles, playdough, or in the dramatic play area with their peers. To some, this type of open exploration or child-directed play (sometimes called *free play*) may look frivolous, inconsequential or perhaps trivial because it lacks formal instruction. The idea that learning can

be playful, and fun may be difficult for some parents to understand. Many parents like to see some type of tangible evidence – for example, a finished worksheet or completed art project, to “know” that teaching and learning are happening. Thus, it is necessary for us as intentional teachers to convey the importance of play through formal documentation. We must provide parents with information that explains not only the end result,(or product) but the process of how curriculum activities are specifically designed to help children master milestones in all the developmental domains. More importantly, we must showcase that learning is a direct product of play.



Figure 17.1 Documentation Board.⁴⁵

What are Documentation Boards

Documentation boards use observations and assessments to illustrate a child’s process of learning. When used effectively, documentation boards highlight the purpose of an activity and record the milestones that have been mastered (NAEYC, 2008). In order for parents to truly understand that children learn through play, documentation boards should include work samples or photos that highlight what the child did during the activity, along with several quotes to highlight the child’s thought process. When done correctly, teachers and families should be able to follow a child’s progress over time. Documentation Boards help teachers and families understand, without explanation, the child’s abilities and Interests. Documentation Boards provide clear evidence as to what children are learning throughout the school year in each of the developmental domains: Physical, Cognitive, Social, Emotional and Language.

What to Document

When I was a “young” teacher, I often felt obligated to post one piece of artwork for each child in the classroom so as to be “fair” that each child was represented. On my classroom walls, I

⁴⁵ [Image](#) by Candateshia Pafford is in the public domain.

mostly posted artwork and I didn't provide any caption or describe the purpose of the activity. Not only did that take a lot of time, but it also took up a lot of wall space. As I became more intentional (and a more "seasoned" teacher, I learned that there was a more efficient way to showcase children's learning. I began to use documentation boards to make learning more visible. Since learning is happening all day - every day in the classroom, there are a variety of topics that can be presented. Documentation boards can illustrate something as simple as a child playing with sand and water for an hour, or something complex like a child learning how to tie their shoes over a long period of time. These boards can feature one child, a group of children, or the whole class. Here are some suggested topics to consider when creating a formal Documentation Board: daily routines, project-based activities, child-directed play and exploration, outdoor play experiences, circle-time conversations, developmental milestones, social relationships, and teacher-directed lesson plan activities. The topics are endless.

How to Make a Documentation Board

Posters, bulletin boards, and slide shows are all commonly used to create documentation boards. The format chosen to use for the documentation board should be reflective of the purpose, the audience, and the activity being presented. These boards can be simple, artistic, or even three dimensional. Before creating the board, consider the collaboration of additional teachers, children, and families. Having a team create the board adds a new level of depth, with various ideas and opinions. The first step is creating a title that invites families to approach the board. Next, mention the developmental milestones and goals for the activity (what the children are learning). Add photos and children's quotes (both parents and children enjoy this), Include the steps that were taken or the process, and work samples as the final product. An extra step would be to add a recipe card or take-home handout so parents can replicate the activity at home. While constructing the board ask yourself, is this showing the child's thought process, developmental growth, and both the child's and teacher's reflection. When creating your documentation boards remember that these boards respect all children's work. The board needs to value efficiency over cuteness, and engagement over entertainment. (The Compass School, 2018). Lastly, the Documentation Board replaces the concept there needs to be one piece of artwork for each child in the class. When you post several documentation boards, all with different themes and purposes, you will no doubt capture all of the children in your care.

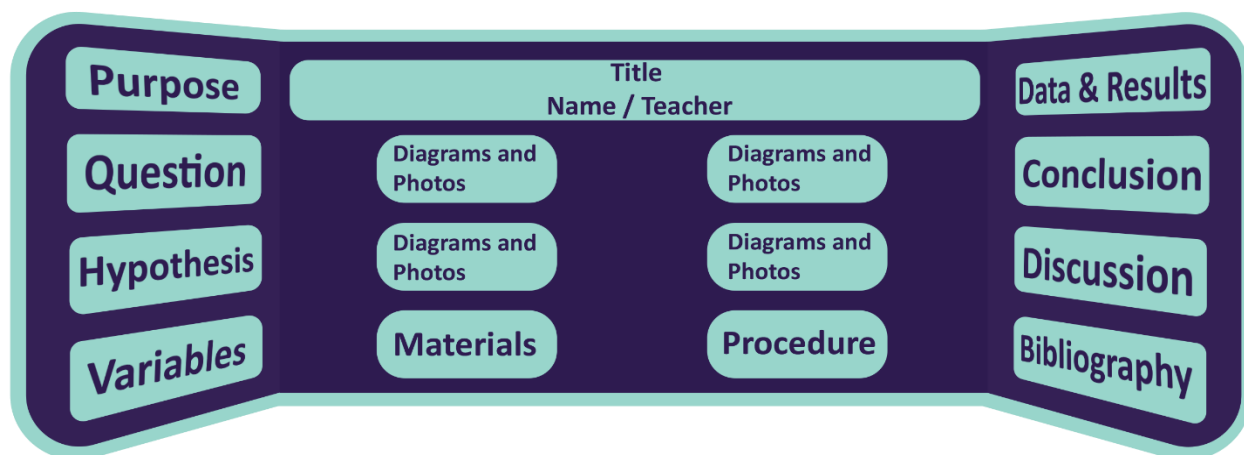


Figure 17.2 Documentation Board Template

Decide on what you want to communicate on the documentation board:

- ✓ Projects or themes
- ✓ Special events
- ✓ Specific curriculum areas
- ✓ Learning environments
- ✓ Skill acquisition
- ✓ Child development

Collect materials for the panel:

- ✓ Children's actual work or photocopies
- ✓ Observation notes / anecdotal records
- ✓ Information and quotes from books and journals
- ✓ Curriculum webs
- ✓ Quotes and dictation from children and teachers
- ✓ Photographs – various sizes (enlarge or shrink on a photocopier) – color, or black and white.

Select the best items that represent the idea or theme of your panel:

- ✓ Write an educational Caption for each piece
- ✓ Use a type size large enough to be read from a distance

Layout of panel:

- ✓ Determine where the panel will be displayed (on a table or wall?)
- ✓ Select a type of panel: poster board (best for wall) or three side3d board
- ✓ Title the panel
- ✓ Select a strong image as the focal point on the panel
- ✓ Aesthetics are important
 - Matte work and photographs
 - Use colored paper to support, not detract from, the images

The Perks of Using Portfolios

Another popular form of documentation is portfolios. Many programs use a portfolio system to record and store information about each child's learning, growth and development. Using both formal and informal observations, teachers begin collecting "evidence" within the first month of a child starting school. Throughout the school year, intentional teachers collect numerous work samples, anecdotal notes, learning stories, checklists, and frequency counts, and it is necessary to safely store everything in an organized manner. A portfolio is the most optimal way to do that. A portfolio helps teachers store observation notes, pieces of art, and photos that are needed to capture and highlight a child's individual strengths, interests and abilities. Portfolios can also store information about a child's thought process, behavior, social interactions, and needs. With all the stored documentation, teachers can assess a child's development.

Portfolios, like documentation boards, record and track a child's development. More specifically, a portfolio tells the unique story of each child's individual progress over time. Although portfolios are not designed to be an assessment tool, portfolios can be shared with families during a conference to showcase evidence of a child's learning throughout the school year. Portfolios hold authentic samples and highlight a child's capabilities, achievements, and progress. During a conference, rather than receiving a handout with checked boxes that rate a child's level of learning, parents and family members will enjoy seeing first-hand what their child "can do." Having both a formal assessment and authentic work samples provides teachers and families a clear picture of the whole child's development.

Since learning and development are ongoing, portfolios have to be easy to use and accessible. Teachers will have to find a rhythm and medium that works best for their teaching style. Here are just a few examples of some portfolios:

- Electronic or e-portfolios stored on computers;
- Accordion files
- File folders,
- Three-ring binders,
- Creative memory photo albums

No matter which style of portfolio a teacher uses, it is important to label and date all pieces of evidence that you put into your portfolio.

