

Getting Started

Standards Addressed in This Chapter

naeyc

NAEYC Standards for Early Childhood Profession Preparation (2011)

1a Knowing and understanding young children's characteristics and needs from birth through age 8.

3a Understanding the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment—including its use in development of appropriate goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies for young children.

3b Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches, including the use of *technology* in documentation, assessment and data collection.

3c Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child, including the use of assistive technology for children with disabilities.

3d Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and with professional colleagues to build effective learning environments.

DAP

4A.01a Programs conduct assessments as an integral part of the program. Programs use assessments to support children's learning, using a variety of methods such as observations, checklists, rating scales, and individually administered tests.

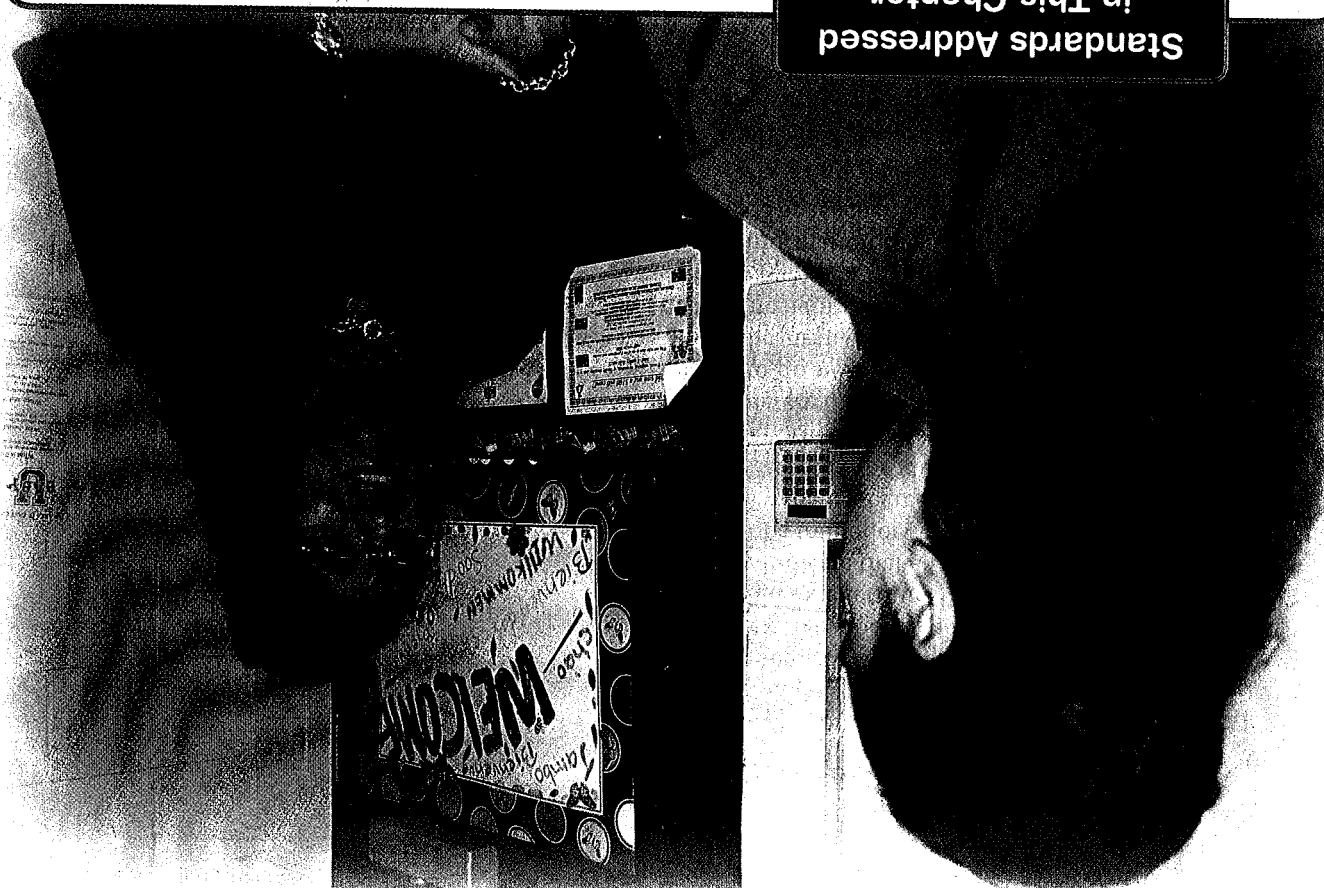
NAEYC Program Standards (2014)

6b Knowing about and upholding ethical standards and other early childhood professional guidelines.

4A Assessment of young children's progress and achievements is ongoing, strategic, and purposeful.

4C There is a system in place to collect, make sense of, and use the assessment information to guide what goes on in the classroom (formative assessment).

NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Practice Guidelines (2009)



● Learning Objectives ●

After reading this chapter, you should be able to:

- 1-1 Name at least 10 reasons why teachers should observe their students.
- 1-2 Identify why it is important to write down (document) observations.
- 1-3 Discuss why it is useful to use different methods to observe and what role you play as an observer.

- 1-4 Justify using portfolios as an authentic assessment strategy for documenting young children's development.
- 1-5 Describe how this book will help you develop a comprehensive portfolio.

EXERCISE

Observe (or imagine): a clock; the inside of a refrigerator; and a traffic light.

Exactly what do you see? What are your observations telling you? What will you do as a result of what you see? Write down what you see. Write down what it means to you. Write down decisions you might make based on those observations. Write down a memory that something that you see brings back to you.

The word *observe* brings to mind the action of looking, seeing, and not participating, but viewing the action as an outsider. In any context, observing is just the first step in determining action. The first stage, taking in information, occurs simultaneously with evaluation and selection of a course of action. The clock is observed, usually not to admire the design but to determine the time. Looking inside a refrigerator may indicate that a trip to the store is needed or that the source of a foul odor should be investigated. The traffic light is a lovely shade of green, but its meaning is more important. That observation produces action: Go!

Everything we see is not just observed but also immediately interpreted for meaning. A decision is made either to do nothing or to act. The observation may be so insignificant that it is sensed but not acted on. Later it might prove to be important, like that traffic light that was green, but the car in the cross street came through the intersection anyway. When filling out the accident report, those details are important. Our senses take in information that is connected with prior experiences, triggering knowledge and emotions. The teacher observes for many different reasons.

1-1 Why Observe?

When a teacher observes a child, information is collected and could be measured against a whole body of knowledge about child development in general and that child in particular (Figure 1-1). Information is then used to make decisions about the next actions. Someone has estimated that a teacher makes thousands of decisions in a day. Each decision is based on observations evaluated for meaning and the most appropriate responses. This *observe-decide-act* sequence is repeated over and over again throughout the day. Let's observe a child painting at the easel in Photo 1-1.



