

Participant's Guide

Authentic Observation

2 hours



Session 1 of 1

Authentic Observation

Date / Time:

Location:

Core Competencies

This session address the following Core Competencies:

III – 1 Assists with collection of information about each child’s development.

III-3b Analyzes findings of observations and uses the information to plan for and guide curriculum, instruction, and interaction with children.

Parent Aware Area

Tracking Learning

Learning Objectives

- Describe three reasons to conduct child observations;
- Demonstrate one method for collecting observation-based information; and
- Use observation information to individualize care and the learning environment.

Session Outline

Section	Overview
<i>Introduction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome and Introductions• Discussion – Knowing the children
<i>Learning about Children through Observation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion – What can we learn through observation?• Presentation and Discussion – Benefits and purposes of child observation
<i>Observation Tools and Skills</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation and Discussion – Observation tools• Activity – The right tools for the job• Activity - Observation skills practice
<i>Using Observation Information</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentation and Discussion – The curriculum, teaching and observation cycle• Presentation – Connecting observation to planning• Activity – Observation vignettes
<i>Closing</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Discussion – Session summary• Activity – Reflection and goal setting• Discussion – Wrap up and PLAT

Authentic Assessment

“Authentic assessment is a type of assessment that uses tasks as close as possible to real-life practical and intellectual challenges in a real-life context.”

Oralie McAfee, Deborah J. Deong, and Elena Bodrova, *Basics of Assessment: A Primer for Early Childhood Educators*, Washington DC: NAEYC, 2004

Benefits and Purposes of Observation

Benefit or Purpose	Example	Notes
To guide planning and instruction; to individualize care and the learning environment	<p><i>Josette notices that a child in her care is interested in letters but cannot yet name the letters in his name. Josette adds name cards to several places in the environment and adds name recognition activities to the day. When conducting these activities Josette focuses on naming each letter and involving the child in pointing to and naming letters.</i></p>	
To identify children who may need further screening	<p><i>Wanda notices that one infant in her care does not respond when her name is called. She tries a number of sound activities – musical toys, rattles, etc and observes that the child sometimes notices the noises and sometimes does not. Wanda records her observations to share with the child’s parent.</i></p>	
To share information with families	<p><i>Ciro is planning a meeting with Carla’s family. He has collected narratives of her play activities over the last two months as well as examples of her art and writing that show what she can do. Ciro believes that the observations he has collected will show Carla’s family that she is developing as expected for her age and is on track to be ready for kindergarten next fall.</i></p>	
To make changes to the environment and improve the program	<p><i>Sue and Tia have been collecting observations about their program for a few months. In reviewing the observation notes they notice that most of the children show interest in books and stories but few are naming or recognizing letters. They know that the children are at the age at which they would usually begin naming at least a few letters. They plan to add more letter recognition activities to their upcoming lesson plans and look for some alphabet-related materials to add to the environment.</i></p>	

Types of Observation Tools

Type of Tool	Description	Advantages	Challenges
Anecdotal Records of Observation	<p>Short descriptive detailed narrative of a specific event</p> <p>Example: <i>Shawn describes the interaction between two children as they negotiate to share a toy</i></p>	Flexible, open-ended	<p>Need record keeping system such as index cards, adhesive notes, or notebooks</p> <p>Must be aware of developmental indicators to watch for</p>
Running Records or Narratives of Observations	<p>Sequential narrative spanning a longer period of time than an anecdotal record.</p> <p>Example: <i>Sheila writes a description of all of Anthony's activities one morning during free play</i></p>	Flexible, open-ended	<p>Time consuming</p> <p>Need record keeping system such as index cards, adhesive notes, or notebooks</p> <p>Must be aware of developmental indicators to watch for within large amount of narrative information</p>
Time Sampling	<p>Observation of what happens during a given time period often using tallies</p> <p>Example: <i>While outdoors, Steve notes the number of children who use the climber, the swing set, and the sandbox during the entire hour of play</i></p>	<p>Objective</p> <p>Can collect information on more than one child at a time</p>	<p>Closed-ended</p> <p>Does not give a context for the information – what else impacted the time</p>
Frequency Counts	<p>A tally of each time a behavior is observed to occur</p> <p>Example: <i>For an entire day Fay notes the number of times a child chooses a book from the book shelf</i></p>	<p>Can document change over time</p> <p>Shows if changes in activities or the environment resulted in changes in behavior. For example, <i>did buying more books result in children choosing books more often?</i></p>	<p>Close ended</p> <p>Does not give a context for the information – what else impacted the time</p>

