Preface

*O*bserving Development of the Young Child presents a unique system for observing and recording development of children ages 3 to 5 in early childhood classroom settings. It is based on a progression of children's skill development in six major domains. The text is designed for use by college students preparing to be teachers in prekindergarten programs, child care centers, Head Start classes, and preschools. The book can also be used in such programs by the teachers and assistant teachers who want to learn more about children in order to make individual learning plans, as well as for making assessments of individual children for program development. Staff members preparing for Child Development Associate (CDA) Assessment will also find this text helpful with its suggestions for classroom activities that are developmentally appropriate for young children. The text not only teaches readers how to observe, record, and interpret development of children 3 through 5 years of age, but also discusses what these children are like and how to support them in their development with exciting hands-on activities.

The text focuses on six major domains of child development—emotional, social, physical, cognitive, language, and creative—that are readily observable. It divides each of these aspects further into specific areas: self-esteem; emotional competence; social competence; physical development; cognitive development; spoken language; emergent writing and reading skills; art, music, and dance skills; and dramatic play skills. The principal observation tool to be used is the Child Development Checklist. Other observation methods and tools include anecdotal records, running records, samplings, rating scales, rubrics, audio and visual documentation, and document panels.

Finally, teachers learn to share their observational data with children's families. The text serves college students as a guide for observing and recording development of young children in their student teaching and coursework. The text is especially well suited as a supplementary text for child development courses. It also can help in-service teachers and assistants who are upgrading their skills in observing children, as well as those who are learning to plan for individuals based on their developmental needs.

Unique aspects of *Observing Development of the Young Child* include discussions of how to *observe* young children, how to *interpret* the data recorded, and how to *plan* for individuals based on the observations. Important topics include children's emotional development, how young children make friends, how to deal with bullying, how to help second-language speakers learn English, how children use exploratory play to learn, how to help young children emerge into reading and writing, and how to develop children's creativity through art, music, and dramatic play.

☑ NEW TO THE EIGHTH EDITION

This edition has been reorganized to broaden the coverage of observation and to make it more concise and accessible. Among its key changes are the following:

- Chapters 1 and 2 were reorganized to deepen and expand the coverage of basic observation methods.
- The former edition's chapters on large-motor development and small-motor development were combined into a new streamlined chapter on physical development.
- New Learning Outcomes were added to each chapter.
- Many more boxed features help to clarify ideas.
- New sections in domain chapters explaining benefits of using particular observing and recording tools for a particular domain.
- Chapter by chapter changes include the following:

Chapter 1   Observing to Assess Children's Development

Revised Child Development Checklist

Standardized tests as tools for assessment

Developmental screening

NAEYC program criteria

Portfolios for assessment

How to become an observer

Chapter 2   Recording and Collecting Observational Data

Using rubrics

Using Learning Prescriptions

Chapter 3   Self-Esteem

Playing without fear of bullying

Books about bullying

Chapter 4   Emotional Competence

Building emotional competence

Emotional literacy

Affective joy; cognitive joy

Chapter 5   Social Competence

Play and neuroscience research

Brain scan evidence
Strategies for gaining access to group play

Chapter 6   Physical Development

Combination of previous chapters on large-motor development and small-motor development
More vigorous playground exercise
Large-motor skills rating scale
Running skills rating scale

Chapter 7   Cognitive Development

Brain imagining; brain development
Making thinking visible
Using document panels
Recording dramatic play scenarios

Chapter 8   Spoken Language

Dual language learners
Books to promote speaking aloud
Telephone conversations
Documenting conversations

Chapter 9   Emergent Writing and Reading Skills

Dual language learners; readers
Writing Skills Checklist; Reading Skills Checklist
Name-Writing Rubric; Book-Handling Rubric
Books on CDs
Scaffolded readings

Chapter 10   Art, Music, and Dance Skills

Observation of creativity
Drawing Skills Checklist
Music and disabilities
Singing and literacy
Developing dance skills; checklist

Chapter 11   Dramatic Play Skills

Children who do not know how to play
Scaffolding dramatic play
Culturally diverse props
Prosocial superheroes

Chapter 12 Sharing Observational Data with Families

Parent outcomes of shared observations

Collaborative portfolios

✓ CHECKLISTS FOR OBSERVING AND RECORDING

Child Development Checklist
Vigorous Playground Exercise
Large-Motor Skills Rating Scale
Running Skills Rating Scale
Large-Motor Checklist
Small-Motor Checklist
Writing Skills Checklist
Reading Skills Checklist
Drawing Skills Checklist
Music and Dance Skills Checklist

✓ USE AS A COMPANION TEXT

This eighth edition of *Observing Development of the Young Child* is designed to be used as a companion volume with the author's text *Skills for Preschool Teachers,* Ninth Edition (Pearson, 2012). While *Observing Development of the Young Child* is intended as a child development text, the companion volume—*Skills for Preschool Teachers*—is a teacher development text focusing on 13 areas of teacher competencies.

Like this text, *Skills for Preschool Teachers* is also based on an observational checklist, the Teacher Skills Checklist, which documents teacher competencies in the 13 Child Development Associate (CDA) "functional areas": safe, healthy, learning environment, physical, cognitive, communication, creative, self, social, guidance, families, program management, and professional.

Together, the two texts form a cohesive, complete training program for preservice teachers, beginning teachers, and in-service teachers preparing for the CDA credential. Preservice teachers can use these complementary texts as especially effective guidance in their student teaching field experiences. Both books focus on positive behaviors in children and teachers. Both the development of children and the training of teachers look at "areas of strength and confidence" and "areas needing strengthening" to set up individualized training plans.

✓ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My special thanks for the new edition of this text goes to the directors, teachers, parents, and children of Tiger Paws Head Start, Park Avenue Head Start, and Trinity Lutheran Child Learning Center in Columbia, Missouri, with thanks to its

Observing to Assess Children's Development

In this chapter you will learn to:

____ Explain why observation is the most useful and meaningful way to assess young children's development

____ Describe a specific standardized test and explain how it can be used in an assessment

____ Explain in detail how certain tests present problems as assessment instruments and how teachers can help overcome their limitations

____ Gather data for a child through alternative methods such as child interviews, visual documentation, document panels, or portfolios

____ Become an observer by following the steps in systematic observation

____ Demonstrate that you "see" a child using all your senses

Most teachers of young children love to watch the children in their classrooms as they work and play together or apart. Which ones are excited about the activities? Who has found a new buddy to play with? Which one stands around and watches? As the days progress, so do the children, growing taller, speaking clearer, showing sparks of creativity never before revealed. And you are witnessing it all with wonder.

Such observations of children are more than just pleasurable these days. They are more than just the way to get to know the children. They have become an important component of your teaching duties. Observing children in early childhood classrooms has taken top priority in programs across the nation in order to determine child progress, curriculum requirements, and program effectiveness. Such progress and effectiveness needs to be measured—assessed—in a careful, comprehensive manner. Children can be tested, interviewed, compared with others, or asked to perform. But the most useful and meaningful way to assess young children is through observation.

☑ ASSESSMENT THROUGH OBSERVATION

As early childhood professionals, we have found that in most instances the best method to determine a child's strengths is *for the teacher to observe the young child in the regular classroom based on a particular set of criteria.* Early childhood specialist Seefeldt (1998) agreed when she talked about how observations reveal much about children's growth and development, their perceptions of self and others, patterns of behavior, and their strengths and weaknesses, as well as the fact that they take place naturally and spontaneously (p. 316). This is known as **authentic assessment** because the children are behaving in a natural manner in a normal setting.

We have chosen observation of child development to determine children's progress. Wortham (2012) notes that one of the most valuable ways to become aware of the individual characteristics of young children is through observation. **Developmental indicators** in early childhood are more likely to be noted from children's behavior in natural circumstances than from a designed assessment or instrument.

Observation might not work so well with an older child, but it is eminently suited to a preschooler. Because young children are unable to express themselves

Knowing the development of a child helps teachers plan the curriculum.

Figure 1.1 How Child
Development Occurs

- Development is continuous.
- Development occurs in a certain order.
- Development occurs in stages or sequences.
- All children go through every stage.
- Each child's rate of development may differ.
- Each child's development depends on age, maturity, and experience.

fully with words, direct observations are the next best thing. Preschoolers reveal themselves through their behavior because, unlike older children, young children are really incapable of hiding their feelings.

Observing Child Development

Knowing the development of a young child helps a teacher to plan the curriculum, to set up activities for individuals, or to ask for special help when necessary. Wortham (2012) talks about development as a process of change in an individual over time.

We realize that all children grow and change. Some do it more rapidly than others. Some do it more slowly. This change is affected by the child's age, the child's rate of maturity, and the child's experiences. Thus children of the same age may not be at the same level of development. Their rate of **maturity** may be different. Their life experiences may be different. But their development, nevertheless, is continuous. It occurs in certain stages or sequences. All children everywhere go through these same stages and in the same order—but not at the same rate. Most important for us as child observers: *These stages can be observed.* We are able to tell where a child stands in his or her development by observing the stage or sequence the child is in. Then as teachers we are able to provide activities that will help the child progress. Figure 1.1 shows how child development occurs.

Once you know the stages or sequences of the various **domains** of child development, you will be able to make sense of the assessment of children that is currently required of us as teachers. What is the purpose for such child observation? A number of researchers have noted two principal ways for using the data obtained:

- For **curriculum planning**
- For **child assessment**

For Curriculum Planning

To make daily and long-term curriculum plans for the children, you will need to know how the child is progressing in the domains listed in Figure 1.2.

Although we treat these domains separately, young children's development occurs in all of them simultaneously. To set up activities in the various curriculum

Figure 1.2 Child Development Domains

Child Development Domains
- Emotional development
- Social development
- Physical development
- Cognitive development
- Language development
- Creative development

centers of the classroom that will help children progress, you will need to know where a child stands in each of these developmental areas. How will you do it? The most appropriate method we have discovered is by observing each child in a regular, continuous, systematic manner. By observing each child, you will be able to gather the necessary data to help you plan your daily and long-range program.

For Child Assessment

Assessment is the process by which teachers collect information about a child's capabilities. Teachers look at children's skill levels, interests, strengths, and weaknesses. McAfee and Leong (2011) include tests, observations, interviews, reports from knowledgeable sources, and almost any form of measurement and appraisal of what children know and can do as being assessment. Here we focus on classroom assessment of children's development ages 3 through 5.

Other terms connected with classroom assessment include **formative assessment**, the gathering of information to help in the formation of an instructional program, and **summative assessment**, the evaluation done at the end of a period of time, for example, the school year. McAfee and Leong stress it is important that assessment be aligned with a program's curriculum and expected outcomes. Although tests may require children to perform on demand, assessment should be measuring what children have gained through a particular curriculum.