FIGURE 1-1 Why Observe?

1-1a Safety

The most important reason for watching children is to keep them safe. Seeing a potentially dangerous situation and rushing to prevent an injury is the most basic example of *observe-decide-act*. A child waiting to paint may be observed trying to wrestle the brush away from the painter. With angry looks and harsh words, she is trying to gain control of the painting area. The teacher rushes over and intervenes before the painter is knocked aside or a brush is poked into someone's eye.

1-1b Physical Health

Recognizing the signs of sickness or disease is another reason to observe, decide, and act. This also can protect the physical health of others. The teacher may notice a few small red spots behind the painter's ear. She casually pats the child's arm and feels bumps beneath the skin. These observations, along with the knowledge that the child's sister had chicken pox two weeks ago, prompt the teacher's decision to isolate the child and call the child's family to take the child home. For chicken pox, of course, it's already too late. Everyone's been exposed! Figure 1-2 shows artwork that the child painted on his return to school after having chicken pox.

1-1c Know the Child

The adult observes the child to discover interests. Watching a child choose a play area and talking with the child about the play is a friendly and affirming thing to do. It also is another way of building bridges from interests to planning, from home to school, and a way of making the curriculum relevant. Watching a child reveals personality and learning styles and could give clues to teaching strategies. By observing the painter, learning styles are indicated that will work better for him—maybe verbal directions, being shown, or trial and error. Reflective observation of the student's learning process leads the teacher to adapt teaching strategies to the child's styles and needs.

1-1d Assistance

Adults help children with tasks that are too hard for them. Observation may indicate that help is needed.

A child is observed preparing to paint at the easel. The teacher sees that the paper supply is gone. He gets more from the cupboard and shows the child how to attach the sheets with the big clips and where to hang the painting to dry. A diaper needs to be changed, a shoe needs to be tied, a spill needs to be wiped up, all needing responsive actions.

1-1e Curriculum Planning to Extend Learning

Teaching is building bridges, making connections between new information and old based on topics that are relevant and of interest to the group. The teacher plans related experiences and learning opportunities (the methods of learning, pedagogy) to help children explore and construct meaning of the content, subject matter, or skill. A knowledge of child development research with indicators of normal development for a certain age helps the teacher intentionally plan learning opportunities for the group as well as for the individual child based on assessments. The group has enjoyed and mastered easel painting, so the teacher plans that next week he will introduce watercolors, demonstrating the technique of washing the brush between colors, knowing that children of this age have gained enough small muscle control to accomplish this task.

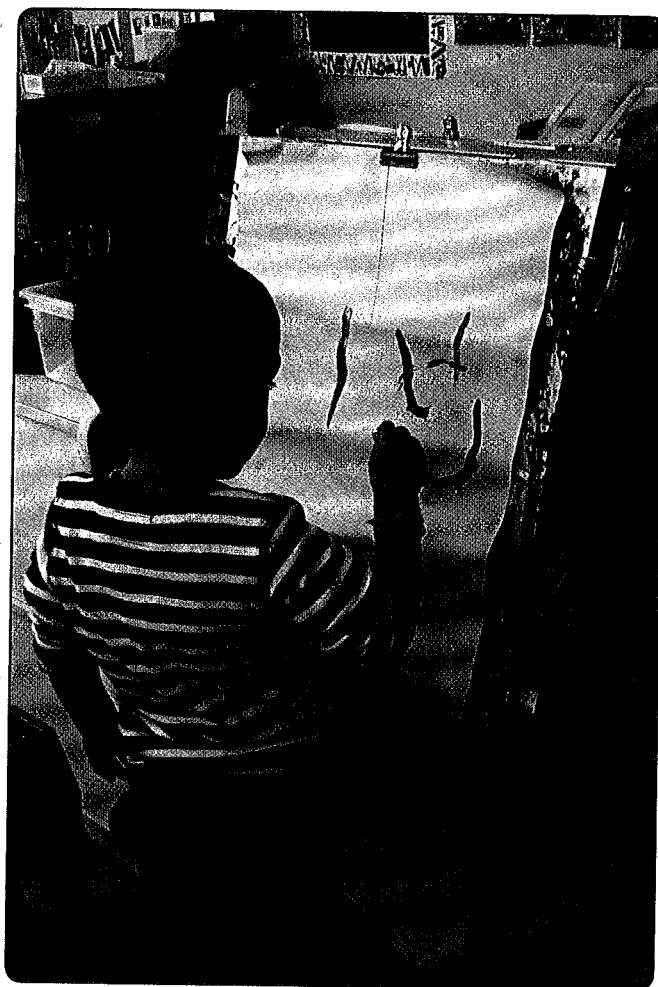


PHOTO 1-1 Common activities yield knowledge of the child.

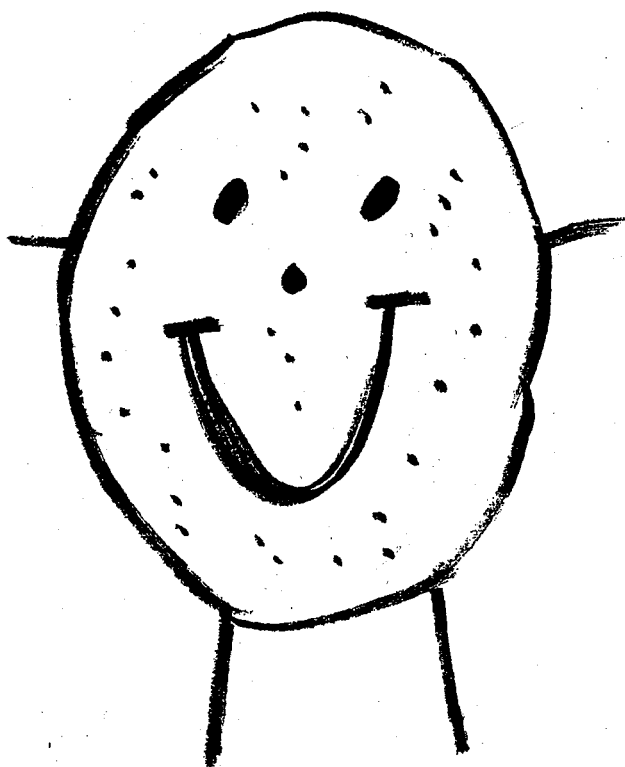


FIGURE 1-2 Observing a child's work, as well as the child as he works, gives valuable information.