Type of Tool	Description	Advantages	Challenges
Checklists	<p>A list of behaviors or traits that the caregiver checks off when observed</p> <p>Example: <i>Mai uses the indicators from the Exploration and Discovery component of the Birth to 3 ECIPs to create a checklist. She watches over one week to check off which indicators she observes for each child using the 'examples' from the ECIPs as a guide</i></p>	<p>Easy to use</p> <p>Time efficient</p>	<p>Closed ended</p> <p>Does not give a context for the information – what else impacted the observation</p>
Work Samples or Portfolio	<p>Tape recording, video recording, photographs, and artifacts (Documents from children's work – drawing, writing, etc) that show children's current work and thinking</p> <p>May be collected in a 'portfolio' or used to illustrate descriptions of observations</p> <p>Example: <i>Chris takes a picture of LaShawn's block tower and clips it to the description of his block building time from this morning's play</i></p>	<p>Can be used to show progress over time</p> <p>Provides a visual for accomplishments that may be hard to describe</p> <p>Quick</p>	<p>Need collection system to keep and store most important samples</p> <p>Analysis of artifacts can be time consuming</p>

Based on a table presented in *Creating Environments for Learning* by Julie Bullard, 2010

The Right Tool for the Job

Situation	Tool to Use	Reason for Selection
<p><i>Phoebe is interested to know if Jake, a toddler in her care, is able to demonstrate the ECIPs indicators for the Component 'Communicating and Speaking' that are typical of his age.</i></p>		
<p><i>Marlene suspects that Trey rarely interacts with other children during free play. She wants to determine if this is true.</i></p>		
<p><i>Juan is preparing for parent conferences. He wants to show how much the children have improved since last fall in writing letters.</i></p>		
<p><i>Raphael has had a difficult time adjusting to his new program. Simone, his caregiver, wants to understand what his typical morning adjustment time is like and how it shows his social and emotional development.</i></p>		
<p><i>Pat has recently rearranged her materials into learning areas. She wants to understand if the children are using all of the areas and which ones are used by which children so she can make further improvements.</i></p>		

Observation Basics

“When you observe, you slow down, listen more carefully, and pause to reflect before stepping in to offer direction or help. You see and respond to who a child is and what a child needs. Observing helps you build relationships by revealing the uniqueness of every child – including the child’s temperament, strengths, personality, work style, and preferred mode of expression.”

Judy R. Jablon, Amy Laura Donbro, and Margo L. Dichtelmiller in *The Power of observation for Birth through Eight*, 2007, NAEYC and Teaching Strategies Inc.

Tips for Effective Observation

Ways to Observe Every Day:

- Keep a diary of observations
- Write about specific incidents
- Record information on charts such as frequency counts
- Interview children and record what they say and do
- Dedicate specific times to observation
- Make note of behaviors as you observe them using adhesive notes, index cards, labels, or stickers

Essentials for Child Development Associates, Carol Brunson Day, editor, 2004, Council for Professional Recognition, NAEYC

Observation improves with time and practice. Start with the following guidelines to enhance the effectiveness of your observations of young children:

- Observe regularly
- Plan who you are observing and what you are looking for
- Be prepared to change focus
- Observe at different times of day and in different situations

- Take advantage of care routines to observe individual children
- Develop a note taking system
- Use frequency counts of other measures when appropriate
- Put your personal biases aside to observe what you see and hear
- Be objective in your observations

Objective	Not Objective
<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Observation of Omar</i></p> <p><i>Selects crayons from box. Puts them on table. Looks around. Picks up crayon from floor. Makes a few marks on paper. Walks to window – back to table. Looks at Richards’s paper, “Whatchya drawing? I’m gonna make apples.” Uses green crayon to draw a circle, pressing hard, scribbles in color.</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Observation of Justine</i></p> <p><i>J is confused and frustrated. She is not relaxed or enjoying the assignment. After a few minutes she gets up and leaves the table, leaving the task incomplete.</i></p>

Source for observation examples: Judy R. Jablon, Amy Laura Donbro, and Margo L. Dichtelmiller in *The Power of Observation for Birth through Eight*, 2007, NAEYC and Teaching Strategies Inc.

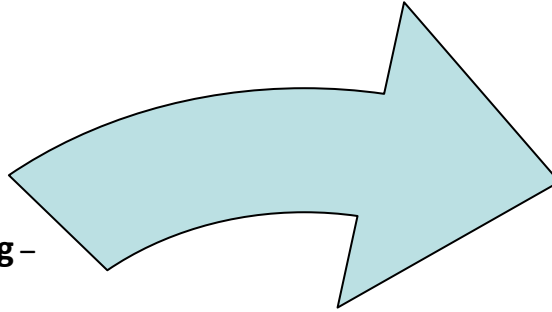
Words and Phrases to Use	Words and Phrases to Avoid
<p><i>He often chooses...</i></p> <p><i>I saw him...</i></p> <p><i>I heard her say...</i></p> <p><i>He spends five minutes doing...</i></p> <p><i>She said...</i></p> <p><i>I observed her...</i></p> <p><i>Each time he ...</i></p>	<p><i>The child loves..</i></p> <p><i>It appears...</i></p> <p><i>It seems like...</i></p> <p><i>I felt..</i></p> <p><i>He is good at...</i></p> <p><i>I thoughts...</i></p> <p><i>She felt...</i></p>

Source: Gaye Gronlund and Marlyn James in *Focused Observations: How to Observe Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning*, 2005, Redleaf Press.