Assessment of preschool children is a current issue of great importance and concern for early childhood educators. Most programs are now required to provide data about children's outcomes. Programs for young children have always attempted to determine children's needs and to evaluate their accomplishments, sometimes successfully, sometimes not. The number of instruments currently available for assessing the learning, progress, and behavior of preschool children is mind-boggling. Literally hundreds of instruments and procedures have come into use in the past 20 years. Behavior rating scales, tests of visual perception, performance inventories, developmental profiles, portfolios, language batteries, self-concept screening devices, social competence scales, sociometric tests, personality inventories, pictorial intelligence tests, case studies, developmental screening tests, performance-based interviews, and video or audio recordings are only a few.

The Child Development Checklist

We have developed a tool called the Child Development Checklist for students of child development and teachers of young children ages 3 through 5 for informally observing and recording children's natural development. It is a recording tool that can help observers determine where each child stands in the six areas of emotional, social, physical, cognitive, language, and creative development. (See Table 1.1.)

All children go through an observable sequence of development. From large- to small-motor coordination, from simple ideas to complex thinking, from one-word utterances to lengthy sentences, from scribbles to **representational drawings**—all children everywhere seem to proceed through a step-by-step sequence of development that can be traced by an observer who knows what to look for. The observer then records these data and later interprets them to make appropriate plans for individual children.

The Child Development Checklist (Table 1.1) helps observers focus on each of the six major areas. These areas are in turn divided into nine topics of child development. Each topic focuses on at least six observable items of child behavior based on recognized developmental sequences or progressions. Rather than including every detail of development on the checklist, six representative items are discussed. This makes observations inclusive enough to be meaningful, but not so detailed to be cumbersome for the observer.

Table 1.1   Child Development Checklist

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

Name _____   Observer _____

Program _____   Dates _____

Directions:

Put an **X** for items you see the child perform regularly. Put an **N** for items where there is no opportunity to observe. Leave all other items blank.

Item	Evidence	Dates
1. Self-Esteem		
_____ Separates from primary caregiver without difficulty		
_____ Develops a secure attachment with teacher		
_____ Completes a task successfully		
_____ Makes activity choices without teacher's help		

Table 1.1   (*Continued*)

Item	Evidence	Dates
_____ Stands up for own rights		
_____ Displays enthusiasm about doing things for self		
2. Emotional Competence		
_____ Releases stressful feelings in appropriate manner		
_____ Expresses anger in words rather than negative actions		
_____ Can be calmed in frightening situations		
_____ Shows fondness, affection, love toward others		
_____ Shows interest, excitement in classroom activities		
_____ Smiles, seems happy much of the time		
3. Social Competence		
_____ Plays by self with own toys/materials		
_____ Plays parallel to others with similar toys/materials		
_____ Plays with others in group play		
_____ Gains access to ongoing play in positive manner		
_____ Makes friends with other children		
_____ Resolves play conflict in positive manner		
4. Physical Development		
_____ Runs with control over speed & directions		
_____ Climbs up, down, across climbing equipment		

Table 1.1   (*Continued*)

Item	Evidence	Dates
_____ Throws, catches, & kicks balls		
_____ Turns knobs, lids, eggbeaters		
_____ Picks up & inserts objects with dexterity		
_____ Uses tools (scissors, hammer) with control		
5. Cognitive Development		
_____ Classifies objects by shape, color, size		
_____ Places objects in a sequence or series		
_____ Recognizes, creates patterns		
_____ Counts by rote to 20		
_____ Displays 1-to-1 correspondence		
_____ Problem-solves with concrete objects		
_____ Makes thinking visible		
6. Spoken Language		
_____ Listens but does not speak		
_____ Gives single-word, short phrase responses		
_____ Takes part in conversations		
_____ Speaks in expanded sentences		
_____ Asks questions		
_____ Can tell a story		
7. Emergent Writing and Reading Skills		
_____ Pretends to write with drawings & scribbles		
_____ Makes horizontal lines of writing scribbles		
_____ Makes some letters, prints name or initial		

Table 1.1 (*Continued*)

Item	Evidence	Dates
_____ Holds book right side up; turns pages right to left		
_____ Pretends to read using pictures to tell story		
_____ Shows awareness that print in books tells story		
8. Art, Music, and Dance Skills		
_____ Makes basic scribble shapes		
_____ Draws person as sun-face with arms & legs		
_____ Makes pictorial drawings		
_____ Moves arms & hands in rhythm to beat		
_____ Plays rhythm instruments		
_____ Sings with group or by him/herself		
_____ Moves body to represent people, animals, feelings		
_____ Dances with others to music		
9. Dramatic Play Skills		
_____ Does pretend play by him/herself		
_____ Assigns roles or takes assigned roles		
_____ Needs particular props to do pretend play		
_____ Takes on characteristics & actions related to role		
_____ Uses language for creating & sustaining the plot		
_____ Enacts exciting, danger-packed themes		

In this text, for items the observer does not check as apparent when observing a child, a section of ideas following the item called *If You Have Not Checked This Item: Some Helpful Ideas* can be useful in planning for individual needs. The purposes for assessing children's development in this manner are twofold:

1. It allows students of child development to gain an in-depth understanding of real children and their sequences of growth.
2. It helps teachers of young children to become aware of each child's growth and to support individual development with appropriate activities and materials.

✓ STANDARDIZED TESTS AS TOOLS FOR ASSESSMENT

Many teachers measure young children's growth and development using more formal tools called **standardized tests**. These tests have been designed by researchers to interpret a child's performance in comparison to the performance of other children with similar characteristics (Mindes, 2011). Some of these **formal assessment tools** and procedures use the observation of children; some do not. Some need to be administered by professional testers; others don't. Some assessment procedures place children in artificial rather than authentic situations. Many ask children to perform contrived activities. Although such tools and tasks may be helpful to researchers and professionals who are evaluating children for developmental problems, many are not appropriate for the nonspecialist teacher in the early childhood classroom. Table 1.2 lists several of the **standardized assessment instruments** using observation of children.

Table 1.2   Selected Preschool Assessment Instruments

Instrument	Age Range	Description
Battelle Developmental Inventory, 2nd Ed. (BDI)	Birth to 8 years	Measures social, communication, motor, cognitive; observation of child in natural setting; parent interview; structured items
Child Observation Record—Revised; (COR) HighScope	2½ to 6 years	Measures child's development of initiative, social, creative, music, language, literacy, math, science; teacher observations throughout year; training may be needed
Developmental Observation Checklist System (DOCS)	Birth to 6 years	Observation questionnaire; language, motor, social, cognitive
Early Learning Accomplishment Profile Diagnostic (LAP-D)	2½ to 6 years	Assessment in 5 areas of development: motor, social, self-help, language, **c**ognition
Early School Inventory Developmental (ESI-D)	Prekindergarten	80-item observation checklist of child; performance ratings

Source: Based on McLean, Wolery, & Bailey, 2004; Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2005; Mindes, 2011, Wortham, 2012

Figure 1.3   COR Category: Initiative—A

Source: Information based on HighScope's Child Progress Assessment Tools, 2012; http://www.highscope.org

COR Category: Initiative—A. Making Choices and Plans

Level 1: Child indicates a choice by pointing or some other action.

Level 2: Child expresses a choice in one or two words.

Level 3: Child expresses a choice with a short sentence.

Level 4: Child makes a plan with one or two details.

Level 5: Child makes a plan with three or more details.

The COR test, for example, developed by HighScope, is an observation tool with six categories (initiative, social relations, creative representation, movement and music, language and literacy, math and science), plus 32 items. Each of the items describes five developmental levels from simple to complex. Teachers spend a few minutes each day writing brief notes that describe significant episodes of each young child's behavior. They record the notes on printed forms or computer files. Then they classify and rate them according to COR categories, items, and levels. Figure 1.3 is a sample of the five levels for the category "Initiative—A. Making Choices and Plans." The teacher/observer lists notes she or he has taken about the child's behavior under the appropriate level. When all six categories, 32 items, and 5 levels have been completed, a comprehensive view of the child and her or his accomplishments and needs is available. Training is recommended for first-time users.

Developmental Screening

Another type of child assessment known as **screening** is often done at the beginning of the program year to identify children who may experience developmental lags, learning problems, or disabilities that call for further investigation. Screening helps children who need services to gain access at an early age in order to prevent more severe problems later. Should such problems be identified, further assessment and evaluation will be necessary. Head Start and many state prekindergarten programs are required to perform such screening. A selection of **standardized screening instruments** is listed in Table 1.3.

✓ THE PROBLEM WITH TESTS AS ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

As noted earlier, the reasons to assess young children are many and varied. Some early childhood programs do assessments of children as a program evaluation tool. Are the children progressing as they should? Should changes be made in the curriculum? Other programs do assessments because they are mandated by the state or federal government to prove their effectiveness to receive ongoing support and funding.

The 21st century is an accountability era. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required states across the nation to develop standards-based assessment (i.e., tests) for kindergarten through 12th-grade students in order to receive benefits. States

Table 1.3   Selected Preschool Screening Instruments

Ages & Stages Questionnaires, 3rd Ed. (ASQ)	Parent-completed; self-regulation, communication, social interaction
AGS Early Screening Profiles (ESP)	Cognitive, language, motor, self-help, social
Denver II	Observation or parent interview format; gross & fine motor, communication
Developmental Indicators for the Assessment of Learning, 3rd Ed. (DIAL-3)	Identifies children with potential learning problems or giftedness
Early Screening Inventory-Revised (ESI-R)	Visual/motor, language, cognition

Source: Based on Meisels & Atkins-Burnett, 2005; Wortham, 2012

failing to comply fully would lose benefits. By 2003 testing of students had reached down into preschool with the Head Start Bureau's test *National Reporting System* being administered to 4- and 5-year-olds—with mixed results.

Testing, the traditional means for evaluating children, should work if the testing instruments have been carefully developed and validated by researchers in the field, shouldn't they? However, when applied to young children, the results are often mixed. What works with older children does not seem to work as well with preschoolers and kindergartners. Test developers sometimes blame the validation procedures used in developing the tests. Early childhood educators nod wisely and think to themselves: "It's the kids."

Young children have little interest in tests. Why should they? They don't need to prove to anyone what they can or cannot do. It's true that they can be talked into cooperating with a test-giver. The teacher can administer a test to a child and occasionally get valid results on a particular day. Next week the results may be different with the same child. Honest researchers have had to admit that the major conclusion of their study is that it is inadvisable to routinely test young children prior to or immediately after their entry into kindergarten (Wenner, 1988). Wenner found that even highly respected and widely used tests predicted little more than a quarter of the actual academic performance of kindergarten children.

Romero (1999) pondered the problem of distinguishing the young child's inability from his or her refusal to cooperate. Sometimes a child's response of "I don't know" may really mean just that, but often it can mean "I don't want to." Nevertheless, assessment procedures routinely include tests of many kinds. Although many are reliable and valid instruments, for their results to be used with confidence, teachers and testers alike need to be aware of this "young child factor."

Young children do not test well. Thus assessors need to include other more informal but reliable types of assessment—such as observations of children in the regular classroom—to round out the picture when they are evaluating young children.