ASSESSING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT

Assessment is "a systematic process which allows for understanding a child's competencies"⁴⁶ Every child in your class needs to be assessed. To properly assess children, we use observations and documentation to determine a child's abilities, interests, strengths, and areas of

⁴⁶ The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. (2015). Chapter 7: Knowledge and Competencies. In *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A unifying Foundation*. Retrieved from <https://www.nap.edu/read/19401/chapter/13>

development that may need additional support. The information gathered during observations guides the classroom routines, curriculum planning, and implementation to ensure quality care. Over time, assessments record a child’s learning, growth, development, and social behavior. Assessments also provide an opportunity to share information with families that will build a bridge from school to home.

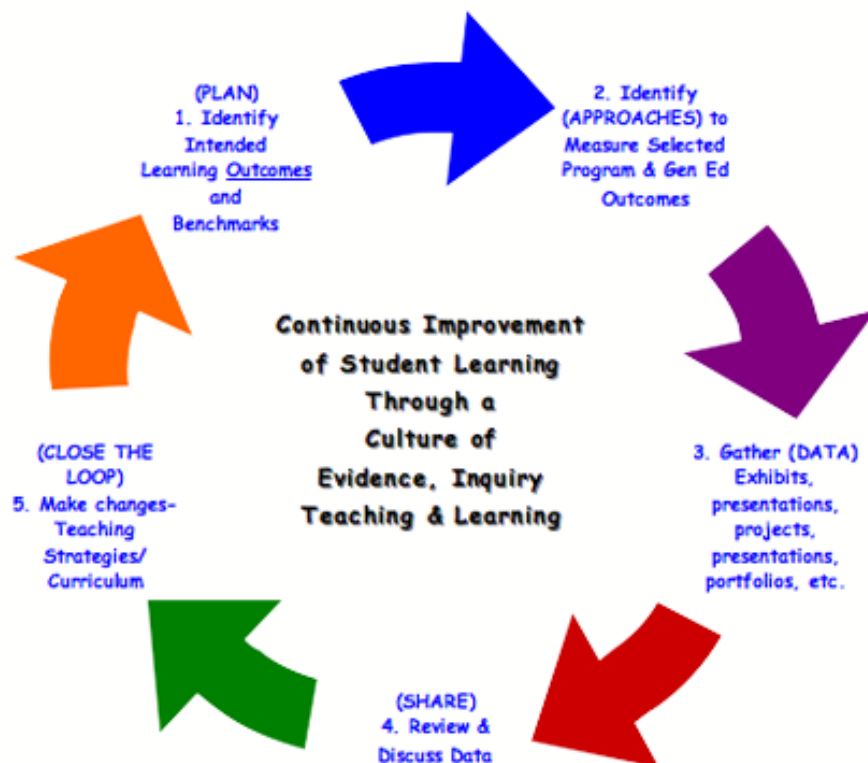


Figure 17.4 Assessment Cycle.⁴⁷

Let’s take a closer look at how we might use assessments in early childhood education. First, assessment is used to inform instruction and to guide teachers as they plan curriculum. With each observation a teacher can assess children’s strengths and capabilities to determine an individualized plan of action with just the “right” balance of independent and group activities across all areas of development (e.g. social, emotional, creative, cognitive, language and physical). When teachers create meaningful curriculum based on the children’s interest and abilities, research indicates that children will take greater strides in academic learning and are more likely to be successful throughout life.

For example, a teacher may notice that one of her students has difficulty joining in and socializing with classmates during group activities. A teacher will then consider activities that would encourage peer interactions while also considering opportunities to support their independence.

⁴⁷ Image by [Rich James](#) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-SA 2.0](#)

Second, assessment is designed for accountability and program evaluation. Assessments provide information that is needed to evaluate program practices and to inform program policies. One of the hallmark traits of a high-quality early childhood program is the practice of continuously monitoring children's development and responding to their learning needs. When administrators, teachers, and families reflect on program goals and outcomes they can determine specific areas that need improvement. Once areas are identified, they can focus on implementing professional development workshops and training in order to improve their ability in meeting the needs of children and families. For example, upon reviewing the math indicators for all of the kindergarten students in a school, the principal realizes that additional teacher training on math-related materials is needed to support math instruction and student learning across all of the kindergarten classrooms in the school.

Third, assessments are used to support school and family partnerships. Assessment helps teachers communicate important milestones in a child's development to families. More importantly, when teachers share their assessments with families, there is an opportunity for teachers and parents to work together to support children as they grow. Intentional teachers respect that parents are teachers on the "home front."

Additionally, families have valuable insight that they can contribute when assessing a child's needs. For example, a teacher may not observe a child's ability to identify colors but through a discussion with the parents, the teacher learns that the child identifies colors of fruit at the grocery store. In this way, parents and teachers collaborate to better understand what needs to happen in the curriculum or at home to support the child's learning and growth.⁴⁸



*Figure 17.5 Children learn by interacting with their environment.*⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The National Education Goals Panel. (2000). Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments. Retrieved from https://ectacenter.org/eco/assets/pdfs/NEGP_goal1_Assessment_Principles.pdf

⁴⁹ Image by [Vita Marija Murenaite](#) from Unsplash.

Let's take a look at 4 Types of Assessments:

1. Screening tools
2. Diagnostic assessments
3. Formative assessments
4. Summative assessments



Figure 17.6 Workbooks assessment.⁵⁰

Screening Tools

According to developmental theories, children may not reach developmental milestones at the same time. In early care and education, we recognize that there is an “acceptable range” for children to reach developmental milestones. That being said, we also recognize that when development does not happen within an expected time frame “red flags” can be raised and teachers may have concerns about developmental disorders, health conditions, or other factors that may negatively impact the child’s development. A developmental screening is the early identification of children at risk for cognitive, motor, communication, or social-emotional delays that may interfere with expected growth, learning, and development, and may warrant further diagnosis, assessment, and evaluation. Programs may conduct the following screenings:

1. Developmental screening tools include the domains of cognition, fine and gross motor skills, speech and language, and social-emotional development.
2. Social-emotional screening is a component of developmental screening of young children that focuses on the early identification of possible delays in the expected development of a child’s ability to express and regulate emotions, form close and secure relationships, and explore his/her environment and learn.

⁵⁰ [Image](#) from [Pixabay](#)

3. Mental health screening is the early identification of children at risk for possible mental health disorders that may interfere with expected growth, learning, or development that warrant further diagnosis, assessment, or evaluation.

It is recommended that young children receive screenings to help identify potential problems or areas needing further evaluation. By recognizing developmental issues early, children can be provided with treatment or intervention more effectively, and additional developmental delays may be prevented. Developmental screenings should begin early in a child's life and should be conducted through third grade. Practitioners should use reliable and valid screening tools that are age-appropriate, culturally inclusive and in the home child's language.

Developmental screenings are often universally performed on large groups of children. The results generated from this type of procedure most commonly are used by programs to identify those few children who may need to receive a more extensive or "diagnostic" assessment for determining developmental delays or special needs. Screenings are brief, and usually effective in catching the most severe cases of children who would need a follow-up evaluation. Screening tools can also be used to assess whether a child is developmentally ready to graduate or move into the next educational level, in other words - a child's school readiness. There is controversy around whether school districts should be permitted to use readiness tests since school districts are not permitted to deny children entry to kindergarten based on the results of a readiness test. One on side there are those that believe many children are often mislabeled. Because young children can demonstrate a wide range of results based on how comfortable they are at the time of the screening, screening results can be inaccurate and children, especially dual language learners, may be placed into remedial classes or special education programs. On the other hand, some proclaim that the screening process at this point will provide young children and their families with access to a wide variety of services early on.

Diagnostic Assessments

Diagnostic assessment tools are typically standardized for a large number of children. A score is given that reflects a child's performance related to other children of the same age (and less common gender and ethnic origin). A diagnostic assessment typically results in a diagnosis for a child. Some common diagnoses are related to intelligence, intellectual disability, autism, learning disabilities, sensory impairment (deaf, blind), or neurologic disorders. Persons administering diagnostic assessment tools must meet state and national standards, certification, or licensing requirements. Some diagnostic assessment tools used for determining or identifying developmental issues are The Wechsler Preschool and Primary Scale of Intelligence (WPPSI), the Bayley Scales of Infant Development (BSID), electroencephalogram (EEG), Kaufman Assessment Battery for Children (K-ABC), the Battelle Developmental Inventory (BDI), and the Pre-Language Assessment Survey (PreLAS). Many other diagnostic assessment tools are available for early childhood. The Buros Institute of Mental Measurements at the University of Nebraska publishes the Buros Mental Maturity Yearbook which helps educators and other childcare professionals choose a tool that is reliable and highly regarded in the diagnostic assessment community.

