Defining Observation

- Children in action during play provides clues
- See children in relation to their peers
- Environmental factors that can influence behavior
  - Noise level
  - Congestion
  - Time of day
What Is Observation?

- Clues to the development and personality of each child
- To “read” the child
- To “see” a situation
- To distinguish between details and trivia
Why Observe?

- To improve teaching
  - Become more objective and less biased, and use less inference
- To construct and apply theory
  - Link research to practice
- To build curriculum
  - Develop specific goals and objectives for planning and development
Why Observe (cont.)

- To help families
  - Share meaningful examples of abilities
- To assess children
  - Document children’s progress
  - Use portfolios and screenings
Understanding What Is Observed

- Children as individuals
  - Tailoring what a child is ready and willing to learn
  - Report what a child does (not feels) and interpretations

- Children in groups
  - Look at developmental norms
  - Children’s play patterns evolve
  - Understanding group and individual behavior

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Developmental Relationships

- Development is specific and integrated
- Focus on major domains of physical-motor, cognitive/language, and socio-emotional development Children’s skills are multiple and varied
- See how the pieces fit together
Influences on Behavior

- Environmental influences are classroom arrangement, daily schedule, and the activities themselves
- Transitions and time of day impact behavior
- Relationships between children and adults
Understanding Self

- Notice human behavior more accurately
- One teaches children and learns from them
- Capturing the unique personality, culture, and qualities develops self-awareness
Documenting What We See

- Systematic observations aid in recording events and help teachers make sense of them
- Must develop a “language of recording” to practice
- Elements of observation
  - Focus on what you want to know
  - Develop a system
  - Find a tool or instrument
  - Select the environment
Types of Observations

- Narratives
  - Record nearly everything that happens
  - Baby biography, diary, journal, or log
  - Modified running record or specimen description (one thing at a time)
  - Advantages: rich information, detailed behavioral accounts, take notes at any time
  - Disadvantages: time consuming, tendency for judgment or inference
Types (cont.)

- Time sampling
  - What happens at a given time
  - Less descriptive
  - Recorded at regular intervals
  - Can use a checklist
  - Advantage: focus on specific behaviors
  - Disadvantage: difficult to get the whole picture
Types (cont.)

- **Event sampling**
  - Defines an event and devises a system to encode immediately
  - Looks at specific behaviors using checklists a number of times during a day
  - Advantage: clearly defined with a recording sheet
  - Disadvantage: lack of detail from a narrative
Modified Child Study Techniques

- **Checklists** with predetermined data are simple to make and record but lack rich detail.

- **Rating scales** are checklists planned in advance that measure quantity and quality.

- **Shadow study** is done on one child at a time by several observers; data are descriptive; child is often aware of scrutiny and can affect study.
Modified Child Study Techniques (cont.)

- Experimental procedures (scientific procedures)
  - Use of control situation with defined variables
  - Observe a behavior
  - Make a hypothesis
  - Test the hypothesis

- La Method Clinique
  - Information gathering with active interview
  - Questions and probes responses
  - Piaget’s clinical method
  - Observer intervenes to test hypotheses

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How to Observe Effectively

- Observing while teaching
  - Gather and prepare materials
  - Consider where you will observe
  - Plan when it will take place, and arrange help if needed
  - Prepare every adult to be an observer and reflect on children’s play
How to Observe (cont.)

- **Beginning to observe**
  - Plan and establish a time and place
  - Have a specific goal in place
  - Observe and record, writing only the raw data of what you saw, not thought
  - Observe professional confidentiality

- **Observe effectively**
  - Be unobtrusive
    - Enter and leave quietly
    - Sit away from the active areas (not on furniture)
    - Follow children as they move
    - Avoid conversations with children and adults
Assessment: Goals and Tools

Purposes for assessing children

- The support of learning
- Identification of special needs
- Program evaluation and monitoring of trends
- High stakes accountability
Assessment: Goals and Tools

- Evaluations are made to:
  - Establish a baseline of information about each child by which to judge future progress
  - Document children’s learning
  - Determine guidance and intervention
  - Plan the curriculum
  - Communicate with families
  - Make administrative decisions
Concerns About Child Assessments

- Unfair comparisons
- Bias
- Overemphasis on norms
- Interpretation
- Too narrow a perspective
- Too wide a range
- Too little or too much time
- “Teaching” to the test
Testing and Screening

- Practical and philosophical issues
  - Young children do not function well in common test situations
  - Disregard for the potential long-term negative effects of retention on children’s self-esteem
  - Standardized tests are frequently misunderstood
  - Teachers are pressured into running programs that overemphasize the testing situation and test items
  - Most tests focus on cognitive and language skills
  - Special training to administer tests is often overlooked
Disadvantages of standardized testing

- Has transformed kindergarten into a “watered-down” version of first grade
- Encourages teachers to alter activities to conform to what will be tested
- Fails to adequately reflect what children learn
- Engages only two of the eight intelligences identified by Gardner
Advantages of standardized testing

- Using valid screening tests to “identify children who, because of the risk of possible learning problems or a handicapping condition, should proceed to a more intensive level of diagnostic assessment”

- Indicates if more investigative work is needed
Authentic Assessment: 
The Portfolio

- Must try to capture who the child is, what the child knows or does not know, and what the child can or cannot do
- Must occur in a variety of settings over time, draw on many sources of information, and focus on essential skills and dispositions valued by the program
Types of Portfolios

- **Display portfolio**—collection of items without teacher comments
- **Showcase portfolio**—the best pieces of the child’s work
- **Working portfolio**—combines work samples with teacher commentary
Collection Plan

- Do not try to collect everything
- Look for work samples that demonstrate your educational objectives and a child’s progress over time
- Be organized
Teacher’s Evaluation

- Teacher adds his or her written comments to the work samples.
- Commentary enhances the documentation—the words are more essential than the work.
- Can evaluate children on their work and play, rather than with standardized tests or unnecessary screening.