Dodge, Heroman, Charles, and Maioca (2004) also pointed out that **government mandates** to test preschoolers are the wrong reason for administering tests. Ongoing

assessment should support children's learning and lead to appropriate curriculum, not gather statistics about children and programs for a political agenda. The tests used for such purposes are often inappropriate as well. These writers say that researchers recommend assessing children based on observations of the processes children use rather than on simple, concrete, disconnected **indicators** or **milestones**.

Teachers as Testers

If formal tests are used, it is especially important that the classroom teachers learn to administer the instrument themselves whenever possible. If an outside tester is the administrator, be sure to help such a person establish rapport with individual children. Invite the tester to the classroom ahead of time. Help her or him to become acquainted with individuals by playing with them, reading to them, and talking with them before the testing begins. Otherwise, results for young children are sure to be suspect.

Much testing of young children constitutes misassessment because the testing is not developmentally appropriate. Tests often present young children with a series of demands to answer here and now, although young children may not be inclined to respond immediately. Classroom teachers who need child assessment data to plan activities that will support individual needs must first understand the meaning of **developmentally appropriate assessment** before choosing such a test or other data-gathering procedure. This means the assessment must be age appropriate, individually appropriate, and culturally appropriate for the children.

It should be stressed again that the classroom teacher, rather than a tester from outside the program, should be the **primary assessor**. The assessment should be based on activities in which children typically engage within the classroom, and not **contrived activities** in **artificial situations**. Assessment should not threaten children, nor should it focus on wrong answers or what children cannot do.

It is important that the teacher be the tester.

Figure 1.4 Observing, Documenting, and Assessing to Support Young Children and Families

3a. Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment

3b. Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches

3c. Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child

3d. Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and with professional colleagues

NAEYC STANDARDS FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONAL PREPARATION

Learning standards for preparing teachers of preschool children have been developed in most states following the trend of standards for kindergarten through 12th grade. If they are used carefully, standards can become a helpful tool to identify expectations in the many diverse early childhood programs (Gronlund & James, 2008). Our national organization, the National Association for the Development of Young Children (NAEYC), has developed its own Standards for Professional Preparation to ensure high-quality early childhood education. Its position statement is available online at http://www.naeyc.org.

There are six core standards, each of which describes what well-prepared students should know and be able to do:

Standard 1. Promoting child development and learning
Standard 2. Building family and community relationships
Standard 3. Observing, documenting, and assessing to support young children and families
Standard 4. Using developmentally effective approaches to connect with children and families
Standard 5. Using content knowledge to build meaningful curriculum
Standard 6. Becoming a professional

This text focuses on Standard 3 as shown in Figure 1.4.

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO ASSESSMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN

In addition to testing instruments, the assessment of preschool children can be done using alternative techniques. Many of them include child observation, but also the collecting of representative work in **play-based assessment**, **child interviews**, and **visual documentation**.

Play-Based Assessment

Because play is young children's natural means of interacting with the world around them, it makes sense to assess children's development while they are engaged in play activities. Toys and specific artificial play situations have long been used by psychologists to observe and record children's behavior using standardized instruments. Play-based assessments, on the other hand, vary from these traditional assessments in that the child is observed doing whatever the child typically does in the environment. Although standardized assessment instruments may be used for the observations and analysis of children's behavior, in this assessment the observer records the child interacting naturally with play materials, peers, or even parents or teachers in the classroom environment. Three types of play-based assessment are typically used:

- *Nonstructured:* identifies all behaviors occurring during a play session; assessors often watch a parent playing with the child
- *Structured:* uses a previously designed set of play behaviors using specific play items
- *Transdisciplinary:* uses a team of assessors observing the child simultaneously, each team member looking for specific information

Play-based assessment (Figure 1.5) has also become the method of choice for assessing children with special needs (Ahola & Kovacik, 2007).

Child Interviews

Assessment interviews done by a teacher and a child can provide important information about a child not easily obtained by any other means. Wortham (2012) tells us about interviews being especially appropriate for young children who are just beginning to develop literacy skills and cannot yet express themselves with paper-and-pencil tests. The strategies followed can be similar to those used by Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget to understand children's thinking. He used questioning, then asked more questions based on children's initial responses.

Such interviews are best conducted on an informal basis during a free-play situation. As the teacher interacts or plays with the child, she or he can talk about what

Figure 1.5   Advantages of Play-Based Assessment

- Provides an opportunity to assess behavior of a child who cannot or will not perform in formal testing situation.
- More can be seen in observing children at play than in asking them to perform.
- All the development domains of a child can be witnessed at the same time.

is happening. For example, while making an animal puzzle with Nicole, the teacher can make remarks about Nicole's skill in finding and matching the puzzle pieces. This may lead Nicole to tell how she does it. What does she guess the animal will look like when the puzzle is finished? If teachers listen closely to what children have to say, they can use children's responses to lead them to new questions that will elicit further information about their development. Teachers can then record their interviews either on a recording device or by writing them down afterward.

Interviews should be short. Ten minutes is an appropriate length of time. Children should also be given plenty of time to think about and respond to the teacher's questions. Reading a picture book to an individual child can serve as an informal interview if the book is carefully chosen and the questions carefully framed to elicit desired information.

Most teachers find such simple informal interviews to be so valuable that they tailor book readings to particular children and develop forms for recording elicited information. These forms are kept in a child's documentation folder or portfolio along with other observational data. You can develop your own interview questions on a recording form or use questions like those in Figure 1.6.

Visual Documentation

Visual documentation is also something we can look at to gain insight into a child's development. With young children, it can take many forms: photographs of children involved in activities, photographs of children's work, video recordings, audio recordings, or samples of children's work.

You can add another dimension to your observation of children by using digital cameras, smartphones, video cameras, or digital audio recorders in addition to conducting play-based assessments, interviews, or traditional classroom observations.

Figure 1.6   Book Interview Protocol

Describing:
What's happening on this page?
Predicting:
What do you think will happen next?
Problem solving:
How else could the character solve the problem?
Empathizing:
How does the characters feel about what's happening?
Creating:
What would you do if you were the character?
Recalling:
Do you remember what the character did first?

Figure 1.7   Uses for Photos
in Child Assessment

- Captures image of child at moment of action
- Serves as memory aid for teachers
- Promotes child's self-image
- Can be used in assessment interviews
- Can be used in parent conferences
- Can be used in book child creates
- Can be used in portfolios, document panels
- Helps staff interpret child's development
- Helps staff plan for child

Such visual documentation can capture important moments to be used to document observational data already gathered about the children. They also can serve as foci for team discussion regarding each child's development or to help make decisions on follow-up activities for the children in question. These observations can then be placed in each child's portfolio or documentation folder.

Photographs

Photos of children are easy to take with digital cameras or smartphones these days, so be sure to take a series of the same child or same incident for later recording. These photos are for your use, not the children's. They should be captioned with content descriptions, dated, and placed in the same file as your recorded notes—perhaps in a child's portfolio.

Photos have other uses as well (Figure 1.7). You can use the photo of a child interacting with others or engaged in a classroom activity as the focus of an **assessment interview**, just as you would use a picture book. Jot down simple questions you will want to ask the child about the photo to elicit assessment information. Be sure the questions are open ended enough for the child to respond in creative ways you may not expect. You may want to audio record your conversation or make a written record of the results on file cards with the picture attached.

Photographs of individual children taken with a digital camera open other avenues for child assessment. Using appropriate software, these photos can be printed on regular computer paper, making several copies of each for use in child or parent interviews, or for inclusion in child portfolios. They also can be used as pages in a book children can create with their own stories written under the photos. Digital photos can also be shown on computer or television screens for use in staff planning sessions on individual children or for parent conferences.

Digital photos are especially well suited to on-the-spot recording. In areas where a child needs strengthening, such photos can be especially useful. For example, if Jessica experiences difficulty at arrival time in making the transition from home to school, be sure to take photos of her every morning for several days, whether or not she continues to encounter the difficulties. Keep a running record of her actions at

the same time and then mount the daily photos together with your written observations on file cards or portfolio pages. Interpreting children's behavior and making plans to help them improve it are more effective when you can see firsthand the visual evidence of their actions long after it occurs (Good, 2009).

Videos

Videos serve the same purpose as photos. Use a video camera or smartphone to capture a child's actions for later observation and discussion with other staff members or parents. After you have previewed the video and know what areas of development it documents, ask staff members to check off that particular section of the Child Development Checklist when they view the video. Checklists can be used like this with videos, treating them like live observations. A group discussion of the video can be recorded and added to the observational data for making individual plans or for documenting the assessment.

Many programs use videos for child observations.

Audio Recordings

A digital audio recording or smartphone recording can also add depth to your written observations by recording a child's spoken language or verbal interactions with other children. Speak the child's name, your name, the date, and the classroom location into the recorder before placing it on a table or countertop near the child. After listening to the recording, make notes or check off appropriate items on a checklist to be placed in the child's portfolio. Audio recordings can also be made of child interviews, as noted previously. Some observers also prefer to speak softly into a smartphone recorder instead of taking notes during their observations of children. Later, the recording can be downloaded into a computer and printed.

Document Panels

Another alternative assessment method for observing children's development is the document panel. Photographs of children along with their products (e.g., painting, writing, and science collections) are displayed on a board or a panel on the wall of the classroom. The Reggio Emilia schools in Italy promoted this approach, believing that documentation should be a part of the learning process. Teachers and parents alike need to see visually what children have accomplished.

For instance, the children in Noah's Ark Preschool in Taos, New Mexico, built their own playhouse outside on their playground over several weeks from adobe bricks they made. Fathers of the Hispanic children helped them plan the dimensions, mix mud and straw, fill square frames, set the bricks out to dry, and then build up the walls and roof. Each step of the process was photographed. Children audio-recorded what was happening. Then they wrote stories and made drawings. This material was then assembled on poster board panels as a visual day-by-day diary of the project.

Although the children and parents often view these panels simply as pictures of an exciting project, teachers understand that this is a permanent record of how the children are developing. It is a form of **summative evaluation**. The playhouse panels displayed children's large- and small-motor accomplishments over time. Their cognitive skills of measuring and counting emerged. Turn-taking and helping one another were captured on video. Their creative skills of making up stories about the playhouse and then reenacting them in real life materialized. These document panels could then be shared with other professionals and afterward kept for future planning.

Other, shorter projects can be documented on panels when they are finished. The "Buddies not Bullies" project illustrated in the accompanying photo was completed in three weeks after a bullying problem was discovered. Teachers did the photography, but children listened to stories, wrote stories, illustrated their stories, interviewed other children, did puppet role-plays, and started a Kindness Classroom.