Formative Assessments

The primary purpose of the formative assessment is to gather evidence that teachers can use to inform instruction, implement learning opportunities and measure a child's learning. As stated in previous chapters, through ongoing observations, evidence is collected and then used to measure the child's learning. To gather an accurate account of what children are learning and how they are learning, observations should occur during daily activities and routines, and should be conducted indoor as well as outdoor. With this information, teachers make instructional adjustments to close the gap between a child's current understanding and what the desired goals are for the child as recommended by formal assessment tools like the Desired Result Developmental Profile (DRDP).

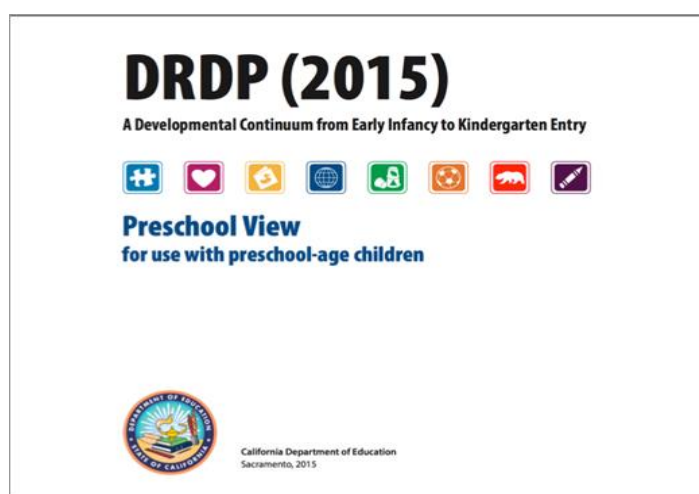


Figure 17.7 DRDP.⁵¹

Formative assessment can consist of **formal assessments** or **informal assessments**. Formal assessments are defined as highly valid and reliable and standardized tools that are administered in a similar manner each time for every child. These tools have standards of comparison (norm-referenced, standards-referenced, and criterion-referenced) to ensure equitable and consistent results. Such tools usually emerge from research studies published by a national company (e.g. Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) or Rating Scales that are based on the acquisition of age-appropriate developmental milestones). Informal assessments, on the other hand, usually may be published, but can also be developed by a teacher or program (i.e. a classroom checklist or frequency count chart). Informal assessments often utilize observable techniques such as anecdotal notes, work samples, and video recordings. Whether formal or informal tools and techniques are used, it is important to note that assessment is not a one-time event since it is difficult to gather valid and reliable information from just one observation technique or from one tool. Formative assessments are on-going.

For best results, intentional teachers are encouraged to assess children through authentic, naturalistic observations. Such observation should be collected throughout the school year, and *not* just

⁵¹ [Image](#) used with permission.

when preparing for family conferences. Another best practice, early care educators are encouraged to actively involve young children with the assessment process. Informal observations and conversations are needed to purposefully plan intentional and individualized activities. Lastly, teachers are encouraged to share learning goals with both children and parents, as well as provide opportunities for children to monitor their ongoing progress. Learning Stories are a great technique to encourage joint collaboration between teachers, families, and children.

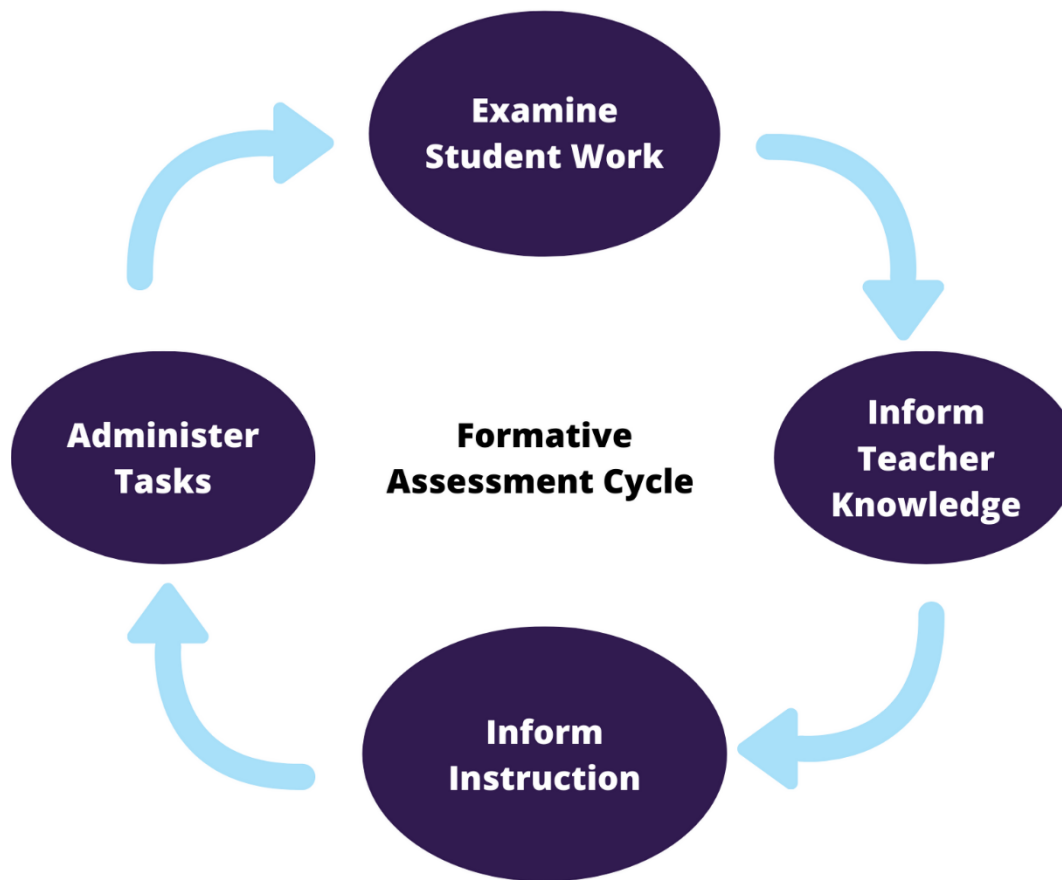


Figure 17.8 Formative Assessment Cycle.⁵²

Summative Assessments

In primary grades, summative assessment, often called **high-stakes assessments**, are designed to measure a child's overall developmental progress at the end of a school year. These assessments can also be administered at certain grade levels for state or local accountability purposes (e.g. Blue-Ribbon Recognition). Summative assessments seek to measure a child's academic performance. Scores are published and parents are notified of their child's individual score along with their child's percentile ranking as compared to other children who are in the same grade. In early care and education however, summative assessments essentially look back to see how effective the teacher or program is at providing high-quality care. This is form of

⁵² Image by [College of the Canyons ZTC Team](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

assessment allows families, teachers and administrators to evaluate instruction practices, curriculum, and whether a child is in need of intervention or teachers are in need of professional development. These assessments help recognize whether or not the child has fallen short of, met, or exceeded the expected standards. Although the results of formative assessments are primarily of interest to teachers, families are eager to know how their child is doing socially and academically. Administrators can utilize the assessment information to identify strengths and challenges of curriculum and instruction, in order to make improvements on the next year's program policies or procedures.

How are Assessments are Used

Planning Curriculum- Teachers use assessments to understand a child's capabilities and needs. By focusing on what a child *can* do, teachers then establish individualized goals for that child. By continuing to observe and document milestones, teachers can proactively assess a child's development and adjust the curriculum accordingly. For example, if a teacher determines that a child needs support in their fine motor development, activities that exercise the pincer grasp will be implemented.

Documentation on behavior should be considered when planning curriculum. If data shows reoccurring conflict taking place in a specific area, teachers should assess if there are enough materials and space in that area, and decide if the materials provided are age-appropriate. For example, after reviewing the data, the teachers concluded that conflict was occurring in the dramatic play area because there were not enough baby dolls for the number of children playing at the same time.