The Curriculum, Teaching, and Observation Cycle

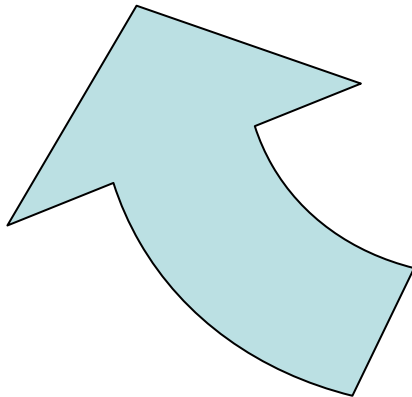
Curriculum Planning –

developing activities,
organizing the environment,
selecting toys and materials,
planning modifications for
individual children

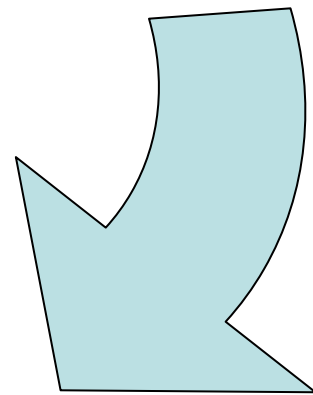


Teaching and Interactions –

Implementing activities,
interacting with children,
providing supporting
interactions and relationships,
scaffolding learning



Observation – observing
children at play and in daily
routines, watching for
indicators of development



Observation Vignettes

Observation Information	What Caregivers Might Do to Respond to this Information
<p>A caregiver notes that Maria rarely answers questions during group time. The caregiver's notes indicate that in the last week Maria has only responded to two questions during a group time, one about her pet and one about her family's new car.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to ask more questions directed to Maria specifically during group time • Plan to engage Maria in conversations during non-group times to understand her language abilities • Plan to ask Maria's family about her language during family gathering, Sunday School, or other groups Maria is in.
<p>A caregiver records the following exchange between two children:</p> <p>Sue: "I go'd to the new pizza store last night"</p> <p>John: "Cool, I want to go too"</p> <p>Sue: "Do you have enough money?"</p> <p>John: "I have two cents!"</p>	
<p>A caregiver records the number of visitors to each of the learning activities in her environment during one day each week for three weeks. She notices that the writing table gets very few visitors, only 2 per day on average.</p>	
<p>A caregiver notices that one child, Minh struggles with counting quantities greater than four. Observations of Minh show that she can count by rote up to ten but cannot count objects in quantities greater than four consistently.</p>	

Reflection

Take a few minutes to reflect on what you have learned in this class. Use the spaces below to capture your ideas and plans for action.

In this class learned...

Based on what I learned, some things I plan to do ...

This class started me thinking about...

Additional Resources of Interest

Bredenkamp, S. & Rosegrant, T. (ed.) (1992) *Reaching Potentials: Appropriate Curriculum and Assessment for Young Children, Vol. 1* Washington, DC: NAEYC

Bredenkamp, S. & Rosegrant, T. (ed) (1995) *Reaching Potentials: Transforming Early Childhood Curriculum and Assessment, Vol. 2.* Washington, DC: NAEYC

Curtis, D. & Carter, M. (2000) *The art of awareness: How observation can transform your teaching.* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Dichtelmiller, M.L. (2004) *Experiences from the Field: New Insights into Infant/Toddler Assessment.* Young Children.

Gronlund, G. & James, M. (2005) *Focused observations: How to observe children for assessment and curriculum planning.* St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.

Jablon, J.R., Dombro, A.L. & Dichtelmiller, M.L. (2007) *The Power of Observation for Birth through Eight* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Jones, J. (2004) *Framing the Assessment Discussion,* Young Children, pp . 4-8.

McAfee, O., Leong, D.L., & Bodrova, E. (2004) *Basics of assessment: A primer for early childhood educators.* Washington, DC: NAEYC.

Milagros Santos, R. (2004) *Ensuring Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Assessment of Young Children.* Young Children, pp. 38-39.

Trister Dodge, D., Heroman, C., Charles, J., & Malorca, J. (2004) *Beyond Outcomes: How Ongoing Assessment Supports Children's Learning and Leads to Meaningful Curriculum.* Young Children, pp. 9 – 16.