Portfolios

Many early childhood educators have adopted the portfolio as one of the best methods for assessing the ongoing development of each child. A portfolio is an individual

This document panel shows what children learned about bullying.
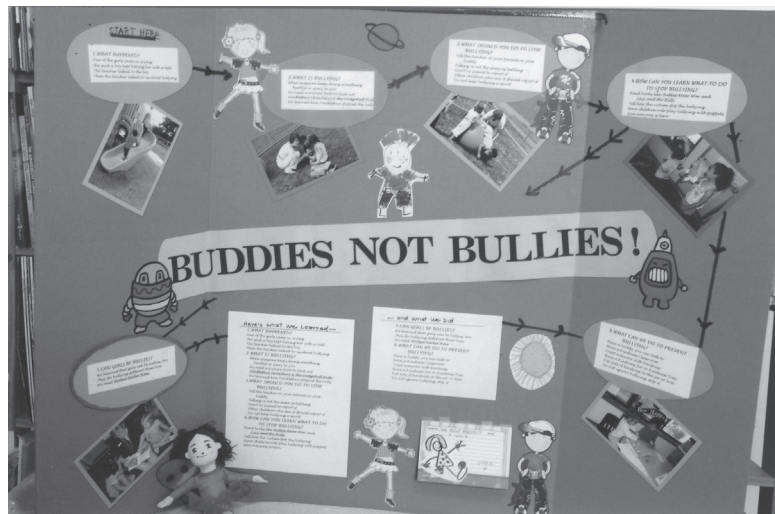
systematic collection of documents that reflects what a child does in a classroom. It is usually assembled by both teachers and children, and emphasizes both process and product in the documents collected.

The teacher must provide the framework for collecting items; otherwise, the results may become a meaningless hodgepodge. Helm, Beneke, and Steinheimer (2007) tell us about the many different approaches to systematizing a portfolio collection process. They discuss a variety of portfolios that have been effectively used in early childhood programs. Some programs use a three-folio system with separate portfolios for ongoing work, current work, and permanently kept work.

The purpose for creating the portfolio may be the deciding factor in how to assemble it. Teachers who need to document a child's development will be assembling a **developmental portfolio**. If the primary purpose is to chart development, then the portfolios should emphasize work in progress.

Such portfolios can be used for assessment of a child's development by the teachers, the program, outside evaluators, and the parents. This author suggests using the Child Development Checklist as an outline for collecting documentation materials. Observing and documenting can then go hand-in-glove in helping teachers, children, and parents to illustrate where the child stands in each of the development areas. See Figure 1.8.

Before beginning to create a portfolio for each child, it should be clearly understood what the portfolios will be used for, thus what work samples will best illustrate this use. Mindes (2011) believes that observational notes form the foundation of the portfolio. Also included should be a collection of children's paintings, drawings, and stories; lists of books read; transcripts of discussions with children about their work; and other products collected throughout the year.

At first this may look like an overwhelming task, but once the observers realize the portfolio can be assembled over the entire school year, they may be more willing to take on the task of adding a piece of evidence to one of the nine areas of development only when appropriate. For example, the teacher may add a sample of a child's writing at the beginning, middle, and end of the year. Or she or he may decide to include only a copy of a child's journal. Photos of children at work and play can be excellent illustrations of their development products for the nine checklist areas.

☑ BECOMING AN OBSERVER

To become an observer of children, you must first step out of the role you normally hold. If you are a teacher or teaching assistant, you must temporarily give that role to another staff member. This can be planned ahead of time at a staff meeting. Each staff member should take on an observer's role for brief periods every week. Student interns can participate, adding another dimension to this important information-gathering task.

Figure 1.8 Portfolio
Items Based on Child
Development Checklist

Self-esteem
- Photos of child showing classroom accomplishments
- Anecdotal records about child from classroom meetings
- Parents' communications about child at home

Emotional competence
- Teacher's records of how child handles stress, anger, joy
- Photo of books child likes to hear when under stress
- Finger painting child made to relieve stress

Social competence
- Photos of child playing with others
- List of dramatic play themes child participates in
- Parent communication about child playing in neighborhood

Physical development
- Photo of child on outside climber
- Photo of large hollow block building child helped build
- Parent communication on child climbing stairs up and down
- Sample of cut-and-paste artwork
- Photo of child pounding nails into wood

Cognitive development
- Pictures with colors child identified
- Photo of block building showing patterns
- Caption dictated by child on drawing he makes

Spoken language
- Audio recording of story child tells
- List of songs child sings
- Funny words child likes to say

Emergent writing and reading skills
- Page of scribbles child makes
- List of books parent has read to child
- Sign-up sheet with name child prints

Art, music, and dance skills
- Sample of easel painting
- Audio recording of child singing, dancing
- Photo of play dough creation

Dramatic play skills
- Hand puppet child made for pretending
- Video of child in dramatic play role
- Running record of child pretending with small figures

Where to Observe

As an observer, you should step back unobtrusively and position yourself close to, but not interfering with, the child you are to observe. You may be seated, standing, or walking around—whatever it takes to get close enough to the child without calling attention to yourself. Try to avoid making eye contact with the child you are observing. If he or she looks your way, you can look around at the other children.

Young children are often much more observant than we give them credit for. Despite your best efforts, the child you are observing will often pick up the fact that you are watching him or her if you keep at it long enough. Most children soon forget about the scrutiny they are undergoing and continue their participation in their activity. If you find, however, that a child seems uncomfortable with your presence and even tries to get away, you should break off your observation. Try again another day, or let another staff member or student observe that particular child.

Children actually like teachers to observe them in this focused way. They relish such one-on-one attention. Children who are not being observed sometimes complain about it. The problem is that you, the observer, want to see what your child is doing with materials and with other children without her looking over her shoulder at you. If she realizes she is being watched, her normal behavior may change. Psychologists call this the Hawthorne effect (Ahola & Kovacik, 2007). Thus, you must try your best to observe a child without being noticed.

What Tools to Use

Many observers prefer to use a clipboard with paper or the Child Development Checklist on it for recording their observations. Several such boards can be left on countertops or the tops of room dividers in each learning center, to be picked up and used by observers whenever the occasion calls for it. If children see you writing on a clipboard for any length of time, some will come over to see what you are doing and want to write with your pencil. Tell them you are busy with your work this morning and that they need to do their own work now. If they persist in wanting to write with your tool, direct them to the classroom writing center, where you can keep a similar clipboard with pencil and paper.

Because children love to imitate you, you could ask those children to observe something like the guinea pig. If they continue to demand your attention, tell them you are busy at the moment but you will attend to them when you are finished. Some observers redirect other children to another staff person or give them a chore to accomplish in one of the learning centers.

Do not announce to the class that you are now doing observations and should be left alone. For youngsters of this age, such an announcement only calls attention to yourself, making everyone stop to look at you. Instead, you should be doing just the opposite: making yourself invisible. Then the child you are observing will continue his or her actions undisturbed. Once you have started observing regularly, most children will soon understand and respect your need for privacy.

Figure 1.9   Getting
Started

- Start at the beginning of the day.
- Walk around watching several children before settling down.
- Keep in mind how interesting the child is.
- Think about painting this child's picture in words.
- Just take the plunge and do it!

How Do You Get Started?

Once you begin observing regularly, you will soon find yourself getting hooked and never want to stop. The problem is getting started. If observing is something you have never done before, you may keep putting it off. What will the children think? Won't you look foolish just standing around? Even though you understand that making observations of individuals is just as important as teaching, it may still be hard for you to drop your regular tasks and begin. Getting started demands conscious effort. Some ideas for getting started are listed in Figure 1.9.

When and How Long Should You Observe?

When is the best time to observe? Any time! You understand how important it is for you to acquire baseline data about each of the children in your program to plan for them. You must therefore *make* time in your busy schedule to gather the necessary information about each child through observation. The time of day to do your observing depends on what you want to learn about a child.

Do you want to see how she makes the transition from home to school in the morning? Which learning centers attract her attention? How long she stays with an activity? How she interacts with others in the dramatic play center? How she handles tools such as scissors, paintbrushes, or pencils? Whether she knows how a particular book "works"? Plan to observe her, then, in each of the centers where these activities take place any time of day.

It does not take long. Only *5 to 10 minutes a day* of focused observing on the part of each staff member will produce a surprising amount of information on children. Make plans to spend your 5 to 10 minutes observing a child you would like to know better. Every day for a week observe the same child for a different 5- to 10-minute period, and soon you will accumulate enough data for a nearly complete profile of her development.

How Should You Plan for Observing?

Because observing and recording are such important aspects of a teacher's commitment to child development, you should explore ways to make it easier for yourself

and other staff members to carry out this responsibility. Some teachers plan to do their most in-depth recording during free-choice time, when children are busily engaged in all the classroom learning centers. Others preplan by placing an "observation chair" in an unobtrusive spot near children's activities. Having notebooks or clipboards and pencils ready at strategic locations also helps.

Some programs include a smartphone as a tool so teachers can record their observations for computer downloading later instead of writing them down at the time. This material can then be transcribed on a checklist. You should consider anything that makes your task easier. Share ideas with other staff members and find out what works best for them. Then everyone can get into the act of observing, recording, and planning for children. This entire process is known as **systematic observation**.

☑ FOLLOW THE STEPS IN SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION

Systematic observation—using a particular system to look at and record children's behavior—has thus become an important part of a classroom staff's daily responsibilities. Systematic observation of young children requires that you have a plan you will be following to do the observing and recording of a child. Steps in such a plan may include those in Figure 1.10.

☑ SHOW THAT YOU KNOW HOW TO SEE

Before you become too deeply involved in child observation, you need to ask yourself: "What do I really see when I look at a child?" Most of us tend to take a cursory look, make some sort of judgment, and then dismiss it. Bentzen (2005) explains about our brains enabling us to see in ways that far exceed the camera's ability to see. Then observation becomes complicated because we do more with sensory information than the camera is able to see. All of us look at and organize the objects according to our past experiences, what we know, and what we believe. In other words, we judge what we see.

This means that two people looking at the same child engaged in play will come away with two different views. On the other hand, the more each of us knows about child development, the more similar our observations of the same child will be. As

Figure 1.10   Systematic Observation

1. Identify the information you want to gather.
2. Identify the child you plan to observe.
3. Identify the method you plan to use.
4. Set up a schedule for observation.
5. Follow the observation schedule.

you practice observation according to this text's suggestions, try doing it with a partner so you can compare your notes. You will find the more you observe, the better you become. The more you learn about young children, the more you will see when you observe. The old adage "We see what we look for" holds true with child observations. When we are not looking for specific details, we tend not to see them. Thus it behooves us to become aware of as many details as possible.

Children "see" with all their senses, not just their eyes. They use sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, and movement to "see" the environment that surrounds them. As an observer of young children, you will need to use as many of these senses as possible for every observation you make. You will also need to record as many details as possible for each of these five senses plus movement.

Practicing Observation Skills

It is important to practice your observing skills before you begin observing children. Look at a person near you or a photo of a person and jot down all the descriptive details you can see. Do this exercise with a team member and compare your results. Do it again and try doubling the details. Next zero in on one aspect of a person, for instance, his or her facial expression, and describe it in detail: eyes, eyebrows, lashes, nose, mouth, lips, cheeks, chin, forehead, ears, and movements. Now take the eyes alone and describe them in detail: eye color, winking, blinking, twinkling, flashing, sparkling, staring, gazing, glancing, opening, closing, squinting, peeking, peering, laughing, scowling. Be careful about being judgmental. Use objective terms only.