Ensuring School Readiness - Whether you use checklists or the DRDP, both assessments will collect data about milestones of development. Recording a child's progress for each domain of development will determine school readiness. School readiness refers to children having enough knowledge and experience to succeed in a kindergarten classroom.

Adjusting the Classroom - Assessments can also be used to adjust teaching styles, classroom setups, daily schedules, and routines. When observing children, teachers should document how the class responds to certain routines, transitions, and language. For example, if the data collected shows that children are having a difficult time falling asleep during nap time, the daily schedule can be adjusted to allow more outdoor play before nap time.

Data can also show us why certain behaviors are occurring. When reviewing data, evaluate what happens before the behavior is observed, and assess what changes can be made to redirect the child. For example, if conflict and running in the classroom are occurring in the morning, the parent drop-off could be moved to the outdoor classroom to allow a large space for children to play and interact before going inside.⁵³

⁵³ The National Education Goals Panel. (2000). Principles and Recommendations for Early Childhood Assessments. Retrieved from https://ectacenter.org/eco/assets/pdfs/NEGP_goal1_Assessment_Principles.pdf



Pin It! Further Information on Authentic Observation and Assessment

- Read this article for more information on [New Learnings in Early Care and Education](https://www.first5la.org/article/new-learnings-in-early-care-and-education/): <https://www.first5la.org/article/new-learnings-in-early-care-and-education/>
- Watch this video to learn more about [authentic assessment](https://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/whatisauthenticassessmant-player): <https://www.cde.state.co.us/resultsmatter/whatisauthenticassessmant-player>
- Read this report from National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) for more information on [balanced preschool assessment](http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/7-1.pdf): <http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/7-1.pdf>
- Watch this video to learn more about [Organizing for Assessment in ECE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfHERCVabwE): - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfHERCVabwE>

FAMILY CONFERENCES

Conferences Building Family Partnerships

Once assessments have been completed, it is time to meet with a child's family. The purpose of the conference is to share information about the child and to build a vital partnership with the child's family. Some parents may not understand the connection between play and learning. Sharing information about play-based curriculum and how it supports development can allow parents to better understand your goals for learning and how the classroom functions. By including parents in discussion making about curriculum and assessments we can encourage support areas development outside of the classroom.

For example, if the individualized curriculum is supporting color recognition, we can suggest that families continue to support this skill by identifying produce colors at the grocery store and/or pointing to certain colors in their favorite books.

In a blog by Concordia University, Portland some key tips are suggested to ensure a successful and engaging family conference occurs:⁵⁴

Resources for Early Learning. (n.d.). Early Childhood Assessment. Retrieved from <http://resourcesforearlylearning.org/fm/early-childhood-assessment/>

Stipek, D. (2018). Early Childhood Education in California. Retrieved from https://gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Brief_EarlyChildhood.pdf

⁵⁴ Gunn, J. (2018). 15 Tips for Leading Productive Parent-Teacher Conferences. Retrieved from <https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/parent-teacher-conferences/>

1. Offer a flexible conference schedule

Some parents have more than one child at different schools, some families may have limited transportation options and some parents may work multiple jobs which can limit their time and availability. In these cases, teachers may need to be flexible to accommodate special circumstances. Teachers can schedule conferences in the morning, later in the afternoon, or during recess breaks. If technology is available, meetings can be offered via Skype or FaceTime as an option for parents who cannot make it to school.

2. Prepare, prepare, prepare

Portfolios and assessments must be updated and organized for each child on a regular basis.

3. Arrange for a translator if needed, and find a way to connect

Parents who don't speak English require a translator. If schools cannot arrange for a translator, family members may need to sit in on the conference, for example an older sibling or an aunt or maybe even a neighbor) — ideally not a student.

When there is a language barrier, teachers should try to find a respectful way to communicate and connect with families. As a reminder, even though families cannot fluently speak the same language, they deserve your professional approach. Try learning a few phrases in their native language to show you're trying to connect; even "Hello," "How are you?" and "Thank you" can go a long way.

4. Be aware of your body language and how you verbally communicate

The classroom environment speaks volumes and so does your body language and how you talk with your families. Check out your body language. Are your arms typically crossed? Do you smile or glare? How is your tone when you speak? Are you calm and reassuring, or sounding like a robot? Do you pause and allow parents to ask questions, or are you hurried and rushing through information? Are you aware and considerate of cultural backgrounds and family practices? For example, did you know that eye contact and handshaking may not be a common practice with some families?

5. Sit side-by-side

Since teachers and parents are on the same team teachers are advised to sit next to parents rather than across from them behind a desk. By arranging the furniture in a friendly and non-threatening way, teachers express their desire to build a partnership with each parent, which can diffuse unnecessary tension on both sides.

6. Share real stories and student work

Even the best teachers can't remember all of the details they need to share with every parent. A portfolio with anecdotal notes and work samples provide parents with real insight into what's happening in their child's academic day.

7. Include the positive and focus on what the child CAN DO

Each student has positive traits and potential. Share at least one shining trait with parents at the beginning and another at the end of the conference. That trait could be an academic trait or a character trait, such as helpfulness, persistence, or hard work. Teachers can follow the "sandwich method" or the "glows and grows" method where you share a child's positive achievements or traits that make them glow, in addition to providing two or more areas in which they can grow. Always end on a high note with another glowing detail or anecdote.

8. Create clear goals

Every student, even the gifted ones, can improve in some way. Write specific goals for each student. Along with those goals, create an **action plan** with steps for improvement, as well as a timeline. Your plan of action should include activities that will be done at school as well as activities that can be done at home. Sharing this with parents can increase buy-in since they will be able to see a clear path to success that has achievable benchmarks and goals that are part of a realistic, structured plan.

9. Avoid education jargon

Not everyone is familiar with DRDPs or diagnostic and summative assessments. Avoid overwhelming parents with [education lingo](#). Speak in plain terms, explain what you mean, and make sure parents are clear about the information you have presented. Encourage parents to ask questions as needed for clarification.

10. Give parents responsibility

Early educators know that children do better in school when their parents are involved. A perfect way to get parents involved is to ask questions about family life and routines (a family questionnaire is ideal). Families should be encouraged to get involved throughout the school year. For example, they can be special guests, and talk about their jobs or they can read their favorite story to the children. Parents who are involved early on, will be more likely to follow through on their "plan of action" once it is presented at the conference.

11. Encourage questions

Approachable teachers build a lasting connection with parents and promote a positive learning experience with their children. Not only do you want your students to feel comfortable enough to ask questions, but you want your parents to feel they can approach you as well. Although your time may be limited during the school day, it is important to carve out some time and space to discuss important matters with parents. If parents cannot make the conference, offer

your email address to allow for some time for a brief “q and a” any point during the school year. NOTE: Hitting parents up at the end of a long work day and rushing through important details regarding their child is NOT recommended.

12. Don't make assumptions about parents or students

Avoid relying on stereotypes and allowing personal biases to cloud your judgment. View all parents as partners because, like it or not, they are. Work to make sure that even the most challenging students and parents feel like they are welcomed and a part of the team.

13. If a parent becomes hostile, don't engage

No matter how prepared, pleasant and affirming you are, some parents may become hostile or upset while at the conference, especially if there are areas of concern or issues with a child's challenging behavior that need to be addressed. Some parents may be used to hearing bad news, other parents don't trust or have little regard for teachers, some parents feel a need to defend their child, while other parents may be upset about a personal matter and may take their frustration out on you. Remain calm! If possible, let the parent vent. Use active listening and really listen to the parent's concerns. Discuss how both parties want what's best for the child and reassure them that you have their child's interest at heart. Look for a compromise or strategy that best supports the child and their family. Stay focused on the task at hand – the conference – and reemphasize the positive. Sometimes, a follow-up meeting may need to be scheduled.

14. Remain professional at all times

Teaching is a challenging job. Like parents, you may have an off day and you may be tempted to stray off into an unprofessional area. We also may cross some fine lines and become “friends” with our families. Here are some topics that should never be discussed with families during a conference (or at any time):

- -Speaking negatively about school administrators or other teachers.
- -Comparing two or more students to each other.
- -Discussing another student's behavior, family, or performance.
- -Blaming parents for a child's academic performance or behavior.
- -Arguing or becoming hostile with parents.
- -Complaining about school policies or procedures.