Through observations, teachers can identify that teachable moment, that budding interest, and that blossoming skill. Providing materials, activities, and opportunities to build on that observed development will capitalize on it. From observing the painting filled with alphabet letters, the teacher decides this is a good time to bring out the alphabet magnets and invite the painter to play with them.

1-1f Communication with the Child

Teachers talk with every child. What better subject to discuss with them than the child's activities? Every child deserves the individual attention of the teacher. By discussing what the teacher observes with the child, the child can give the reason or explanation in a way that makes sense only if the teacher asks the child. That is the basis for Piaget's cognitive questioning method (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969), to delve more deeply into children's "wrong" answers. In that way, thinking processes are explored. Results or answers are not simply considered incorrect, but teachers reflect on possible reasons for the answers to explain how the answer was derived. This may involve more conversation with the child, or the family, to get a better understanding of the background knowledge leading to the answer. The teacher says to the painter, "You worked hard on that painting. You used red, blue, and yellow, and you made straight lines and curved lines. Would you like to tell me how you did it? What did you do first?"

1-1g Communication with the Family

The point of interest between the teacher and the family is the child. The subjects of what the child has done that day, what the child is learning, how the child is progressing, what might be an area of concern are points of communication between the teacher and the family. Talking with the family about the child's daily activities communicates the following to them:

- Their child is under a watchful eye.
- This teacher observes and relates important developments in their child's actions, rather than giving the family a test score they might not understand how to evaluate.
- The family is included in the world that the teacher and their child share.

Unfortunately, many children and families have come to expect to receive only bad reports, phone calls, and notes from school, which bring a sense of dread. Too often, the only communications they receive about their child relate misbehaviors, failure to perform to expectations, or commands for the child or family to take remedial action. In contrast, discussing observations from the day's observed activities or documentation from the **Portfolio** with the child's family gives positive, substantive information about the child's progress, compared only to her previous work, not anyone else's. Observation gives descriptive accounts of the child's behavior and skills from the point of view of achievement rather than deficit—what she can or has done, rather than cannot or will not. Observations are shared with families in formal and informal ways.

family

the group of related or unrelated adults who are legally responsible for the child

Portfolio

a collection of documentation about the child's development

The paintings in the child's Portfolio previously were scribbles, and then they became pages filled with lines and deliberate designs. The teacher and child show her family the collection in the Portfolio. The family realizes that the teacher *knows and observes* their child's work from a different point of view.

1-1h Guidance

Occasionally (and sometimes often) the teacher sees a behavior situation that needs intervention before it happens or a quick response to prevent it from escalating. Prevention is always better than remedy. Young children are learning how to get along with others, and they sometimes go beyond the boundaries of safety and acceptable behavior. The teacher watches for impending struggles that may escalate into bad situations. Redirection is better than discipline or punishment. Through observation, potential problems can be averted. The painter's brush is approaching the wall. The teacher reminds the child, "Paint on paper," guiding the brush back to the paper on the easel.

1-1i Measure Progress, Assessment, Evaluation

Children change so quickly. Based on knowledge of child development, certain changes are expected and anticipated. Comparisons over time can measure that development. The teacher observes that the painter moved from experimentation with line and color to painting recognizable objects. He proclaims that the smiling face with dots is a picture of his sister who is just getting over the chicken pox. The teacher can see her control of small muscles and the frustration when the paint does not flow in the way the painter thinks it should. The child's social world is portrayed in the pictures he paints. Many areas of development can be observed in this one activity and in changes from paintings done a few weeks ago.

In order to measure progress, teachers watch children to gather information. That is **assessment**, the process of documenting a child's knowledge, skills, and attitudes in measurable terms. Assessment may take many forms, but the premise here is that observation is the best method. Naturalistic inquiry, studying children in their natural habitats, results in seeing the child "exhibiting the highest levels of competence," unlike in contrived situations where children are put into strange, anxiety-producing situations (Pellegrini, 1998). Information is gathered to measure the child's development against accepted stages or a set of developmental norms. Assessment measures where the child is at this point in time. It may alert the observer to unusually delayed or accelerated development.

Once the teacher has made an assessment of an area of development, **evaluation** is the decision-making step of assessment—probably the most precarious because it is the step that considers the information gathered through assessment upon which judgments are drawn and decisions made about future directions. Evaluation is based on prior knowledge and comparing observations with that prior knowledge. Knowing typical child development stages that include social, emotional, and cognitive domains gives the observer a lens through which to view the child.

The observer of the painter has collected paintings over several weeks and judges that this child is in the stage when children are beginning to represent thought, not just experimenting with the materials. A sticky note as to the importance of this example may be placed on the back of the painting, noting, "He has moved from making circles and controlled straight lines to painting faces, and was smiling and singing while painting." The teacher may decide to bring out a plastic skeleton for the science area or read a story about sick children to give the painter ideas about anatomy. A copy of this drawing is filed in the child's Portfolio for later comparisons.

For all of these good reasons, teachers observe children. That informed observation, measuring what is seen against what is known, is assessment and evaluation of the child's development and behavior.

assessment

process of observing, recording, and documenting a child's actions, skills, and behaviors to measure against a standard

evaluation

comparison of information gathered against a standard or set of criteria

1-1j Referral

Sometimes questions or even red flags arise when a teacher observes a child. Certain behaviors, actions, and skills—or lack of them—will send an alert calling for a closer look at a developmental area.

From the child's paintings, the teacher observes some alarming messages. The teacher may ask a probing question such as, "Would you like to tell me about your painting?" and the child's answers may lead only to more questions. It is important not to rush to conclusions (especially based on a child's art products).

Further reflection and closer observation of behavior over time may warrant discussing a concern first with the family or other professionals within the agency, and then perhaps suggesting a referral to the family. The **referral** may be for further evaluation in a specific area, such as hearing, speech, physical, or cognitive development. Family involvement and decision making in the referral process are the pivotal factors. Families are recognized and deferred to as the authority on the child.

There may be situations where it is necessary to report suspicions of neglect or abuse. Knowledge, careful judgment, empathy, and consideration are important skills for the teacher in all of these circumstances, for both referrals and reporting.

referral

a recommendation made for further evaluation by a helping professional

1-1k Self-Reflection

Observing is not just looking at a child but also thinking about our influence on the child and the child's effect on us. The teacher notices that no one is painting anymore and wonders what the cause could be. By observing and recording, questions can be answered and the teacher's own effectiveness can be measured. The interest a child has in the planned activities will indicate to the teacher if the activities are appropriate. Activities that are not challenging or too difficult will be avoided or abandoned by the child. By closely watching what keeps a child involved, the observer can learn what skills the child is working on and modify activities to meet those needs.