Read to a child from a picture book that focuses on careful observation. See if the child can discover hidden objects. See if you can. In **Looking for a Moose** (Root, 2006), four children hike into the woods, a swamp, the bushes, and up a hillside in search of a moose. Only parts of the moose are visible in each location, but no one sees anything at all until the moose finally bugles its call. Zany sound words that accompany the search add to the excitement.

Observation of young children is critical for a number of reasons. Bentzen (2005) goes on to mention how we learn about reality by observing it, by having contact with it through one or more of our five physical senses. Therefore, if we are to understand children, we must watch them, listen to them, and even touch them. Then we need to make some sense of this data in order to act toward children in appropriate and meaningful ways.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Write a brief report explaining what makes child observation the best way to assess children's development and why.

2. Choose one of the standardized tests discussed and explain how it can be used in a child assessment.

3. Choose one of the standardized tests that present problems and describe how teachers can overcome some of the problems.

4. Use one of the alternative methods for assessment such as child interviews, document panels,

videotapes, or portfolios and show what kinds of data you can gather on child development.

5. Use the steps in systematic observation of a child and describe in detail the plan you would use to determine the child's development.

6. Work with a partner in observing a child in all the developmental domains mentioned. Write up the results separately and then compare them. What did you learn?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Curtis, D. (2011). Changes in how we see children. *Exchange,* July/August, 20–25.

Garrigues, S. M. (2012). Competency-based behavioral interviewing. *Exchange,* February, 37–41.

Gibson, C. Jones, S., & Patrick, T. (2010). Conducting informal developmental assessments, *Exchange,* May/June, 36–40.

Harris, M. E. (2009). Implementing portfolio assessment. *Young Children, 64*(3), 82–85.

Ogunnaike-Lafe, Y., & Krohn, J. (2010). Using document panels to record, reflect, and relate learning experiences. *Exchange,* May/June, 92–96.

Reifel, S. (2011). Observation and early childhood teaching: Evolving fundamentals. *Young Children, 66*(2), 62–65.

CHILDREN'S BOOK

Root, P. (2006). *Looking for a Moose.* Cambridge, MA: Candlewick Press.

WEB SITES

UCLA Center for the Study of Evaluation
http://www.cse.ucla.edu

The National Center for Fair and Open Testing
http://www.fairtest.org

HighScope Educational Research Foundations
http://www.highscope.org

KidSource Online (issues related to assessment and observation)
http://www.kidsource.com

Early Childhood Direction Center Behavioral Observation Checklist
http://www.thechp.syr.edu

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)
http://www.naeyc.org

Recording and Collecting Observational Data

In this chapter you will learn to:

____ Make an anecdotal record and running record of a child's actions

____ Record information using your own shorthand

____ Make samplings, rating scales, and rubrics of children's actions

____ Choose a new method of observing and recording

____ Use the Child Development Checklist in two of the domains to observe and record a child's actions

____ Interpret the data and fill out a Learning Prescription for a child

☑ METHODS FOR RECORDING AND COLLECTING OBSERVATIONAL DATA

As you begin the actual observation of young children, you need to keep in mind that important criteria apply to the details you are discovering and recording. They include those in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1   Criteria for Observing Children

- ***Objectivity:*** You must observe each child without judging.
- ***Confidentiality:*** You must keep the information you obtain to yourself.
- ***Recording details:*** You should look for and record even the smallest details.
- ***Using direct quotes:*** You should listen closely and record what each child says.
- ***Using mood cues:*** You should describe the emotional mood of the child.

Systematic observation of young children always implies recording. Not only must observers have a particular reason to observe a child and know what to look for, but they also need a method for recording the information they gather. Mindes (2011) reminds us to to make multiple measures, collecting several samples of observations on all the children. A sampling of these methods is included for discussion in this chapter (Figure 2.2).

ANECDOTAL AND RUNNING RECORDS

The most popular methods for recording child observations fall under the heading of "narrative recording," that is, written descriptions of children's actions. Three of the several types of informal narratives most widely used are anecdotal records, running records, and logs.

Figure 2.2   Recording Methods

- **Narratives**
  Anecdotal records
  Running records
  Learning Center logs
- **Sampling**
  Time sampling
  Event sampling
- **Rating scales**
  Graphic scales
  Rubrics
- **Checklists**
  Developmental

Anecdotal Records

Anecdotal records are brief narrative accounts describing an incident of child behavior that is important to the observer. Anecdotes (a) describe what happened in a factual, objective manner, (b) telling how it happened, (c) when and where it happened, and (d) what was said and done. Sometimes they include reasons for the child's behavior, but the "why" is better kept in the commentary part of the record. These accounts are most often written *after* the incident has occurred, by someone who witnessed it informally, rather than *during* its occurrence, by someone who was formally observing and recording. Anecdotal records have long been made by teachers, psychologists, social workers, and even parents who record when their babies first walk and talk.

Although anecdotal records are brief, describing only one incident at a time, they are cumulative. A series of them over a period of time can be extremely useful in providing rich details about the child being observed. Teachers can also use anecdotal records with the Child Development Checklist to describe more fully the evidence they offer when checking an item. When combined with photos, anecdotes written as captions for photos provide very rich visual information about each child's development. Other advantages of using anecdotal records include the following.

Advantages

1. The observer needs no special training to record.
2. The observation is open ended. The recorder writes anything and everything he or she witnesses and is not restricted to one kind of behavior or recording.
3. The observer can catch an unexpected incident no matter when it occurs, for it is usually recorded at a later time.
4. The observer can look for and record the significant behavior and ignore the rest.

As in all observational methods, there are also disadvantages. Observers need to decide (1) why they are observing, (2) what they want to find out, and (3) which method will be most useful. Some of the disadvantages of the anecdotal method include the following.

Disadvantages

1. It does not give a complete picture because it records only incidents of interest to the observer.
2. It depends too much on the memory of the observer because it is recorded after the event. Witnesses to events are notoriously poor on details.
3. Incidents may be taken out of context and thus be interpreted incorrectly or used in a biased manner.
4. It is difficult to code or analyze narrative records; thus, the method may not prove useful in a scientific study.

Such records can be more useful if recorded on a vertically divided page with the anecdote on the left side and a space for comments or interpretation on the right,

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ANECDOTAL RECORD

Child's Name _____ *Stevie* _____ **Age** ____ *4* ____ **Date** ____ *2/23* ____

Observer _____ *Anne* _____ **Place** _____ *HS* _____ **Time** ____ *9:00–10:00* ____

INCIDENT

Stevie went over to the block corner and asked two boys, Ron and Tanner, if he could help them build. They told him it was okay. As they were building he accidentally knocked some blocks down. "I can put it back up," he said, and handed the blocks to Ron. For awhile he watched Ron build and then said, "I found a smokestack, Ron," and handed him a cylinder block. Ron told him where to put it, and Stevie began getting cylinders off the shelf and handing them to Ron and Tanner to place. Finally he started placing his own cylinders around the perimeter of the building. The teacher asked him if he wanted to finger paint but he replied, "I'm not gonna finger paint unless Ron finger paints."

COMMENT

Stevie is often involved in a lot of dramatic play with several other boys. He especially likes to be near or play with Ron. He seems to look up to him. Whatever rules Ron sets in the play, Stevie follows. Once engaged in play, he likes to continue, and will usually not let another child, or even the teacher, distract him.

Figure 2.3   Anecdotal Record of Observation

or the page can be divided horizontally with the anecdote at the top and the commentary at the bottom. Figure 2.3 is an example of the latter format.

This anecdote tells what happened in an objective manner. Especially good are the direct quotes. The anecdote could have included more details about the child's facial expression, tone of voice, and gestures. The reader does not get the feeling of whether the boy was enjoying himself as a helper, trying to ingratiate himself with another child who was not paying much attention, or desperately trying to gain the attention of the other boy. Such details are sometimes missing from anecdotes because they have not been written down until the end of the day or even later. By then, much is forgotten.

The comments contain several inferences and conclusions based on insufficient evidence. Obviously this observer has spent some time watching Stevie, based on her comments, "Stevie is often involved" and "Once engaged in play, he likes to continue, and will usually not . . ." She would need an accumulation of such anecdotes to make valid statements like this based on evidence. If this were one page in an accumulation of anecdotes about Stevie, the comments would perhaps be more accurate.

The observer infers that Stevie "likes to be near or playing with Ron," although there is not sufficient evidence here to make that definite an inference. Perhaps she should have said: "Whatever rules Ron sets in the play, Stevie follows," if Stevie actually placed a cylinder block where directed. However, this was only hinted at and not stated. Particular words are very important in objective recording. Her conclusion

The observer needs to make careful inferences about the boys.

about Stevie not letting another child or even the teacher distract him is only partially accurate because the observer recorded no evidence about another child.

If you were writing the comments about this particular anecdotal record, what might you infer from the incident? Can you make any conclusions based on this information alone, or is it too limited? Are there things you might want to look for in the future when observing this boy that you would include in the commentary?

It is also helpful to indicate what the purpose is for the particular observation. Most observation forms do not provide a space for this, but the usefulness of the observation is enhanced if it is included. In this case, the observer was looking for evidence of involvement in social play for this child.

Running Records

Another popular informal observing and recording method is the **running record**. It is a detailed narrative account of behavior recorded in a sequential manner as it happens. The observer sits or stands apart from the children and writes down everything that occurs to a particular child over a specified period, which may be as short as several minutes or may be recorded from time to time during a full day. The running record is different from the anecdotal record because it includes all behavior and not just selected incidents, and it is written as the behavior occurs instead of later. Sentences are often short, and words are abbreviated to keep up with the pace of the action. Ahola and Kovacik (2007) point out how the running record is beneficial because it allows us to record minute details, but it is not considered practical when trying to collect a great deal of information about a child. Information you should record in a running record includes the items shown in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 Information to Record

- Facial expressions
- Interactions with materials
- Interactions with people
- Body movements
- Body langauge
- Spoken language
- Attention span

As with all factual recording, the observer must be careful not to use descriptive words and phrases that are judgmental. The running record has a number of advantages for persons interested in child development.

Advantages

1. It is a rich, complete, and comprehensive record not limited to particular incidents.
2. It is open ended, allowing the observer to record everything he or she sees, and not restricting the observations to a particular kind of behavior.
3. Because it is written at the time of the incident, it tends to be more accurate than accounts written later.
4. It does not require that the observer have special observational skills and therefore is particularly useful to the classroom teacher.

There are also several disadvantages to using this method, once again depending on the purpose for gathering the information.

Disadvantages

1. It is time consuming, making it difficult for observers to find periods of uninterrupted time.
2. It is difficult to record everything for any length of time without missing important details.
3. It works best when observing an individual, but it is inefficient when observing a group.
4. Observers must keep themselves apart from the children for long periods.

Observer Errors

Insufficient Evidence

Look at the running record for Katy (Figure 2.5). Has the observer, Rob, omitted any information that would be important for any conclusion he might make about Katy?