15. Document, document, document

Because you will meet with several families in the course of a week, it is a good idea to make notes about the conversations and outcomes of the conference. You may need to refer to them at a later time when planning a follow-up meeting, or when planning additional curriculum activities. Once in a while, a parent may notify your administrator that they have concerns about the information that was shared during the conference and your notes can be shared with your administrator to help see both sides of the conversation.

16. Stay in contact with parents

Parents should be able to get in touch with you to follow up or address new concerns. Email is the most convenient way for you to receive messages and respond to parents, but phone calls or future conferences may be necessary, too. Set the guidelines and boundaries for future communications.

According to Seplocha, teachers have many important responsibilities, especially preparing for effective and engaging parent-teacher conferences. When teachers connect with family members and establish a respectful relationship, the positive outcome provides a lifeline that will ultimately support a child's overall development and learning.



Figure 17.9 Carol Mahn (right), a first grade teacher at the Hanscom Primary School, meets Melissa Weyand and her son, Maximas, during a "Meet and Greet".⁵⁵

⁵⁵ [Image](#) is in the public domain.

CHAPTER 18: QUALITY COUNTS

CHAPTER PREVIEW

1. Closing the Achievement Gap
2. Not All Preschool Programs are Alike
3. Process Quality and Structural Quality
4. The Role of the Teacher in High-Quality Practices
5. Measuring High-Quality in Early Care and Education Classrooms
6. The Environment Rating Scale (ERS)
7. The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)
8. Additional Methods, Tools and Techniques to Ensure High-Quality Practices

INTRODUCTION

The need for high-quality childcare continues to be a topic of interest as more and more families enter the workforce and more and more children need care. Every week, families from all socioeconomic backgrounds drop their children off at some type of childcare. According to the National Institute for Early Education Research, “In the United States, 76% of children ages three to four, receive education and care from someone other than a parent.” (NIEER, 2002). With so many children needing childcare, researchers and policymakers are tasked with figuring out how to best support the next generation of preschoolers. In this chapter, we will address the need for high-quality in early care and education as means to reduce the achievement gap between children from low to high socioeconomic families. We will also compare *standard* industry practices to what the field of early care and education recognizes as *high-quality* practices. Lastly, we will review some of the current observation methods, tools and techniques that can be used to ensure programs are implementing quality practices.⁵⁶

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

Decades of research on early child development has determined that “When it comes to early care and education programs, quality is critical,” (Wechsler, Melnick, Maier & Bishop, 2016, p.1). It is suggested that thoughtfully designed preschool programs can impact and influence a child’s future learning outcomes. Not only are there short-term benefits, based on data collected from quantitative research projects (e.g. Perry Preschool, the Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers), there are long-term benefits as well. More specifically, children from low-income homes who attended high-quality preschool programs showed higher achievement scores - especially in math and reading, as compared to their counterparts

⁵⁶ Espinosa, L.M. (2002). Policy Brief- High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like. Retrieved from <http://nieer.org/policy-issue/policy-brief-high-quality-preschool-why-we-need-it-and-what-it-looks-like>
NIEER. (2002). High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like. Retrieved from: <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/high-quality-preschool-why-we-need-it-and-what-it-looks>

who were not able to attend a quality preschool. Furthermore, children who were enrolled in high-quality programs were less likely to be placed in special education, less likely to be retained or held back a grade, and it was noted that they were more likely to graduate from high school.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, due to limited funding opportunities and financial restraints, there are many families who cannot afford to send their child to a high-quality preschool. “This lack of access to high-quality early childhood education perpetuates the achievement gap, evidenced by the fact that only 48 percent of low-income children are ready for kindergarten, compared to 75 percent of moderated – or high-income children” (p. 3 Center for American Progress). This data reveals that the achievement gap is problematic on many levels. Moving forward we must consider how we, as advocates and educators, can lessen the achievement gap so that all children, no matter their socioeconomic status, can get a smart start. To find possible solutions to this dilemma, let’s take a closer look at and compare *standard industry practices* to what the field of early care and education regards as *high-quality practices*.⁵⁸

NOT ALL PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS ARE ALIKE

As more and more children need childcare, families are faced with a tremendous task of finding “*the right preschool program*.” When choosing a center, some families may contemplate certain factors like cost and affordability, hours of operation and availability, and location. Some families, on the other hand, may consider the school philosophy, the education and experience of teachers, the environment and daily activities, as well as the curriculum model and guidance policies. As you can see, there are numerous possibilities to consider. Families must also decide on whether to send their child to a state-funded or faith-based program, a family childcare or a traditional preschool setting. No matter what type of program a family chooses, in the state of California all childcare centers must be licensed by the California Department of Social Services and comply with Community Care Licensing Title 22 regulations. For the purpose of this text, in order to demonstrate that all preschools are not alike, we will refer to “*standard industry practice*” as any state licensed childcare program and we will refer to “*high-quality practice*” as any childcare center that undergoes regular assessments using tools and techniques that are above and beyond the *standard industry practice*.

⁵⁷ Karoly, Lynn A. and Anamarie A. Whitaker, Informing Investments in Preschool Quality and Access in Cincinnati: Evidence of Impacts and Economic Returns from National, State, and Local Preschool Programs. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2016. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1461.html.

Wechsler, M., Melnick, H., Maier, A., & Bishop, J. (2016). *The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs* (policy brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute. Retrieved from <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/building-blocks-high-quality-early-childhood-education-programs>

⁵⁸ Workman, S. and Ullrich, R. (2017). Quality 101: Identifying the Core Components of a High-Quality Early Childhood Program. Retrieved from <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/02/10063958/QualityEarlyChildhood101-brief.pdf>

A LOOK AT STANDARD INDUSTRY PRACTICES

To legally operate a childcare program in California, a center must comply with certain licensing policies and procedures. These state regulations provide “a baseline standard and are primarily focused on protecting children from harm rather than on advancing child development and early learning,” (Workman & Ullrich, 2017, p. 3). In other words, Title 22 Regulations stipulate health and safety standards, space and square footage requirements, supervision standards, and teacher qualifications. Title 22 Regulations do not however, consider curriculum activities, age appropriate materials, or teacher-to-child interactions, nor does it address developmentally appropriate practices such as family culture and perspectives, child development theories, or principles and practices.

To ensure early childhood education programs are compliant with all state policies and procedures, a licensing analyst will conduct an annual inspection, or will evaluate a program as needed. Typically, the analyst will look at the center’s overall cleanliness and they will inspect both the indoor and outdoor environment to certify that the center is safe for the children. The analyst will confirm that the ratios are met, and that there is proper space and square footage available for each child to play and nap. The analyst will also conduct a spot check of the employee files to confirm teacher qualifications, and they will look through the children’s files to validate that the proper paperwork is signed and in complete order. To comply with state regulations and policies, a center director will need to download the California Code of Regulations, Title 22 administered by CDSS (Divisions 12 only) and follow all the mandated requirements. If any criteria are not met, the analyst will cite the program. The program will then be given a certain timeframe to rectify and correct the concern. The analyst will return to verify the problem has been fixed. Families who are considering a program can check the Community Care Licensing website to see if a center has received any “substantiated citations.”⁵⁹

A LOOK AT HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICES

One of the hallmarks of *high-quality practices* is the practice of continuously monitoring and evaluating a program’s overall effectiveness for the purpose of accountability. Therefore, in addition to complying with state licensing regulations, *high-quality programs may* utilize noted assessment tools and resources (e.g. ECERS, CLASS, QRIS, NAEYC’s Developmentally Appropriate Practice) to evaluate their center and staff. To guide high-quality practices, early childhood educators often look to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) to provide ethical pedagogy. NAEYC is a recognized professional organization committed to promoting quality early learning experiences for children, birth through age 8. Grounded by research and theory principles, NAEYC promotes best practices for children, families, teachers, administrators, stakeholders and policy makers. To ensure quality practices

⁵⁹ Department of Social Services. (n.d.). Child Care Regulations. Retrieved from <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/letters-regulations/legislation-and-regulations/community-care-licensing-regulations/child-care>

are being implemented, it is suggested that teachers follow NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) Framework:

- Teachers encourage children to be active participants in their own learning
- Teachers set reasonable expectations based on what they know about a child's age and stage of development
- Teachers build on what children know using a variety of learning strategies, materials, meaningful experiences
- Teachers plan activities to support all aspects of development: social, emotional, physical and cognitive
- Teachers value each child's family, language, and cultural practices
- Teachers are aware of each child's interests, strengths, abilities and individual needs
- Teachers recognize play as a primary context in which young children learn
- Teachers establish warm, caring and respectful relationships with children, families and colleagues
- Teachers regularly assess the children's development and the environment, and they self-reflect on their own practices (Gordon and Browne, 2016, Beginning Essentials in early childhood education 3e)

PROCESS QUALITY AND STRUCTURAL QUALITY

Unlike standard industry practices, high-quality practices place an emphasis on promoting positive child outcomes. The key to a high-quality program is contingent upon what happens inside the classroom environment. Let's examine how both *process quality* and *structural quality* work together to influence positive outcomes for children.

