Observation and Play-Based Assessment

Observations

Time Sampling
The observer selects a child, or group of children or an activity and then notes down what is happening at pre-specified moments over a longer, substantial period.

*E.g.* Observing a child. Every ten minutes over the morning write down:-
- Where the child is
- Who the child is with
- What the child is doing
- What the child is saying

Observing the use of the water tray. Every 15 minutes write down:-
- Who is present
- What they are doing
- What materials they are using.

Frequency Sampling
The observer selects an aspect of behaviour of a child and makes notes of every time this particular behaviour occurs. It gives an idea of the frequency of certain behaviours and a picture of when they occur. Over time, it can be used to find out if the frequency is increasing or decreasing.

*E.g.* Observation of child pulling at his jumper. Every time he pulls at his jumper write down:-
- Where the child is
- Who the child is with
- What activity the child is at

Observations

Duration Observing
Sometimes it is more useful to record the duration of the behaviour – the length of time the activity lasts. How long did the child wander, sit, scream, play with the cars etc. This method establishes how much time is actually spent by a child at a particular activity or acting in a particular way.

**Focused observation: What did the child or children actually do?**
When more needs to be known about a child, this technique is used to make detailed, on-the-spot, written notes of everything that happens. This intensive observation can be very tiring and difficult to sustain, so it is best done in short bursts. Record observations for five minutes, then have a five-minute break. It can provide a mass of information, which can be very useful in building up a
full picture of a child’s understanding, their achievements and the difficulties they have.

**Target Child Observations**

Observe a child at regular, pre-set intervals throughout a session or sessions, a very full picture can be built up of the child’s activities, interaction and developing skills and understanding.

**Using Video/Audio Tapes to Record**

Tapes (with all parents’ permission) can be used to record all that happens. Over time, they will provide a record of the child’s development.

**Why use assessment through play**

Play is a natural means of expression for most children
Provides a natural and appealing setting
Play allows children to experience a wide number of emotions and situations
Play is a child initiated and child maintained activity
Play is a tool for learning
It is flexible and should not be intrusive to the child's pre-school experience
It helps adults to understand how children approach tasks, thereby offering ways of improving their learning.

**Assessment**

Assessment is
Part of a process of intervention/exploration
Information gathering/evaluation
Used in planning for the child
In order to take action for the child.

Assessment is **not**

A single action
An end in itself

**Plan what you are going to do**

Think about the situation. Ask questions based on the child and try to formulate questions about the key issues.

- What do you want to find out?
- How will you do it?
- What activity do you think will provide the information?
- Will you have an adult observing/recording the child’s actions, etc, when:

1. child in usual session
2. child in one to one with adult
3. child in group focused on specific activity

- If in a group, what size will it be?

Think about the materials you are going to use.

With what equipment does the child usually enjoy or prefer to play with?

Will you specifically try new or unfamiliar materials?

How will you support or interact with the child?


**Process of play-based assessment**

What is the difficulty?

Which questions do you want to ask?

Set up specific activity/play situation
(think carefully about materials used)

Observe and record activities

Decide what you have found out

Decide what to focus upon

Decide upon a plan of action
Strategy/approach
Set targets
Write an IEP

Monitor and Record

Review