RUNNING RECORD

Name _____ Katy _____   Age _____ 4 _____   Date _____ 2/9 _____

Observer _____ Rob _____   Place _____ SPreschool _____   Time _____ 930-10 _____

Observation	Comments
Katy is playing by herself with plastic blocks, making a gun; she walks into playroom; "Lisa, would you play with me? I'm tired of playing by myself; They walk into other room to slide & climber area. K: "I am Wonder Woman." L: "So am I."	Clips blocks together to make gun; copies it to make gun for Lisa; clever; shows creativity; does teacher allow guns?
K: "No. There is only 1 Wonder Woman. You are Robin." L: "Robin needs a Batman because Batman and Robin are friends." All this takes place under slide & climber; Lisa shoots block gun Katy has given her; Katy falls to floor. L: (to teacher) "We're playing super friends and Wonder Woman keeps falling down.	Seems to be the leader here as in other activities I have observed. Lisa is the friend she most often plays with.
K: Opens eyes; gets up; says: "Let's get get out our Batmobile & go help the world." She runs to other room & back making noises like a car. L: "Wonder Woman is died. She fell out of the car." She falls down.	Katy switches roles here. She shows good concentration & spends much time on one play episode.
K: "It's only a game; wake up, Lisa. You be Wonder Woman. I'll be……. L: Let's play house now."	She can distinguish reality from fantasy.
Katy begins sliding down the slide. Says: "Robin is coming after you!" she shouts to Lisa, running from slide to other room. L. "Katy, here is your doll's dress." John joins girls. L. "I'm Wonder Woman." K. "I'm Robin." J: "I'm Batman. Where is the Batmobile?"	Shows good large motor coordination. Spends much time every day like this, running around room. Seems to know she is good at this & spends a lot of time doing it.
K. "John, we are not playing Superfriends any more."	Seems to be more comfortable playing with only 1 child at a time.

Figure 2.5   Running Record for Katy

Look at the "information to record" in Figure 2.4. Check off each item as you reread the running record for Katy. Was anything overlooked or omitted? What about "facial expressions" and "body language"? Can you comment on the "emotional mood" of the child from this running record? What conclusions can you make about Katy from this record?

In another situation, if we see a child come into the room in the morning, refuse to greet the teacher, walk outside and sit on a trike without riding it, shoo away another child who tries to talk to her, and shake her head in refusal when the teacher suggests an activity, how can we record it? A running record of the situation might read like this:

> Jennifer walks into the room this morning as if she is mad at the world. She will not look up at the teacher or respond to her greeting. She sort of slumps as she walks out to the playground with the others. She plunks herself down on a trike but doesn't ride it. When Monica comes over to talk to her she shoos her away. The teacher goes over and asks her if she wants to ride in the trike parade but she shakes her head no.

This record is rich enough in detail for us to visualize it, but is it factually objective? No. The words *"as if she is mad at the world"* are a conclusion based on insufficient evidence. The recorder might better have described Jennifer's entrance objectively like this:

> Jennifer walks into the room this morning with a frowning kind of look on her face. She lowers her head when the teacher greets her and does not respond.

This behavior is unusual for Jennifer, the staff knows. Later the teacher found out that she was not "mad at the world," but sad because her pet cat had been killed by a car the night before. We realize that frowning looks, lowered head, and refusal to speak

Does this girl look angry or sad?

or participate may be the result of emotions other than anger. If the observer first thought about recording the child as "acting grumpy this morning," he needs to avoid this judgment and instead record the actual details that explain what happened, such as: *"Jennifer wouldn't respond to the teacher's greeting at first, and when she did, she muttered 'good morning' in a low voice with head bent down."* It is up to us to sift out our inferences and judgments and make sure we record only the facts.

Omitting or Adding Facts

Other observer errors include (a) omitting some of the facts, (b) recording things that did not happen, and (c) recording things out of order. Here is the "Jennifer incident" again with some of these errors included. Can you find them?

> Jennifer walks into the classroom this morning. She doesn't look at the teacher but goes out on the playground with the others and sits on a trike. The teacher wants her to join the trike parade but she refuses. Monica comes over to talk with her, but she shakes her head no.

Facts *omitted* from the observation:

1. Has a frowning look on her face.
2. Does not respond to teacher's greeting.
3. Walks out to the playground with shoulders slumped.
4. Drops herself down onto a trike but doesn't ride it.

   A fact *added* to the observation:

1. She shakes her head no to Monica.

Such errors can creep into an observation almost without the recorder being aware. You need to practice with at least two observers recording the same incident, and then compare results. If you find discrepancies between the records, check carefully that you have followed the guidelines in Figure 2.6.

Learning Center Logs

Some programs have found that the best way to observe and record on-the-spot actions is to keep a small spiral notebook on the top of the room divider for each learning center. Staff members are asked to briefly record what they see happening in a center whenever they are in the vicinity and to date their observations. The

Figure 2.6   Guidelines for Objective Recording

- Record only the facts.
- Record every detail without omitting anything.
- Do not interpret as you observe and record.
- Use words that describe but do not judge or interpret.
- Record the facts in the order that they occur.

teacher later gathers these **logs** and transfers the information onto the Child Development Checklists being used for each of the children.

This is a way to collect data for several children at once, as well as data for child interactions in several learning centers at once. Some programs divide the pages of their logs into the headings of *Child, Actions,* and *Language* to help remind observers of what information to record. If the teacher notes that nothing has been recorded in one of the centers by the end of the day, she or he can discuss this with the staff. Did no children play in that particular center, or did none of the staff happen to observe what was going on there?

Using learning center logs like this helps to alert staff members not only to what is occurring throughout the classroom during the day, but also as a reminder to record what they see happening. As a result, the teacher can piece together a record for more than one child's entire day of activities as seen by several different observers. In addition, no one feels burdened by stepping out of the role as a teacher to observe. Child observation occurs naturally as a part of the staff's normal checking of learning centers to see how children are doing.

All the staff, including the teacher, benefit from this sort of ongoing assessment of children. They learn where each child is developmentally, which centers and which activities seem to attract the most children, and which centers need changing. Learning center log recording like this gives the entire staff a better feel for what is really happening in the program. Martin (1994) also pointed out, "The log system requires a teacher to be diligent in record keeping. It can provide a detailed analysis of what the child is doing. For the child who has a diagnosed special need, this type of record keeping can provide data which can be interpreted and form part of the planning process" (p. 227).

☑ RECORDING INFORMATION

Using Your Own Shorthand

Children often move from one area to another very rapidly. Even within the same learning center they may not settle down. To catch all the action in your notes, you will want to develop your own shorthand by using abbreviations. Use children's initials for their names and abbreviate words: *child* = ch, *teacher* = tch, *with* = w/, *different* = dif, and so on. Use descriptive verbs whenever you can. Instead of "walks over to sink," can you be more specific? Try to paint a picture with words. Figure 2.7 suggests descriptive verbs to be used for the word *walks*.

Figure 2.7 Descriptive Words for *Walks*

marches	prances	strolls
stomps	tiptoes	skips
shuffles	toddles	strides
plods	trudges	tramps

Figure 2.8   Descriptive Words for *Said*

whispered	stammered	muttered
shouted	grumbled	mumbled
argued	declared	insisted
announced	uttered	stated

Practice makes perfect, and you will soon be developing your own observational shorthand and vocabulary. Complete sentences are not necessary on a running record. Instead, catch the moment on paper as quickly and completely as you can. Afterward, you can draw a line under the recording and write any comments or interpretive remarks that may help explain what you saw happening. Your first 5-minute running record may be rather short, perhaps not more than a half-page of notes. But as you hone your skills, you will soon be filling up more than one page because the more experienced you become, the more you will see.

Be sure to record as much of the spoken language as possible. Also include how the child sounds as she or he speaks. Figure 2.8 lists some of the many verbs describing speaking that you can use instead of the word *said*.

You may want to keep a card with you listing descriptive verbs to substitute for *walks* and *said* and other frequently used but nondescriptive verbs.

What about judgmental words? Be careful that the words you use do not carry judgments that will give a unintended meaning to the observation. Figure 2.9 lists judgmental phrases and sentences sometimes found in observation records. Should they ever be used? If not, why not? What could you substitute for them?

✓ SAMPLINGS, SCALES, AND RUBRICS

A different way of observing children is to look at samples of certain behaviors to discover how often, how long, or when a particular behavior occurs. When using samples, it is important to combine them with other forms of recording—such as developmental checklists—so that a whole picture of the child emerges.

Time Sampling

Because many of young children's behaviors are brief, the observer can gain comprehensive information by using time sampling (Wortham, 2012). In time sampling,

Figure 2.9   Judgmental Phrases

He was a good boy today.	*Lost his temper*
Marcie was mad at Elena.	*Got upset*
Shouted angrily	*Made a big mess*
Acted happy	*Couldn't wait to go home*

the observer records the frequency of a behavior's occurrence over time. The behavior must be overt and frequent (at least once every 15 minutes) to be a candidate for sampling. For example, hitting or crying are behaviors that a teacher might want to sample for certain children because they can be seen and counted. Laughing and helping to pick up are other overt behaviors. Problem solving is not a good candidate for time sampling because this behavior is not always clear to the observers, nor can it be counted easily.

Time sampling thus involves observing a specified behavior of an individual or group and recording the presence or absence of this behavior during short time intervals of uniform length. The observer must prepare ahead of time, determining what specific behavior(s) to look for, what the time interval will be, and how to record the presence or absence of the behavior. Such time sampling is often used in **behavior modification** interventions. If the behavior is an inappropriate one, it is also important to use other assessment tools (such as a developmental checklist) to give a complete picture of the child.

For example, to help Jamie change his bullying behavior, the teacher needed to know how frequently the behavior occurred. The teacher noted that it included the following behaviors, determined by previous observations:

Hitting = h

Pushing = p

Kicking = k

Holding another against his will = hd

Taking another's toy = t

Next the teacher needed to decide about the time intervals to observe and record. She decided she wanted to sample Jamie's behavior for 5-minute intervals during the first half hour of the morning for a week. This seemed to be the most difficult time for him. Then the teacher had to decide what and how to record on the sheet she had blocked off in time intervals. Often an observer simply records "1" if the behavior occurs and "0" if it does not. This is called **duration recording**.

Check marks and tally marks can also be used if the teacher wants to know how many times the behavior occurred, rather than just its presence or absence. If the teacher is more concerned with specific categories of bullying, each of the categories can be given a code. The teacher can then set up her recording chart like the one in Figure 2.10 or in any way she wants, since this is an informal type of observation. This chart also involved **frequency counts**.

How would you interpret the results gathered on the first day as shown in Figure 2.10? The teacher could see that Jamie's bullying during the first 15 minutes of the day involved mostly hitting and pushing certain children. That also seemed to be the case on the following mornings. She decided to set up a home-to-school transition activity for Jamie to get involved in interacting nonaggressively with other children. Future observations would help the teacher determine if the intervention strategy had been successful. Time sampling is thus a useful method for observing children for some of the following reasons:

Figure 2.10 Time Sampling

Time Intervals
(5 minutes each)

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Duration Recording (presence or absence)	1	1	1	0	0	0
Event Recording (frequency)	IIII	II	I	0	0	0
Event Recording (presence or absence)	h, p	h, p, t	h	0	0	0

Advantages

1. It takes less time and effort than narrative recording.
2. It is more objective and controlled because the behavior is specified and limited.
3. It allows an observer to collect data on a number of children or a number of behaviors at once.
4. It provides useful information on intervals and frequencies of behavior.
5. It provides quantitative results useful for statistical analysis.