Process quality refers to the types of interactions that occur throughout the day between the teachers, children, families, and administrators. *Process quality* also considers the types of materials that are available for the children to use, as well as the activities that children engage in throughout their day. Lastly, *process quality* takes into account the health, well-being and safety of the children. **Structural quality** on the other hand, refers to the features and characteristics of a program. More specifically, the class size, teacher-to-child ratios, teacher qualifications and experiences, teacher pay scale, along with the allotted square footage for play space define quality. Although *process quality* is thought to have a more direct impact on child outcomes as compared to *structural quality*, researchers and leaders in the field of early care and education agree that *process and structural* indicators are interrelated, and when combined together they promote the highest quality experiences.

For example, when groups are smaller, teachers tend to have more positive, supportive, and stimulating interactions with children. Warm and nurturing interactions are directly linked to children's social competence and future academic success, and such interactions are essential to high quality. Early childhood teachers who are more highly qualified and have smaller groups can more effectively provide individualized, responsive

learning opportunities. Finally, higher teacher wages have consistently been linked to higher process quality.⁶⁰

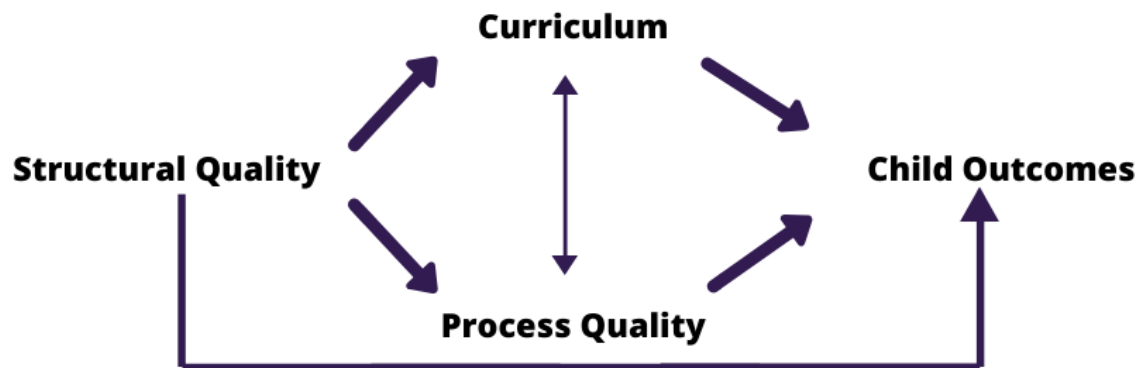


Figure 18.1 Structural Quality directly effects Child Outcomes⁶¹

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN HIGH-QUALITY PRACTICES

As mentioned above, the teacher plays a vital role in orchestrating high-quality practices. In high-quality classrooms, not only must teachers create a safe and nurturing space, they must intentionally set up the environment to support children’s interests and individuality. California childcare programs serve a diverse population, therefore, an intentional teacher must also consider the cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic status of each family enrolled in her class. The highly- qualified teacher has a deep understanding of child development, and with that knowledge she will provide appropriate materials and experiences to challenge the children in her care. In the chart below, we can see how teachers maintain high-quality practices.

Table 18.1: Classroom Environments

Physical environment	The overall design and layout of a classroom, including the learning centers and play spaces, the age appropriate materials, and the child size furnishings
Social environment	The interactions that occur within the classroom between teachers, children, family members, center staff and administration
Temporal environment	The routines and daily schedules, the timing, sequence, and length of play time, the time spent indoors and outdoors engaged in child-directed and teacher-directed activities

⁶⁰ NIEER. (2002). High Quality Preschool: Why We Need It and What It Looks Like. Retrieved from: <https://www.readingrockets.org/article/high-quality-preschool-why-we-need-it-and-what-it-looks>

⁶¹ Image by [College of the Canyons ZTC Team](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

Here are some considerations to incorporate quality practices into your classroom to promote responsive caregiving while supporting the physical, social, emotional and intellectual development of children:



Pin It! The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs⁶²

1. Early learning standards and curricula that address the whole child, are developmentally appropriate, and are effectively implemented.
2. Assessments that consider children's academic, social-emotional, and physical progress and contribute to instructional and program planning.
3. Well-prepared teachers who provide engaging interactions and classroom environments that support learning.
4. Ongoing support for teachers, including coaching and mentoring.
5. Support for English learners and students with special needs.
6. Meaningful family engagement.
7. Sufficient learning time.
8. Small class sizes with low student-teacher ratios.
9. Program assessments that measure structural quality and classroom interactions.
10. A well-implemented state quality rating and improvement system.

MEASURING HIGH-QUALITY IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION CLASSROOMS

One of the characteristics of a high-quality early childhood program is the practice of continuously monitoring children's development, along with the environmental setting and teacher interactions. By evaluating the overall performance in these key areas, teachers, administrators and families can reflect, make necessary changes and improvements to support all students and families. There are numerous tools on the market that evaluate program quality. For the purpose of this text we will focus on just a few tools that are highly recognized and most often used in California to monitor quality practices in preschool programs.

The Environment Rating Scales (ERS)

The Environment Rating Scale is a standardized assessment tool that can help caregivers, teachers, and administrators improve the quality of their program. The ERS measure *process quality*.

⁶² Wechsler, M., Melnick, H., Maier, A., & Bishop, J. (2016). *The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs*(policy brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

The Building Blocks of High-Quality Early Childhood Education Programs by Marjorie Wechsler, Hanna Melnick, Anna Maier, and Joseph Bishop is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#). Videos courtesy of the [High-Quality Early Learning Project](#).

Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in a classroom between staff and children, staff, parents, and other adults, among the children themselves, and the interactions children have with the many materials and activities in the environment, as well as those features, such as space, schedule and materials that support these interactions. Process quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators such as staff to child ratio, group size, cost of care, and even type of care, for example child care center or family child care home.⁶³

There are 4 Environment Rating Scales:

1. The **Infant and Toddler Environmental Rating Scale (ITERS)** for programs serving young learners aged 6 weeks to 30 months
2. The **Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)** for preschool programs serving children aged 3-5 years
3. The **School-Age Child Environmental Rating Scale (SACERS)** for afterschool programs serving children aged 5-12 years
4. The **Family Child Care Environmental Rating Scale (FCCERS)** for family childcare programs serving children aged 6 weeks to 12 years.

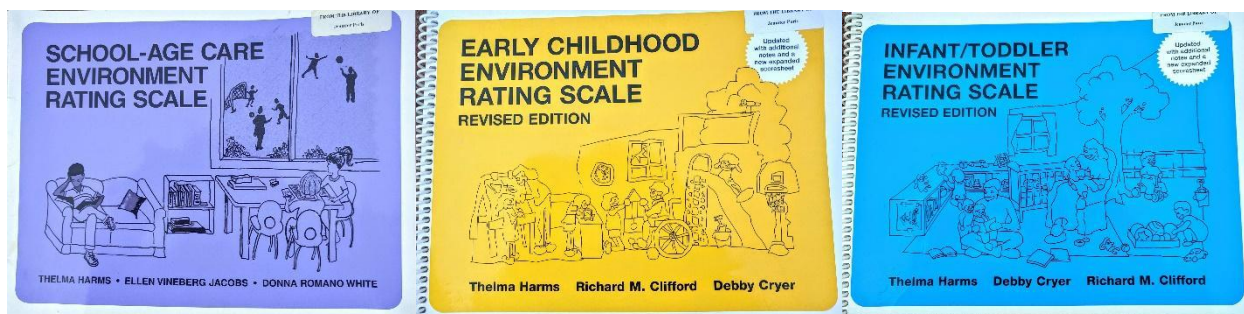


Figure 2.2 Rating Scale Texts⁶⁴

Why Use Environment Rating Scales

The scales are used in a variety of ways including for self-assessment by center staff, preparation for accreditation, and voluntary improvement efforts by licensing or other agencies. For example, in the United States:

- Several states, including **California**, Massachusetts, Montana, Mississippi, Kansas, Oregon, Kentucky, New Mexico, Georgia, Florida, Wisconsin, and Nebraska have also initiated quality evaluation and improvement programs using our scales. Each state is tailoring its use of the scales to its individual needs and resources.
- The state of Arkansas has trained personnel, who do assessments and provide training and technical assistance so that childcare centers and homes can increase their quality of care. Another innovative feature of the Arkansas program is that parents who select

⁶³ (Whitebook, Howes & Phillips, 1995)." (Retrieved on 7/10/19 <https://ers.fpg.unc.edu/>)

⁶⁴ Image by [College of the Canyons ZTC Team](#) is licensed under [CC BY 4.0](#)

childcare facilities with an average of 4.5 or higher on our scales are eligible for two times the state childcare tax exemption. Thus, both parents and providers are being rewarded for quality improvements that benefit the children.