This type of observation is active research, constantly accumulating data to analyze for its meaning. Goodman & Owocki (2002) say "kid watching" involves "teachers who interact with students and who monitor class activities in order to understand more about teaching and learning, mostly learning" (p. 13). While the child is learning, the teacher is also learning, reflecting on how to be more effective as well as on personal feelings about what has happened.

1-1l Accountability

Data drives decisions, from the star ratings of movies to the walk/don't walk signals at a crosswalk. Collecting high-quality data through reliable child assessments is a way to view the child and the program objectively. Preschool programs are often funded through special governmental funding at the state and federal level, with private funds through foundations and organizations, and by the families of the children themselves. Initiatives that are expected to prepare children for school by enhancing social, language, and cognitive skills—especially for children from economically disadvantaged homes and for children of special needs—are under scrutiny to demonstrate their effectiveness. Is the teacher, curriculum, program, or school doing what it says it will do? Proof is needed to show that children are learning and meeting the standards and expected outcomes. This area of child assessment is the focus of close examination to prove the worth of early childhood programs.

Accountability takes on many forms. The program or school is accountable to the funding or sponsoring agency. Assessment for funders calls for statistical data gathered by research-based methods and showing demonstrable outcomes of groups of children. Policymakers also use this kind of assessment to measure the benefits of one type of program or initiative over another. The purpose is to maximize the investment for the greatest gain.

The type of accountability that is most often addressed in this text, however, is that of the teacher to the child and family. By systematically using observation, along with other types of assessment tools, the classroom teacher and caregiver can gather information to show each child's progress, raise an awareness of potential difficulties, and intentionally plan learning opportunities that will help the child develop and learn.

A teacher might observe the following: "This child's painting shows increases in small muscle control, attention span, interest in alphabet, and is increasingly detailed." The teacher's notes on the back of the painting relate the significance of this work in light of developmental progress. It shows the child is learning.

Documentation of all types can:

- provide evidence of children's learning in all domains.
- provide insight into learning experiences.
- provide a framework for recording each child's interests and developmental progress.
- emphasize learning as an interactive process.
- show advantages of concrete activities and materials as opposed to group testing situations.
- enable teachers to assess knowledge and abilities in order to increase the challenge to match the child's level. (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 2007)

1-2 Why Write It Down?

"I'll remember this and write it down later." Everyone has said this and then not written it down. It is lost with all the other details of life that intercede and blur the image, blotting out specifics and erasing the exact words.

Recording is used here to refer to a written account or notation of what has been observed. What are the reasons for writing down what has been seen? (See Figure 1-3.)

Teachers write down their observations to:

EXERCISE

List the kinds of writing (on paper and electronically) you do on a typical day and why you do it.

recording
a system or method of writing down what has been observed

1-2a Remember

The grocery list (Figure 1-4), even if it is left at home on the refrigerator door, sticks in the memory longer because it was written down. Many students copy their notes over or condense them as a study technique. There is a connection between writing and memory. The written words form a visual and kinetic or physical connection in the brain, assisting memory and recall even when the visual cues are not present.

1-2b Compare

A child's height is measured with a line on the wall, and it is surprising a few months later how much she has grown without anyone realizing it. If that mark had not been made, the change would not have been noticed. Children are expected to change, so a mark of comparison is needed. Relying on a memory of the child one, three, or six months ago is inaccurate and unreliable. By writing observations down, teachers have tangible comparison points. Portfolios, collections of the child's work, and written observations are becoming

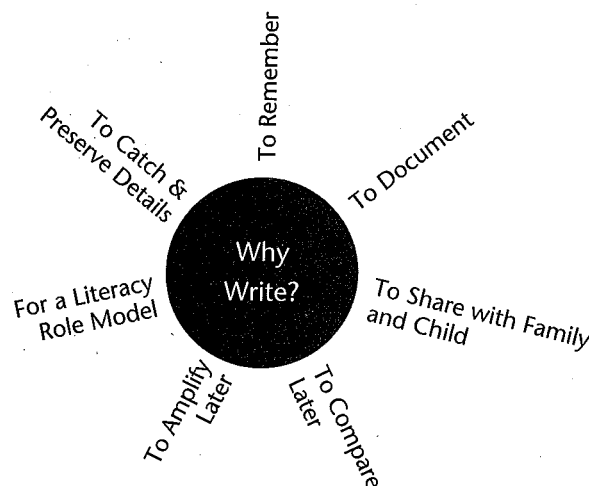


FIGURE 1-3 Why Write?

Grocery List

eggs	vegetable soup
milk	toothpicks
chocolate chips	paper towels
banking	
dry cleaning	
birthday card for Louise	

FIGURE 1-4 Write to Remember

accepted methods of documenting a child's progress. Written observations that are thorough, objective, regular, and done during daily routines and child-initiated play are accurate measures of the child's progress.

1-2c Amplify Later

Sometimes there is no time to write the whole incident, so a few strategic notes written and dated at the time can be just enough to jog the memory for a longer, more complete narrative written later.

1-2d Catch and Preserve Details

Details are quickly forgotten. Insurance companies want auto accident reports written at the scene because of the frailty of human memory. Fine details that seem so clear or so unimportant now can best be preserved by writing them down. These details can give clues to trends or correlations that are not seen at the time. On closer examination and comparison later, they gain significance. For example, keeping some data on which areas of

the classroom a child spends her free time in and how long she stays there gives much information about the child. Without some method of tracking, there is no way to recall details like these that can yield important information (Photo 1-2).

1-2e Serve as a Literacy Role Model

Children need to see adults writing. Literacy is an important concept to teach young children. The importance of the written word is emphasized when children see its usefulness and practical application by their role models, the adults in their lives. When an adult