Disadvantages

1. It is not an open method and therefore may miss much important behavior.
2. It does not describe the behavior, its causes, or results because it is more concerned with time (when or how frequently the behavior occurs).
3. It does not keep units of behavior intact because its principal concern is the time interval, not the behavior.
4. It takes the behavior out of its context and therefore may be biased.
5. It is limited to observable behaviors that occur frequently.
6. It usually focuses on one type of behavior (in this case an inappropriate behavior) and thus may give a biased view of the child.

Event Sampling

Event sampling is used instead of time sampling when a behavior tends to occur in a particular setting, rather than a particular time period (Wortham, 2012). The observer waits for and then records a specific preselected behavior. Event sampling is used to study the conditions under which particular behaviors occur. It may be important to

Event Sampling

Name _Darrell_   **Age** _3½_

Center _Head Start_   **Date** _10/5_

Observer _Sue S._   **Time** _9:00–12:00_

Behavior: Kicking: striking out at other children or teacher with right foot, hard enough to make children cry.

Time	Antecedent Event	Behavior	Consequent Event
9:13	Darrell playing alone in block corner; Rob comes in & puts block on Darrell's building	Darrell looks at Rob with frown; stands; pushes at Rob; Rob pushes back; Darrell kicks Rob on leg	Rob cries & runs to teacher
10:05	On playground; Darrell waiting turn in line with others to go on slide; Sally tries to cut in	Darrell kicks Sally hard on leg Darrell kicks teacher	Sally cries; teacher comes & takes Darrell away by arm to talk to him

Figure 2.11   ABC Event Sampling Observation

learn *what triggers* a particular kind of behavior—biting, for instance—to find ways to control it. Or the observer may want to find out *how many times* a certain behavior occurs. Time sampling could be used if time intervals or time of day were the important factor. If the behavior occurs at odd times or infrequently, event sampling is more appropriate.

The observer must first define the event or "unit of behavior." Then, the setting in which it is likely to occur must be determined. The observer takes the most advantageous position to observe the behavior, waits for it to occur, and records it.

Recording can be done in several ways, depending on the purpose for the observation. If the observer is studying causes or results for certain behaviors, then the so-called ABC analysis is especially useful (see Figure 2.11). It is a narrative description of the entire event, breaking it down into three parts: A = antecedent event, B = behavior, and C = consequent event. Each time the event occurs, it is recorded.

If subsequent observations of Darrell show the same sort of sequence as in the event sampling, the teacher could interpret this to mean that Darrell does not initiate the kicking, but rather responds to interference with his activities in this inappropriate manner. The teacher may need to help him learn an acceptable way to vent his frustration other than kicking. Until this issue is resolved, he may need to keep his shoes off in the classroom. This may also help him learn that

kicking hurts. The advantages and disadvantages for using event sampling include the following:

Advantages

1. It keeps the event or behavior intact, making analysis easier.
2. It is more objective than some methods because the behavior has been defined ahead of time.
3. It is especially helpful in examining infrequent or rarely occurring behaviors.

Disadvantages

1. It takes the event out of context and thus may minimize other phenomena that are important to the interpretation.
2. It is a closed method that looks only for specified behavior and ignores other important behavior.
3. It misses the richness of detail that anecdotes, specimen records, or running records provide.

Rating Scales

Rating scales are observation tools that indicate the degree to which a person possesses a certain trait or behavior. Each behavior is rated on a continuum from the lowest to the highest level (or vice versa) and is marked off at certain points along the scale. The observer must make a judgment about where on the scale the child's behavior lies. As an observation tool, rating scales work best where particular degrees of behavior are well defined or well understood by the observer and where there is a distinct difference in the behavior at the various points on the scale.

These tools are useful in diagnosing a child on several behaviors at the same time. The observer watches the child and checks off or circles the point on the scale that indicates the child's current position in regard to the behavior or ability. Such scales are simple to make: Simply state the behavior, draw a line, then mark off a number of points or intervals along the line. Five intervals are often used so that there is a middle (neutral) position, with positive and negative intervals on either side of it (see Figure 2.12).

Graphic Scale

The rating scale in Figure 2.12 shows only one item of behavior. Many similar behaviors could be listed on this same scale. Such scales are called **graphic scales** and can be drawn either horizontally or vertically. Many traits can be listed on one sheet. Graphic scales are often easier to construct than to use. The observer must know the children well, be able to interpret their behavior, and be able to make an objective judgment within a limited time. For example, how would you rate the girl in the accompanying photo?

Shares toys_____

               Always   Often   Sometimes   Seldom   Never

Figure 2.12   Graphic Scale for Single Behavior

Rating Scale Observer Errors

A different kind of observer error can affect the use of rating scales. Contrary to other types of observation, this tool calls for the observer to make an on-the-spot judgment, rather than an objective description. It is extremely difficult for observers to be totally unbiased and objective. They may be influenced by other things they already know about the child or the child's family, or by outside influences completely unrelated to the situation they are observing. For example, one observer persistently gave lower ratings to an overweight child. When asked about it later, the observer admitted a prejudice against overweight children because he had been one himself.

To guard against these tendencies, the observer should rate all of the different children being observed on the same trait before going on to another trait. To check objectivity, a second rater can observe the same children and compare results.

Rating scales may be used on their own, implemented with other observation methods as a part of the procedure, or filled in after the observation is completed

This girl has trouble sharing toys.

from data gathered from running records. As with the other observation methods, rating scales have certain advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages

1. They are easy to design and less time consuming to use.
2. They provide a convenient method to observe a large number of traits at one time or more than one child at a time.
3. They make it possible to measure difficult-to-quantify traits—shyness, for example.
4. They can be used by nonspecialist observers.
5. They are easier to score and quantify than most other methods.

Disadvantages

1. Rating scales use a closed method. They examine specified traits and may overlook other important behavior.
2. They feature the negative as well as the positive side of each trait.
3. Clearly differentiating between each point on the scale is sometimes difficult, both for the designer and the observer.
4. It is difficult to eliminate observer bias when judgments must be made quickly on many different traits.

Rubrics

Rubrics are a set of guidelines that evaluate performance. They have a range of criteria, like rating scales, but have indicators that determine the quality of performance from one level to the next (Wortham, 2012). There are three types of rubrics: holistic, analytic, and developmental.

Holistic Rubric

This type of rubric has a number of indicators that describe the quality of work or performance arranged in a progression from worst to best. It is scored with points for the level a child obtains. See Figure 2.13

Attention Span

1—Rarely finishes task, moves rapidly from one task to another
2—Usually needs encouragement to stay with task until complete
3—Can usually remain with task appropriate to age level until it is finished
4—Can stay with a chosen activity for very long periods, even returning next day

---

Figure 2.13   Holistic Rubric for Attention Span

Analytic Rubric

Describes and scores each task attribute separately with limited descriptors. For example, for "Rarely finishes task" the descriptors could be: 1—Gets up and leaves before starting task; 2—Starts a task but leaves before finished; 3—Stays with task for a while before leaving; 4—Stays with task almost to the end before leaving. This kind of rubric is used for diagnostic purposes.

Developmental Rubric

This type of rubric is used to serve a multiage group of children over a long period of time, often several grade levels. A child is assessed on a continuum of skills that shows developmental progress (Wortham, 2012).

Advantages
1. They provide guidelines for a child's performance.
2. They can be designed for many uses and ability levels.
3. They can easily meet changing needs.
4. They can be used to discuss children's performance with parents.

Disadvantages
1. Teachers may have difficulty determining the assessment criteria.
2. Rubrics may be limited or too specific.
3. Holistic rubrics may lack validity and reliability.
4. Teachers may focus on the wrong characteristics of student work.

Checklists

Checklists are lists of specific traits or behaviors arranged in a logical order. The observer must indicate the presence or absence of the behaviors either when observing them or when reflecting on the observation. Checklists are especially useful for types of behaviors or traits that can be specified easily and clearly. We tend to see what we look for. Thus a checklist can prove to be a valuable tool for focusing attention when many different items need to be observed. A survey or inventory of a situation can be done more efficiently with a checklist than with almost any other observation tool. If the observer needs to know whether a child displays the specified behavior, a checklist is the instrument of choice to use.

Both checklists and rating scales often include large numbers of traits or behaviors. The difference between the two is not necessarily in their appearance but in their use. An observer using a checklist merely checks off the presence of the trait (a blank denotes its absence). The observer using a rating scale must make a snap judgment about the degree to which the trait is present.

A separate checklist can be used for each child in the class.

Checklists can be used in a number of ways, depending on the purpose for the observation. For instance, a separate checklist can be used for each child in the class, if the results are to be used for individual planning. Or all of the children's names can be included on the same checklist along with the checklist items, if it is the observer's purpose to screen children for certain traits.

The items on a checklist can simply be checked off, or the date or time when they first appear can be entered to make a more complete record. A different checklist can be used for each observation, or a single checklist can serve in a cumulative manner for the same child all year if dates are recorded for each item. A single checklist can be used by one observer or by several observers who will add to the cumulative data over a period of time.

Finally, information gained from anecdotal and running records can be transferred to checklists to make interpretation easier. It is much simpler to scan a list of checked behaviors than to read through long paragraphs of wordy description when attempting to interpret observational evidence. However, it is obvious that checklists need to be prepared carefully.

Whether you plan to make your own checklist or use a prepared list, make sure the items listed are specified very clearly in objective, nonjudgmental terms. The user should be able to understand the items easily; thus, it makes sense to put items through a pretest before actual use in an observation tool. All checklist items should be positive, unlike rating scale items, which include a range of behavior from positive to negative.

Checklist items not observed are left blank, indicating absence of the particular behavior. If the observer does not have the opportunity to witness certain behaviors, these items should not be left blank, but denoted by some symbol (e.g., *N*, meaning no opportunity to observe). Some suggestions for developing checklist items are listed in Figure 2.14.

Overall, the checklist format should allow the observer to scan the items at a glance. The Child Development Checklist is an example of an observation tool that

Figure 2.14 Checklist Items

- Short, descriptive, understandable
- Parallel in construction (word order, verb tense)
- Objective and nonjudgmental
- Positive in nature
- Not repeated elsewhere in checklist
- Representative of behavior, not all-inclusive

looks at nine important areas of child development, breaking down each area into six observable items: Each item is brief, represents an important aspect of development, is parallel in construction (beginning with a verb), and is positive. The six items are listed in either a sequence or a progression of known child development. Together, they form the profile of a whole child as he or she works and plays in the environment of an early childhood classroom. Advantages for using checklists of this nature include the following:

Advantages

1. They are easy, quick, and efficient to use.
2. The nonspecialist observer can use them with ease.
3. They can be used in the presence of the child or later from remembered behaviors or recorded narrative observation.
4. Several observers can gather the same information to check for reliability.
5. These checklists help to focus observation on many behaviors at one time.
6. They are especially useful for curriculum planning for individuals.