- The state of Colorado uses the scales in a variety of program improvement and evaluation projects. For example, Denver has a quality improvement program that uses on site consultation and training based on scale scores. Many of the centers participating in this program serve poor and minority children and their families. The state of Colorado is currently considering a tiered reimbursement system using the scales.
- North Carolina also currently uses scale scores as part of their 5-star rated license system. Centers and family childcare homes are awarded either one or two stars based on compliance with licensing standards. Programs may voluntarily apply for an additional three stars based on a set of quality measures including the licensing compliance record, teacher and director education, and the levels of process quality as measured by the appropriate environmental scale. Only the lowest level of licensing is mandatory. However, an additional fee is paid to the provider of subsidized care for each additional star earned voluntarily.
- The Oklahoma 3-star tiered license incorporates an evaluation with the scales in the second tier as a basis for quality improvement, and provides technical assistance based on scores for meeting accreditation standards. Tiered reimbursement is a part of this system.
- Tennessee is now initiating a rated license system, based on North Carolina's experience. In their system, however, program evaluation is not voluntary, but is required yearly to create a "Report Card" that must be posted with the license so childcare consumers have access to reliable information on the quality of childcare they are using for their children. Tiered reimbursement will also be tied to scores on the scale.
- All the US military services have been using the scales routinely in their center and family childcare homes for program improvement and monitoring. The military child development system was recognized by Executive Order in 1998 for its high quality.
- Our environmental rating scales are widely used by programs as they **prepare for accreditation**. This is due to the fact that our scales use a format with detailed levels of quality that provides a blueprint for gradual change. The content of our scales is completely supportive of the various credentialing and accreditation programs.

The ERS Tool

As suggested by ERS, in order to provide high-quality care and education experiences to all children and their families, a childcare program must provide for the three basic needs all children have:

- Protection of their health and safety
- Building positive relationships
- Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience

Let's take a closer look at how to use the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS-3) for preschool programs serving children aged 3-5 years. The Scale consists of 35 items organized into 6 subscales:⁶⁵

- Space and Furnishings
- Personal Care Routines
- Language and Literacy
- Learning Activities
- Interaction
- Program Structure

Within each subscale there are indicators that are arranged in a hierarchical order with basic needs at low levels and the more educational and interactional aspects at higher levels. The requirements for each indicator must be met before the next indicator is measured. If a requirement is not met, scoring then comes to a stop.

Scoring:

1 = inadequate

3 = minimal

5 = good

7 = excellent

Empirical Research

Empirical studies using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised (ECERS-R) tool have generally found positive associations between the quality of early childhood programs and child development.

The ECERS-R (1998) is the revised edition of the original ECERS (1980). It is currently being used in several major studies, including the Early Head Start Study (Mathematica Corporation), and Welfare, Children and Families: A Three City Study (Columbia University, University of Chicago, and Harvard University). The original ECERS was used in the Head Start FACES study, in which over 400 classrooms are included nationwide. The preliminary results in all these studies show that the ECERS and the ECERS-R are performing very well.

Additionally, it should be noted that the ECERS and ITERS were used as the comprehensive quality measures in the National Child Care Staffing Study (Whitebook, Howes, & Phillips, 1989) and the Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study (1995), the major studies of their time. The FDCRS was used in The Study of Children in Family Child Care and Relative Care (Galinsky, Howes, Kontos, & Shinn, 1994). In all of these studies, a relationship was found between higher scores on the ECERS and more positive child development outcomes in areas that are considered important for later school success. The effects of higher quality early childhood experiences have now been shown to last at least through the second grade of elementary

⁶⁵ Ersi. (n.d.). Related work. Retrieved from https://www.ersi.info/scales_relatedwork.html

school (Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan, Yazejian, Byler, Rustici, & Zelazo, 1999). Research is continuing to evaluate longer-lasting effects.⁶⁶

ERS Strengths

The instrument has good test-retest reliability, high inter-rater reliability (Clifford et al., 2010), and many studies have demonstrated its predictive validity (Burchinal et al., 2008; Montes et al., 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Furthermore, the results show that ECERS-R is a significant predictor of child development in two domains: physical health and well-being, and social competence.

ERS Limitation

While the ECERS-R is a useful tool to measure the quality of early childhood programs across various settings, there are some limitations. Because the Environmental Rating Scales were developed in the United States, the relevance to non-American cultural settings has been questioned (Dickinson, 2006; Mathers, Singler, & Karemaker, 2012). Some have criticized that the ITERS-R scale places too much emphasis on the structural aspects of childcare (Sanders & Howes, 2013; Vermeer et al., 2008), while others are concerned that the Rating Scales fail to measure the interactions between the teacher and children and families, which is considered to be key quality factors in childcare (Bisceglia, Perlman, Schaack, & Jenkins, 2009; Helmerhorst et al., 2014).

Although the Environment Rating Scales are highly regarded, there has also been some considerable criticism. For example, a closer look at the items in the ECERS-R reveals that some items may be less relevant than others in our study's setting—poor, rural villages in Indonesia. Item 27 outlines the provision of TV, video or computers for classroom activities. Item 3 describes the provision of soft furnishings such as carpeted space and cushions for children's relaxation and comfort. While all of these provisions would be great to have, they are often unfeasible in rural, resource-constrained environments. In over 3 weeks of field observation, we rarely saw soft furnishings—sitting on the floor for children and adults alike is the norm in rural Indonesia – even when soft furnishings are available. We did encounter one center with a computer lab during piloting of the ECERS-R but this was a state-of-the-art center where not one but three international donors had channeled funding.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ FPG Child Development Institute. (n.d.). Environment Rating Scales. Retrieved from <https://ers.fpg.unc.edu/>

⁶⁷ Brinkman, S. et.al. (2016). The Role of Preschool Quality in Promoting Child Development. Retrieved from <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/23629/The0role0of0pr0from0rural0Indonesia.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

ECERS FAQ Find:

When was the first ECERS tool published?

Who typically uses the ECERS tool?

Who administers the assessment tool?

How can teachers prepare for an assessment?

When was the last time the ECERS tool was updated?

How many measures are there in the ECERS?

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

Research shows that all children benefit from high-quality instruction and classroom interactions, regardless of language status, race/ethnicity, or special needs (August & Shanahan, 2006; Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001). When teachers provide individualized support and guidance to the children in their classrooms, they contribute to each child's social and emotional development, which has been linked to their overall physical development and academic achievement. The CLASS tool showcases various strategies that teachers can implement to promote quality interactions. It is important to note that class does not favor any curriculum model over another.

The CLASS tool differs from other measurement tools that may address the content of the physical environment, available materials, or a specific curriculum. Although the physical environment materials and curriculum are important, the CLASS tool focuses more on the context of how teachers directly interact, engage and communicate with the children in their classroom environment. CLASS measures cooperative and creative learning experiences and focuses on the teacher's role in allowing children to be active participants in their own learning. More specifically, CLASS promotes social justice and equity, and has "indicators" to assess how a teacher develops a sense of community and empathy for others. Not only must the teacher consider the tangible environmental elements, they must consciously incorporate quality interactions. Teachers must ask questions and engage in thoughtful conversations that emphasize back and forth dialogue rather than one and done responses. Teachers must extend the children's vocabulary and create opportunities where children can use their expressive language skills. Lastly, teachers must provide positive feedback to children throughout the day and allow children to make choices.