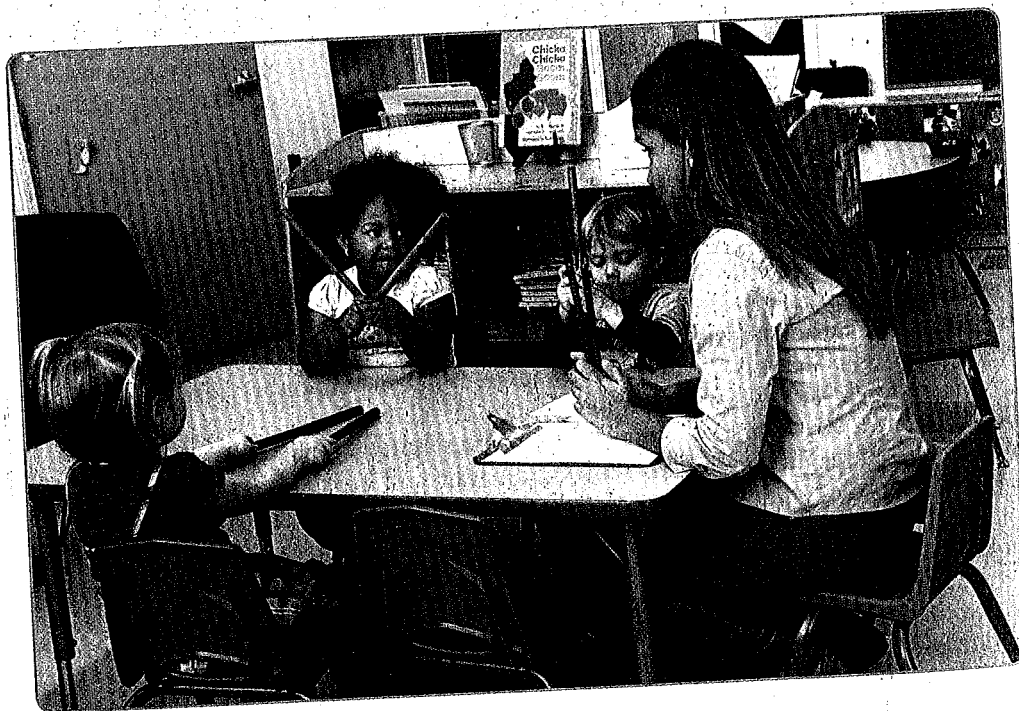


PHOTO 1-2 Busy teachers jot short notes to amplify later.

It Happened to Me

All Eyes

The teacher shows a new song chart and has just said, "Look up here, all eyes on the chart." Andrew asks, "What's 16 plus 16?" A puzzled look comes over the teacher's face, followed immediately by one of irritation for the interruption. Andrew repeats his question louder. "Thirty-two, now let's look at this new song chart." Andrew replies, "Oh, you want all thirty-two eyes looking at the chart." This tells us about Andrew's thinking, his beginning understanding of math concepts,

and it causes the teacher to vow to listen more closely to children's questions. This is a wonderful incident to relate to Andrew's family to demonstrate his thinking and his humor. The teacher just had time to write "eyes, 16, 32" with the ever-present pad and pen. That was enough to enable the teacher to fully write about the incident later.

How can we be more observant of children's naturally simplistic way of thinking?

writes something down, a child often asks, "What are you doing?" A reply such as "I'm writing this down so I won't forget" lays literacy foundations for the child. It shows that writing is a way to help memory, that what is written is constant, and it stirs the child's desire to want to write himself. A literacy-rich environment is one with accessible writing materials to encourage him to do just that (Figure 1-5).

1-2f Document

Reliable research demands hard data. It is necessary to preserve in writing—to **document**—what has been observed to substantiate it. Recording methods that include facts rather than inferences along with the date and time of the recording are essential to meaningful documentation. The details must be preserved to see progress, trends, and correlations.

This is especially critical if a child discloses an incident of abuse. The reports must be accurate and show that the child was not led or influenced in order for the disclosure to be supportable evidence. One would like never to deal with this, but for the protection of the child it is important not to jeopardize the testimony by failing to document or keeping inaccurate records. You will read more about this in Chapter 13.

To accomplish this desirable goal, the task of documentation must be broken down into manageable segments, planned, and executed in a systematic manner.

document

document (verb) – the action of preserving data for later review;
documentation (noun) – the product that preserves the data (evidence, artifacts)

Dramatic Play Area—paper and pencil next to the play phone, sheets cut for grocery lists attached to a pad on the play refrigerator, calendars on which children can write important events to remember

Block Area—paper, markers, tape for signs on buildings

Large Motor—paper, markers, tape for signs signifying what the climber is today (a rocket ship, a house on fire, Jenny's house)

Sand/Water—paper and pencil nearby to write down a mark to indicate what sinks or floats, draw pictures of what has been found hidden in the sand; paper to list who is waiting for a turn

Cubbies—paper and pencil to list what children say they want to do outside today, to decide which toys to load in the wagon

Group Area—chart paper, markers to take surveys of favorite things, lists of things to remember contributed by the group, safety rules

FIGURE 1-5 A Literacy-Rich Environment

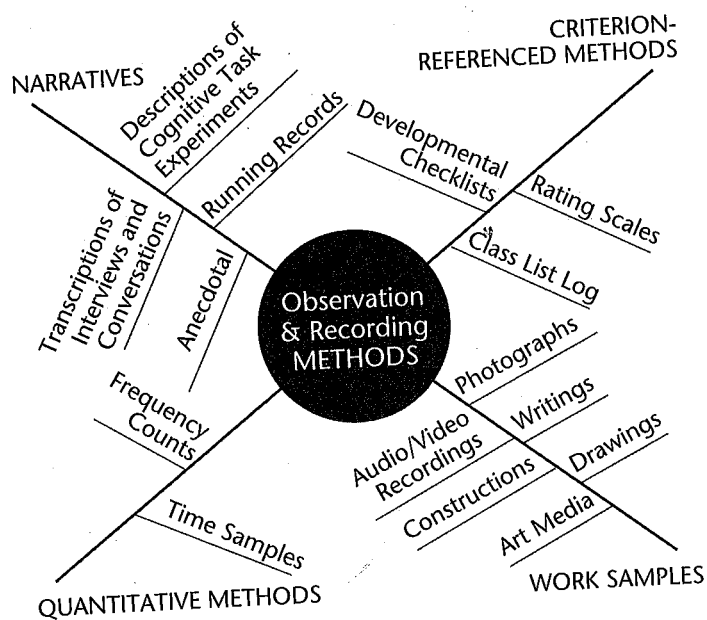


FIGURE 1-6 Methods Web

narrative

method that tells a story, includes all the details of an incident

criterion-referenced

method that provides a predetermined standard or guideline to look for and measure against

quantitative

method that provides a numerical count of individual or group action or a numerical score

Work Samples

children's work such as drawings, writings, constructions, audio/video recordings, or photographs

1-3

Why, When, and Who

You have seen why observe and why write it down, but why do you need different methods, when should these observations take place, and what is the role of the person who is observing? This next section answers those questions.

1-3a Why Use Different Observation Methods?

You can see that this book is about different observing and recording methods. Think of it this way: Why are there so many ways to cook a chicken? Because there are different end results from each method. The cook may be looking for a certain consistency, lowering calories, tenderizing, or cooking it within a short period of time. Similarly, there are many different methods of recording observations because the end result from each method is different. This book presents many different methods for recording (preserving) what has been observed.