Checklists have a number of disadvantages as well. Observers must weigh one against the other, always keeping in mind their purpose for observing.

Disadvantages

1. They are closed in nature, looking at particular behaviors and not everything that occurs; thus they may miss behaviors of importance.
2. They are limited to recording the presence or absence of behavior.
3. They lack information about the quality and duration of behavior and a description.

CHOOSING THE METHOD FOR OBSERVING AND RECORDING

Table 2.1 compares six of the methods for observing and recording young children discussed in this chapter. Each has advantages and disadvantages that an observer needs to consider before choosing a particular method. The final choice often depends on the purpose for the observation.

Table 2.1 Comparison of Methods of Observing and Recording

Method	Purpose	Advantages	Disadvantages
Anecdotal Record:			
A narrative of descriptive paragraphs, recorded *after behavior occurs*	To detail specific behavior for child's record; for case conferences; to plan for individuals	Open-ended; rich in details; no special observer training	Depends on observer's memory; behavior taken out of context; difficult to code or analyze for research
Running Record:			
A narrative written in sequence over a specified time, recorded *while behavior is occurring*	To discover causes and effects of behavior; for case conferences; to plan for individuals	Open-ended; comprehensive; no special observer training	Time-consuming; difficult to use for more than one child at a time; time-consuming to code and analyze for research
Time Sampling:			
Tallies or symbols showing the presence or absence of specified behavior during short time periods, recorded *while behavior is occurring*	For behavior modification baseline data; for child development research	Objective and controlled; not time-consuming; efficient for observing more than one child at a time; provides quantitative data for research	Closed; limited to observable behaviors that occur frequently; no description of behavior; takes behavior out of context
Event Sampling:			
A brief narrative of conditions preceding and following specified behavior, recorded *while behavior is occurring*	For behavior modification input; for child development research	Objective; helpful for in-depth diagnosis of infrequent behavior	Closed; takes event out of context; limited to specified behaviors
Rating Scale:			
A scale of traits or behaviors with checkmarks, recorded *before, during, and after behavior occurs*	To judge degree to which child behaves or possesses certain traits; to diagnose behavior or traits; to plan for individuals	Not time-consuming; easy to design; efficient for observing more than one child at a time for many traits; useful for several observers watching same child	Closed; subjective; limited to specified traits or behaviors
Checklist:			
A list of behaviors with checkmarks, recorded *before, during, and after behavior occurs*	To determine presence or absence of specified behaviors; to plan for individuals; to give observer an overview of child's development or progress	Efficient for observing more than one child at a time for many behaviors; useful for an individual during a period of time; a good survey or inventory tool; useful for several observers at once; no special training needed	Closed; limited to specified behaviors; no information on quality of behavior

A checklist was chosen as the basis for this book because of checklists' unique ability to give the observer an overview of child development. It is a teaching tool as well as an observational tool. The Child Development Checklist will thus assist the observer not only in gathering information to help plan for specific children, but also in learning the sequences of child growth in the areas of emotional, social, physical, cognitive, language, and creative development. Ahola and Kovacik (2007) concur, saying: "Checklists that are well-designed and appropriately used can be useful in understanding children's development and in developing curriculum" (p. 27).

☑ USING THE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

The Child Development Checklist in Table 2.2, around which this text is written, is as much a learning device for the observer as it is a planning tool for helping the child. With sequences of child development as its focus, it presents the areas of emotional, social, physical, cognitive, language, and creative development by dividing most of these domains into two major areas, then subdividing each area into six representative items of development.

Emotional development, for example, is divided into "self-esteem" and "emotional competence" (shown here) with a chapter devoted to each of these topics. These chapters illustrate representative behaviors in the sequence of emotional development that can be seen in the early childhood classroom.

Using One Checklist Section at a Time

As a learning device for the observer, the checklist is best used one section at a time. To understand the sequence of emotional development as it appears in the early childhood classroom, for instance, the observer should first plan to use the Self-Esteem section of the checklist in observing a child *for enough time to see if all six items are present*. This means coming into the classroom early enough to see how the child enters the room, what she does when her parent/caregiver leaves, and how she interacts with the teacher(s). It also means coming early to the classroom *more than once* to observe how the child behaves on different days and to record this information. The observer should not only check off the items as they appear, but also record evidence for each item in the space provided.

Using the Entire Checklist

Once you are familiar with each of the checklist areas and items, you can use the entire checklist (Table 1.1) for one child to gain a complete overview. How should you begin? You may want to learn something about a particular child in a certain area of development. Perhaps she has difficulty getting involved with the others in the pretend play during free-choice period. Plan to begin your observation during this period. You will want to look at the items in the social competence section. Other

Table 2.2   Child Development Checklist (Self-Esteem; Emotional Competence)

<div align="center">

CHILD DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

</div>

Name _____   **Observer** _____

Program _____   **Dates** _____

Directions:

Put an **X** for items you see the child perform regularly. Put an **N** for items where there is no opportunity to observe. Leave all other items blank.

Item	Evidence	Dates
1. Self-Esteem		
_____ Separates from primary caregiver without difficulty		
_____ Develops a secure attachment with teacher		
_____ Completes a task successfully		
_____ Makes activity choices without teacher's help		
_____ Stands up for own rights		
_____ Displays enthusiasm about doing things for self		
2. Emotional Competence		
_____ Releases stressful feelings in appropriate manner		
_____ Expresses anger in words rather than negative actions		
_____ Can be calmed in frightening situations		
_____ Shows fondness, affection, love toward others		
_____ Shows interest, excitement in classroom activities		
_____ Smiles, seems happy much of the time		

checklist areas that can often be seen at the same time as Social Competence include the items under Self-Esteem, Emotional Competence, Spoken Language, and Dramatic Play Skills. Either check off the items as you see them, writing in the evidence, or do a running record of everything the child does and says and convert it to the checklist afterward.

Be sure to make notes after each item, jotting down the evidence that prompted you to check the item (or leave it blank). If you leave the item blank, it is still important to write down your reason—the evidence for leaving the item blank. If you use the same checklist on more than one day in a cumulative manner, be sure to put the date after each item as well.

The time of your next observation may be determined by the areas you have not had the opportunity to observe. For Self-Esteem, for instance, you will want to observe the child when she arrives in the morning, especially at the beginning of the year. Emotional Competence items also need to be observed during lunch or snack time, toileting, and naptime.

✓ INTERPRETING AND USING THE DATA

Once you have observed a child and recorded data about her in a running record, then transferred the data to the Child Development Checklist, the next step is to interpret the information. Learning to know and understand a child is a fascinating process. Objective observing and recording like this make possible a deeper understanding than a lifetime of merely being around children can do. We need to step back from children and look at them impartially and objectively. Only then do we truly see who they are and what they are. Only then do we begin to understand how we can help them reach their greatest potential.

Interpreting the information your observations have provided takes knowledge and skill. You need to know a great deal about child development both from reading and studying about children and from actual experience with them. Then you can begin to make valid inferences and conclusions about children based on your observations.

However, the data you have gained about a child from the Child Development Checklist observation can help you plan activities for the child to help in his or her development. Go over the checklist carefully making notes of the particular strengths of a child whom you have observed. Also note the areas needing strengthening (not weaknesses). Make what we call a Learning Prescription for the child by listing three areas of strengths and three areas needing strengthening. Using the child's strengths, decide on three activities that can help the child in the areas needing strengthening (see Figure 2.15). Set up these activities and observe to see how the child responds over time. New activities can be added if necessary.

Use of the Checklist by Preservice Teachers and Student Teachers

Preservice teachers and student teachers can use the Child Development Checklist just as a classroom teacher does, making a series of observations of a single child

Learning Prescription

Name_____Age_____Date_____

Areas of Strength and Confidence

1._____

2._____

3._____

Areas Needing Strengthening

1._____

2._____

3._____

Activities to Help

1._____

2._____

3._____

until all the items have been noted. In case the observer has no access to live chil-dren in a classroom, it is possible to observe and record using prerecorded videos or CD-ROMs of children in a classroom.

For student observers who observe and record live children, you need to rewrite your notes as soon as possible after you have finished your observations. As an expe-rienced observer notes:

Memory is a poor recorder. Therefore you will want to make it a practice to transcribe your notes soon after you visit a classroom.

✓ OBSERVATION OF EACH CHILD

It is important to observe each of the children in this kind of detail throughout the year. Teachers report that they can learn more about each child by stepping back and making a relatively brief, focused observation like this, than by having the child in their program for an entire year. It is an eye-opening experience to look at one child in depth from an observer's point of view, rather than from the perspective of a busy teacher involved with the activities of many other lively youngsters.

Child development students report that an in-depth examination of a real child makes textbooks and courses come alive, as well. Parents, too, benefit from the infor-mation that objective observations provide. Not only do the parents learn new activities to use with their children at home, but they also often become involved in the fascinat-ing drama of how their own children develop, why their children act the way they do, and how they, as parents, can best help their children realize their full potential.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. Have a team of observers record a 10-minute observation of a child at play in a preschool classroom. One team member should record a running record of the child at the time of the observation. The other member should make a running record of the same observation at the end of the day. Compare the results. Write up which one showed the most details and which worked best for the observers.

2. Write up the results of the time sampling, event sampling, and rubric you used to observe a child. Tell which of these methods was more satisfactory and why.

3. Write up a comparison of the six methods of observing and recording shown in Table 2.1 as they apply to a specific child of your interest. What would you want to find out about the child? Which method worked best and why?

4. Write up your use of the Child Development Checklist in two of the domains to observe a different child's actions. Summarize your findings about this child.

5. Fill out a detailed Learning Prescription about the child based on your observations.

SUGGESTED READINGS

Burke, K. (2011). *From standards to rubrics in six steps* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Gibson, C., Jones, S., & Patrick, T. (2010). Conducting informal developmental assessments. *Exchange* (May/June), 36–40.

McAfee, O., & Leong, D. J. (2011). *Assessing and guiding young children's development and learning* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

McFarland, L. (2008). Anecdotal records: Valuable tools for assessing young children's development. *Dimensions of Early Learning, 36*(1), 31–36.

Nilsen, B. A. (2010). *Week by week: Plans for documenting children's development* (5th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage.

Puckett, M. B., & Black, J. K. (2008). *Meaningful assessments of the young child* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

WEB SITES

American Educational Research Association
http://www.aera.net

Kidsource Online (assessment and observation)
http://www.kidsource.com

Lesson Planz (suggestions for assessment)
http://www.lessonplanz.com

A quick program for creating rubrics
http://www.ribistar.41teachers.org

Focuses on building rubrics
http://www.teachnology.com/web_tools/rubrics/

An early childhood behavioral checklist
http://www.thechp.syr.edu/Behavioral_Observation_Checklist.pdf