Observing, documenting and analyzing children’s behavior

On observing young children:

“When you observe, you do not make decisions ahead of time. You are there. You see what there is to be seen.”

Magda Gerber

On observing young children...

- Why observe?
- How should we observe?
- Why should we record and document our observations?
- Why analyze?
Why observe?

- To learn about child’s strengths
- To learn about child’s interests
- To learn more about child development
- To make individual plans for the child
- To plan curriculum for children as individuals

Why observe?

- To resolve a particular problem
- To gather information for reports or meetings with parents or with specialists
- To gather information for child’s portfolio for use in long-term guidance and planning

How to observe?

- Objectivity
- Non-judgment
- Close attention
- Recognizing and focusing on significant behaviors
- Developmental framework
- Valid evaluation methods (e.g. DRDP)
Documentation

➢ Describe in detail what child does and how
➢ Avoid interpreting or attributing intentions.
➢ For example:
  ➢ With both hands the child pulled on his mother’s shirt, looking at her face, frowning and making a shrieking sound.
  ➢ Instead of: He pulled on his mom to get her attention.

Focus during observation

Observe with focus on child’s:
1. learning strategies (cognitive development)
2. communication strategies (language development)
3. social interactions; emotions, temperament and personality development (psychosocial development)
4. physical and motor activities (biosocial development)

- Observe during periods of free play
- Observe during care-giving routines
- Focus on child-selected and child-directed activities
- Notice behaviors during adult-directed activities

focus on child’s learning strategies (cognitive development)

Exploration and discovery
- curiosity
- sensory exploration - objects; own self; others
- repetition
- habituation
- cause and effect
- observation and imitation
- deferred imitation
- symbolic play
- problem solving
- guided participation
focus on child’s communication strategies
(language development)

Receptive language
- Responsiveness to language
- Language comprehension

Productive language
- Communication of needs, feelings, interests
- Reciprocal communication

Emergent literacy
- Interest in books &/or print
- Recognition of signs or symbols

focus on child’s social interactions, emotions,
temperament and personality development

A. Social interactions:
- with familiar peers
- with other children
- with familiar adults
- with non-familiar adults
- attachments and friendships

B. Feelings and emotions:
- self expression
- sense of self in relation to others

C. Self regulation:
- impulse control
- self comforting
- empathy
- seeking others help to comfort or regulate self
- autonomy
- initiative
- self-sufficiency

focus on child’s physical and motor activities

A. Gross motor skills
B. Fine motor skills
C. Balance
D. Eye-hand coordination
Authentic assessment is a much broader way of looking at children’s progress and how it relates to curriculum goals. Authentic assessment focuses on what the children know and what they do; notices what they are interested in and then uses the results for ongoing curriculum planning.

Janet González-Mena

Authentic assessment avoids measuring isolated skills and bits of knowledge out of context.