Yes, they are all based on observing the child and measuring the observation against standards in order to make decisions about immediate and future actions, but they differ in technique, content, and approach. Each chapter of *Week by Week* presents a different observation method, along with a review of a developmental area, but the method is not limited to recording only that particular area. In the cooking example above, once the technique of frying or stewing or microwaving is mastered it can be applied to other foods and modified for a variety of desired results. Just like cooking, once a recording technique is mastered, it can be applied to other developmental areas and modified to fit the recorder's style and selected outcome. While the recording methods in *Week by Week* are paired with a specific area of child development, most of the methods can be used for assessment of any area of development. The recording methods can be classified using a web design (Figure 1-6).

Types of Recording Methods. Each method is a technique to focus on a behavior, skill, or action of an individual child or the whole group. The **narrative** recordings, such as Anecdotal Recordings, Running Records, and Interviews, tell a story. They bring the reader along by providing the actual details of actions, words, and results. The **criterion-referenced** recordings, such as Class List Logs, Checklists, and Rating Scales, provide a predetermined skill or standard to look for and measure against. The **quantitative** recordings, such as Time Samples and Frequency Counts, provide a numerical count of individual or group actions that then can be interpreted in various ways. These methods lose most of the raw data, the actual details that narratives preserve, but are useful for certain purposes.

The **Work Samples**, such as drawings, writings, constructions, sculptures, and media-preserved work (audio or video recordings or photographs), give a visual account of the child's activities from which assessments are made. Each category and method within the category is distinctive and useful, with its own specific technique, advantages and disadvantages, and best applications.

1-3b When to Observe?

From what you have read so far, you see that observing children in the natural setting of the classroom, while they are actively participating, gives us the best indicators of their

capabilities. This means that while children are engaged in play they gain knowledge, organize their world, and develop their bodies, minds, emotions, social skills, and language. In play, children can be themselves, with their behavior speaking the language of who they are and what they think and feel. While observing play, every domain of development can be assessed by documenting behavior and analyzing it for indicators of development. In the chapters that follow, documentation methods are presented along with a review of child development so that the observer will look at children's play as an opportunity to measure attainment, support forward progress, and plan the environment and curriculum to help achieve it. *Week by Week* is a play-based assessment system.

1-3c What Are the Roles of the Observer?

You may have various roles, reasons, or situations for observing, either directly working with children or just watching.

Participant Observer. The participant observer is actively engaged with the children but observing and taking notes at the same time.

- **Teacher**

If you are a teacher, then you observe children all the time for many of the reasons given earlier in the chapter. In order to remember, you will need to have paper and pen handy (or electronic devices such as laptops, smart phones, tablets, or video/audio recorders) at all times to be sure to preserve important details (remember, writing aids the memory). Teaching demands full attention to the children while thinking on another level about what is important about what just happened and how to make note of it to remember. Sometimes the teacher plans the environment for observing—for example, setting up an obstacle course, to observe children's large muscle coordination, or sitting at the snack table, taking note of children's small muscle coordination as they eat, or listening carefully to their language. Using routine times in the day, play times, or specially constructed activities allows the teacher to be unobtrusive and yet carefully observe.

- **Student teacher**

In field experience classes student teachers practice the skills they will use when they have classrooms of their own. Under a supervisor, student teachers plan, implement, and self-assess their own teaching while learning about the children in the group they are working with and about children in general. This learning opportunity should include written observations of how lessons were carried out, how children were involved in the lesson, and self-reflections of what the student teacher learned about teaching from the success or difficulties encountered. The student teacher is actively engaged with children as well as observing and recording.

- **Home Visitor**

Many early childhood professionals work as itinerant home visitors, calling on children and families in their homes through organized programs to help families with children's learning. Home visitors are observers of children and the interactions within the family as they participate in learning activities. They make detailed records and use specific assessment tools prescribed by the program in which they work. For those students and practitioners working in the home, your program has likely already defined what record keeping is required and what, in addition, is useful. Experienced educators have found that, if families are comfortable, videotaping the visit as it happens, tape recording and/or writing on sticky notes the key observations after the visit, or writing short observations during the visit are all helpful tools when completing the visit narrative. Sometimes making notes during a visit makes the family uncomfortable, so writing notes as soon as the visit is concluded is necessary. Some home visitors use voice recording reflections during transit from one visit to the next.

Non-Participant Observer. Sometimes observers are in the classroom for specific purposes. Such a person has the luxury of having no responsibility in a classroom other than observing and recording. The non-participant observer finds a place in the classroom that is out of the way, but in a place where the observer can see and hear what is happening. Some early childhood programs (especially lab schools) have an observation booth where students, family members, or other professionals can observe children without being seen. This nonintrusive vantage point does not influence the children's behavior. However, sometimes vision or clear sound may be hampered by the placement and technology available. Recordings of classroom activity are another way of observing. This will be explored in Chapter 12.

- **Student**

Early childhood students may be in courses that require just observation. This may be to practice various recording methods or to observe certain domains of development. The classroom teacher can assist you in finding the right spot. Try to avoid letting any child "feel" watched by gazing around the room rather than staring. Avoid eye contact or conversations with the children, but appear friendly and nonthreatening. Answer the children's questions about what you are doing directly by saying you are writing down what is happening in the classroom and go back to your work.

- **Visiting teacher**

Teachers sometimes visit someone else's classroom to learn teaching strategies or to participate in a collaborative learning community to improve their teaching and learning. With prior permission, a visiting teacher can see the classroom with objective eyes, perhaps giving advice, if requested, in ways to improve. It is not for evaluation but for assistance.

- **Family member**

Family members of prospective students may visit a classroom to see if this is the right fit for their child. They will experience the environment, observe the teacher's interactions with the children, and learn about the routines and policies, to come to a decision whether to enroll in the program. Family members whose child is already in the classroom may visit to get a better idea of what takes place in the classroom and to see their child in action. Sometimes family members are participant observers, helping in the classroom as extra hands or sharing special knowledge of experiences with the class.

- **Other professionals**

Researchers and certain consultants are non-participant observers who make observations and gather specific data on children, taking meticulous notes for analysis later, specific data on one child, or children in a certain population.

1-4

Building Child Development Portfolios

When the radiologist shows the X-ray of a broken bone to the parents of the crying child, the parents look at it but may not *see it as radiologist does*. They are looking at the same visual image but understand it at a different level. The teacher needs the specialized knowledge base of child development in order to understand the recorded events. Without a foundational knowledge of child development, behavior is observed, seen, but not recognized for its importance. For that reason, each chapter includes an overview of a developmental area discussing influences, milestones, terminology, and key theories. There is an emphasis on the child's observable skills and behaviors that demonstrate progress. This is not a comprehensive child development text, but it does present and review each developmental domain as it relates to that chapter. Knowledge of child

development helps you to understand what typical children of this age know and can do. Your observations will help you know what this particular child knows and can do. When you put those two together, you have evaluated the child and now can individualize the curriculum so it is not so hard that it is frustrating nor so easy that it is boring. Like Goldilocks, it will then be “just right.” What you observe and write down is seen through the lens of child development. Part of each chapter also discusses one domain or area of child development so you will know what to look for when you are observing; that is what you are recording is each child’s development.