Why Use the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

As advocates and educators, we know that engaging interactions and well-designed environments form the foundation for optimal learning to occur. High-quality preschool programs should strive to incorporate the following:

- well-managed and well-organized classrooms with clearly defined spaces
- support systems to enhance children’s social and emotional development
- a variety of instructional materials that stimulate children’s thinking and curiosity
- opportunities for authentic interactions and meaningful conversations
- a balance of teacher-directed activities and child-directed activities
- enhanced language and literacy implemented throughout the day
- opportunities for movement and classroom spaces that support kinesthetic learning

Research findings from over 3,000 classrooms found that children who were in classrooms that received higher CLASS ratings showed greater gains in social skill, language, early literacy, and math development. Furthermore, after a decade of research, crucial conclusions were made that suggest using the CLASS tool can not only improve the effectiveness of an individual classroom, it can also improve the program as well. Let’s look at some reasons as to why you might want to use the CLASS tool:

1. Effective teacher–child interactions are an active and crucial ingredient for children’s social and academic development.
2. Children in ECE settings are not consistently exposed to effective teacher–child interactions.
3. Initial evidence suggests thresholds for effective teacher–child interactions, as measured by CLASS, in promoting children’s learning and development.
4. Quality improvement efforts that focus explicitly on teacher–child interactions maximize impacts for children.
5. Carefully designed and implemented professional development support can improve the quality of teacher–child interactions

The CLASS Tool

The CLASS Tool is divided into 3 **Domains**: Emotional Support; Classroom Organization; and Instructional Support. Each Domain has several **Dimensions** (see the chart below), and each Dimension has several **Indicators** that provide detailed descriptors of how a teacher should interact (Note: the indicators for each dimension are not listed in the chart below.)

Table 18.2: CLASS Tool Domains

Emotional Support	Classroom Organization	Instructional Support
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Positive Climate2. Negative Climate3. Teacher Sensitivity4. Regard for Student Perspective	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Behavior Management2. Productivity3. Instructional Learning Formats	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Concept Development2. Quality of Feedback3. Language Modeling4. 4. Literacy (optional)

Scoring

Scoring is based on a 7-point scale, with the “low range” being a score of 1 to 2, the “middle range” a score of 3 to 5, and the “high range” a score of 6 to 7. The higher the range in each dimension the better.

CLASS Strengths

The Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) tool is a systematic observation tool that can be used to measure the interactions between teachers and their children in typical classroom settings. The CLASS tool has also been used to assess classroom quality across diverse populations, including dual language learners (DLLs), children from migrant families, tribal populations, in addition to children with special needs and children with diverse cultural backgrounds (Downer et al., 2011). The CLASS tool is deemed both reliable and valid, and it provides preschool programs and individual classroom teachers with an opportunity to regularly monitor and evaluate themselves.

Formal assessments can be made by certified CLASS evaluators and the results are shared with the teacher and program with the intent of finding strategies on how to improve interactions. The tool can also be used informally. Teachers can review each domain, dimension and indicator, and then reflect on their own practices to find ways they can incorporate more intentional interactions.

CLASS Limitations

Even though every CLASS observer is formally certified, there will be small, systematic differences in their scoring. Some observers may tend to give slightly higher scores, while others may tend to be slightly more critical. Although slight differences fall within the threshold for “reliability,” inaccurate results have been noted. One other limitation is that there is little emphasis on *structural quality*. More specifically, CLASS does not assess the physical environment or materials, and it is not designed to review program safety.

Additional Methods, Tools and Techniques to Ensure High-Quality Practices

Program Accreditation

Both the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](https://www.naeyc.org/) (NAEYC) (link: <https://www.naeyc.org/>) and the [National Early Childhood Program Accreditation](https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation) (NECPA)⁶⁸ (link: <https://www.naeyc.org/accreditation>) are nationally recognized agencies that set a standard of excellence for overall program quality. Programs that pursue accreditation must meet key criteria expectations in areas such as “the learning environment, teacher and child interactions, staff qualifications, professional development, and family engagement” (Center for America, 2017, p. 6). Both NAEYC and NECPA offer training, technical assistance, and consulting services to support early care and education programs that not only want to meet but exceed standard industry practices. Accreditation is a voluntary endeavor that requires programs to undergo a self-study as they prepare for the validation process. Programs that achieve accreditation status must be re-assessed every three years to demonstrate a continued commitment to high-quality practices.

The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS)

The Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) is a systemic approach to assess, improve, and communicate the level of quality in early care and school-age care programs.⁶⁹ The main purpose of the QRIS is to improve and standardize the quality of care in all facilities in the state, and to make childcare more accessible and affordable for families. In California, the QRIS is used to:

- Assess program quality comparably across provider types (publicly and privately funded, centers and family childcare homes) throughout the state
- Align program standards with early learning and practitioner standards
- Support continuous quality improvement for participating programs and their staff
- Provide families with information about program quality to assist them in making informed choices.⁷⁰

The Caregiver Interaction Scale (CIS)

In the late 80's, Arnett released the Caregiver Interaction Scale (1989) to assess a global rating of caregiver sensitivity and responsiveness in both early care and education settings and family childcare environments. The tool focuses on caregiver / teacher emotional interactions and measures several items including sensitivity, harshness, detachment, and permissiveness. Items are rated on a 4-point scale. The scale has limitations as it captures only one aspect of process quality, and thus it is suggested that additional assessments be used to measure more structural dimensions.

⁶⁸ NECPA. (2019). National Early Childhood Program Accreditation. Retrieved from <https://necpa.net/>

⁶⁹ [Quality Rating and Improvement System](#) by [CDE](#) is used with permission.

⁷⁰ [Quality Rating and Improvement System](#) by [CDE](#) is used with permission.

NAEYC Position Statement on Importance of Environmental Assessments⁷¹

The National Association for the Education of Young Children and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education take the position that policy makers, the early childhood profession, and other stakeholders in young children's lives have a shared responsibility to:

- Construct comprehensive systems of curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation guided by sound early childhood practices, effective early learning standards and program standards, and a set of core principles and values: belief in civic and democratic values; commitment to ethical behavior on behalf of children; use of important goals as guides to action; coordinated systems; support for children as individuals and members of families, cultures, and communities; partnerships with families; respect for evidence; and shared accountability.
- Implement curriculum that is thoughtfully planned, challenging, engaging, developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, comprehensive, and likely to promote positive outcomes for all young children.
- Make ethical, appropriate, valid, and reliable assessment a central part of all early childhood programs. To assess young children's strengths, progress, and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by Professional development, inclusive of families, and connected to specific, beneficial purposes: (1) making sound decisions about teaching and learning, (2) identifying significant concerns that may require focused intervention for individual children, and (3) helping programs improve their educational and developmental interventions.
- Regularly engage in program evaluation guided by program goals and using varied, appropriate, conceptually and technically sound evidence to determine the extent to which programs meet the expected standards of quality and to examine intended as well as unintended results.
- Provide the support, Professional development, and other resources to allow staff in early childhood programs to implement high-quality curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation practices and to connect those practices with well-defined early learning standards and program standards.

⁷¹ Source: (http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/assessment_print.pdf)

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Figure 18.3 In the right environment children thrive⁷²

CONCLUSION

Research suggests that an enriched learning environment, along with meaningful interactions and experiences can significantly enhance a child's overall development (Center for American Progress, 2017). Not only do children deserve high-quality learning experiences, parents need the assurance of knowing that their children are in safe, healthy and nurturing environments. Unfortunately, providing high-quality early childhood education services can be particularly challenging especially for the estimated four million children who are living in poverty and considered at-risk. Thus, the achievement gap continues to be a concern and the quest for quality is ongoing. As early childhood educators, we must strive to regularly observe, collect data and assess our programs, and reflect on our teaching practices to be more proactive in our quest for quality. While a score is important to look at and improve on, it is not the end all, be all, it merely serves to guide our practices as it relates to a whole picture. Ongoing observation and documentation help to keep us informed of how to best serve the children and families in our care.

⁷² [Image](#) by Divine Cox is in the public domain.

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