1-4a Child Development

The word **development** is an important one to understand. It is more than just change. Some important developmental principles include the following:

1. Development in one area influences and is influenced by what takes place in other developmental areas.
2. Development is sequential, with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired.
3. Development occurs at varying rates from child to child, and at uneven rates across different areas in the same child.
4. Development results from biological maturation and experiences.
5. Early experiences, positive or negative, have later effects, and there are optimal periods for certain types of development to occur.
6. Development progresses from simple to complex.
7. Development occurs best when children have secure relationships with responsive adults and peers.
8. Development is influenced by social, emotional, and cultural contexts.
9. Children learn in multiple ways, seeking meaning of the world around them, so a range of teaching strategies is effective in supporting learning.
10. Play is an important vehicle for all areas of development.
11. Development advances when children are challenged with opportunities to practice new skills just beyond their level of mastery.
12. Child’s experiences shape their motivation and approaches to learning.
(Adapted from Copple & Bredekamp, 2009)

development
change that takes place in a predictable sequence, from simple to complex, but in a different pace for individual people

1-4b Portfolio Assessment

Any long-term project begins with a plan that has small steps along the way leading to the completion of the project. Some long-term projects may seem impossible until they are broken down into manageable steps.

Teachers of young children *know* they should be keeping written records on each child’s behavior for many good reasons, but there is one seemingly insurmountable obstacle: *time*. This book begins with the premise that writing down observations of children’s activities is the preferred method of assessing and documenting children’s development.

“But I don’t have time!” Every busy adult working with children has said it. The teacher’s priority is to applaud the climb to the top of the ladder, redirect that arm ready to throw a block, or give a thoughtful response to a family member as she hurriedly says on her way out, “He’s running a little fever and had a touch of diarrhea this morning, but he says he feels fine.” The role of the teacher is to provide physical and psychological safety and intellectual challenge to each child. The teacher also strives to maximize the teachable moment and expand on the child’s interests and conversations.

Those two responsibilities, accurate record keeping and responsiveness to the needs of each child, seem incompatible. Time and attention for record keeping is minimal. Teachers who know they should be making written records are caught in a bind. They recognize the importance of keeping accurate records on which to base evaluations or plan individualized curricula. The difficulty, and for some the impossibility, is doing this while interacting with children.

A collection of written observations, no matter how meticulous they were written, is meaningless without an organization and application for their use. Major accomplishments require time and planning. A meaningful Portfolio of a child's development and work is not gathered in a few days. Authentic assessment is achieved when each child's development is observed and documented objectively and periodically. The systematic gathering of information about the child is Portfolio assessment. Portfolios are more than a scrapbook or folder full of unrelated pieces of paper. The pieces of documentation that describe and measure the child's development, gathered over a period of time are listed on the **Portfolio Evidence Sheet** that notes the area of development that it describes. You will learn more about Portfolios in Chapter 15.

The results of systematic portfolio building are strategies to facilitate the child's progress to the next developmental level through intentional teaching. There is a cycle of observe, record, assess, plan, implement, evaluate, and record. This is repeated in each developmental area for each child. This is an authentic performance-based assessment system that is useful, valid, and dependable.

Why Use Portfolio Assessment Rather Than Testing? Chapter 9 will discuss standardized testing and its use and misuse. This book will guide you in using Portfolios as an authentic, reliable way to assess children's development. Much has been written to promote Portfolio assessments (Martin, 2014; NAEYC, 2003; Cohen & Wiener, 2003). A review of the benefits of Portfolio assessment includes its ongoing purposeful assessment done during authentic activities (play) in a naturalistic setting without diverting children from natural learning processes.

Portfolios can be a valid, reliable replacement or augmentation for standardized testing. Organizations such as the NAEYC and National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) take this position on assessment: "To assess young children's strengths, progress and needs, use assessment methods that are developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive, tied to children's daily activities, supported by professional development, inclusive of families and connected to specific, beneficial purposes" (NAEYC, 2003, p. 2). They call for more authentic assessment methods that provide documentation gathered from multiple sources over a period of time in the child's natural environment (Photo 1-3).

Here are eight principles for guiding the decision on how to assess children (Neisworth & Bagnato, 2004, pp. 204-208):

- **Utility**—Can the assessment be used to guide the individualized curriculum?
- **Acceptability**—Is the assessment socially and culturally relevant?

Portfolio Evidence Sheet

index of pieces of documentation contained in the Portfolio

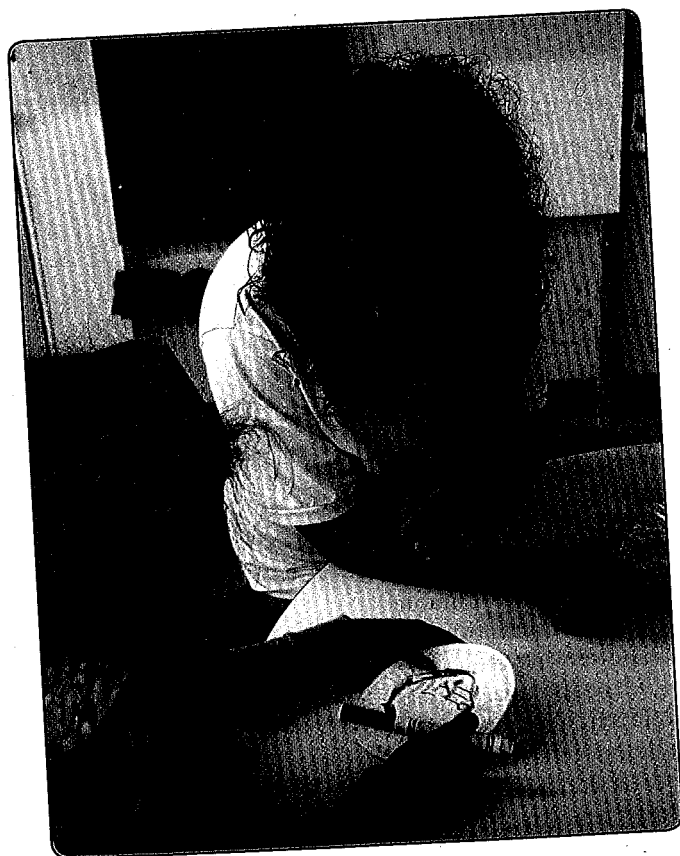


PHOTO 1-3 Close observation of routine events helps the teacher evaluate and make decisions.

TOPICS in OBSERVATION • Ethics of Documentation

EXERCISE What do you think about the following observations?

"Ethan bit Trevor on Tuesday or Wednesday."

"Kara is the cutest child in the class."

"I think that Alex is autistic."

"I keep writing about Dominic's behavior so that he'll be moved out of my group."

"Lillie talks about that horror movie all the time. I can't believe you let your child watch that movie."

"When I told my friend about what happened at school yesterday, she said that it sounded like Lydia has been abused."

Ethics should guide documentation in the following ways.

Accuracy. With every method of observation, there is a responsibility to record the raw data (facts) as accurately as possible. This is done by making notes as completely and promptly after observing as possible because memory and details slip as time passes.

The best recording is done *as the behavior is observed*. Some methods you will learn about are strictly factual, while others do have elements of judgment inherent in them. Carefully choose those methods and use them wisely.

Objectivity. Methods that preserve the raw data (just record the facts) are more **objective** (without bias or opinion) than others. That does not mean that one method is better than another or that biases and opinions can't enter into any recording. It is the responsibility of the recorder to capture what is seen and heard without interpretation. Again,

the methods will contribute to the recording of data or interpretation. Be aware of that possibility. Objectivity also includes the practice of regularly gathering data on each child in the group because each child deserves an equal representation in observing practices. The *Week by Week* plan seeks to make that selection of subjects more arbitrary, thus equalizing the number and topic of the documentation added to each child's Portfolio.

Labeling. We all sort and categorize the information we take in. That is how we attempt to make sense of the world. It is important not to draw premature conclusions or diagnoses about a child based on limited information or to label a child or behavior. Our observation methods are designed to document the facts and to try to avoid categorizing a child as "bold," "hyperactive," or "shy."

Intended Purposes. Students write about children for the purpose of observing and interpreting milestones in child development, seeing theories in action, and practicing recording methods. The college policy will dictate the final distribution of the child's work gathered by the student so that no unintentional breaches of **confidentiality** or inferential and biased statements could be made by the practicing student.

For practitioners, the purpose in recording is to document a child's behavior, assess, and plan for that child accordingly. Documenting should not be used to build a case against a child for any reason or to threaten or humiliate a child or family.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Students will mask the identity of the children they observe by using only initials or some other neutral identifier. No last names should ever appear on any student's recording. Permission from a family member may be required by the school or program. It is the student's responsibility to inquire about the policy and abide by it. The file must keep the documentation private from anyone other than the instructor, the child, the child's family, and those who have a legal "right to know."

Writing enhances memory. This point has been strongly emphasized as the reason for writing observations. Discussions outside the classroom with friends, or one's own family, require discretion. Sometimes stories are related for illustration, but they should never include children's names or details that could identify the child or their family. Complaining, satirizing, or criticizing children or families is unprofessional.

Professional behavior is guided by wisdom, kindness, and most of all, respect for an individual's privacy. Let's make a commitment to uphold the *NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct* (NAEYC, 2011).

How do these points on ethics apply to the quoted observations in the exercise?

objective

detached, impersonal, observed, unprejudiced, data-only

confidentiality

the professional attitude and practice of preserving the privacy of information

- *Authenticity*—Does it yield information about the child's typical behavior in natural settings?
- *Equity*—Does the assessment collect and interpret findings fairly?
- *Sensitivity*—Does the assessment provide for the measurement of a full range of abilities?
- *Convergence*—Does the assessment look at all the domains of development?
- *Collaboration*—Does the assessment gather information from several sources with the family as the authority on the child?
- *Congruence*—Does the assessment make allowances for differing abilities; is it evidence based?

The *Week by Week* systematic plan for Portfolio building will enable the user to gather data to meet the needs of authentic assessment as outlined in the eight principles above in a manageable way. It meets the guidelines for appropriate assessment for planning instruction and communicating with families, identifying children with special needs, and for program evaluation and accountability. You can find the full NAEYC position statement on the NAEYC website. Many kinds of scientists—sociologists, anthropologists, archeologists, biologists—gather field data of their subjects, carefully describing and cataloguing to make meaning of their specimens later. Teachers are just such scientists, taking the ecological view by studying children in their naturalistic settings, not a controlled laboratory, but in an environment that is just a part of the child's world that centers around the family and the community.

ecological view
consideration of all aspects that
influence a human being

1-5 How to Use This Book

This book is meant to be the basis for a weekly plan for recording observations of each child's development and to be used as a guide for intentional teaching. The outcome of this week-by-week plan is a meaningful, comprehensive Portfolio.

1-5a Standards

Every chapter begins with a list of applicable NAEYC Professional Preparation Standards, so you can see what the profession expects of you, and also the pertinent Program Standards, and NAEYC Developmentally Appropriate Guidelines, to see what is expected of early childhood programs and teachers. Almost every profession has established standards for itself and its constituents to describe the guiding principles and practices. *Week by Week* seeks to assist in meeting these standards, whether for accreditation, preparation program improvement, or for more qualified early childhood professionals. Child performance standards guide early childhood program administrators, teachers, and curriculum planners in areas such as physical, social, emotional, language, literacy, and creativity. These standards are often available on the Internet and in publications from the organizations. There is a cross reference of standards that are related to chapters in *Week by Week* on the inside cover.

1-5b Learning Objectives

There are learning goals listed at the beginning of each chapter so that you can see what learning is expected of you as you complete each chapter. At the end of the chapter, you have an opportunity to review them to see if you have understood the content and to assess your own learning.

1-5c Using the Recording Method

Each chapter presents a different method of writing down or documenting what the observer sees and hears in the classroom or on the playground during the regular activities and routines of the day as they are happening. The uses for each method are explained, and examples are provided to illustrate what they look like. The advantages and disadvantages are reviewed, and suggestions are given for how to find the time in a busy classroom to use the method efficiently. Included also in each chapter is a section on using technology.

1-5d Looking at ... Child Development

Each chapter also presents a discussion of one domain or area of child development so you will know what to look for when you are observing. The triangle (Figure 1-7), illustrating the expanding nature of development, is used throughout the book to represent the expansion of skills and knowledge that begins in a limited, crude way, but broadens and builds upon prior experiences, moving wider and deeper. Helping All Children is a chapter section that discusses observing infants and toddlers, children of diverse cultures, and those with exceptionalities or disabilities.

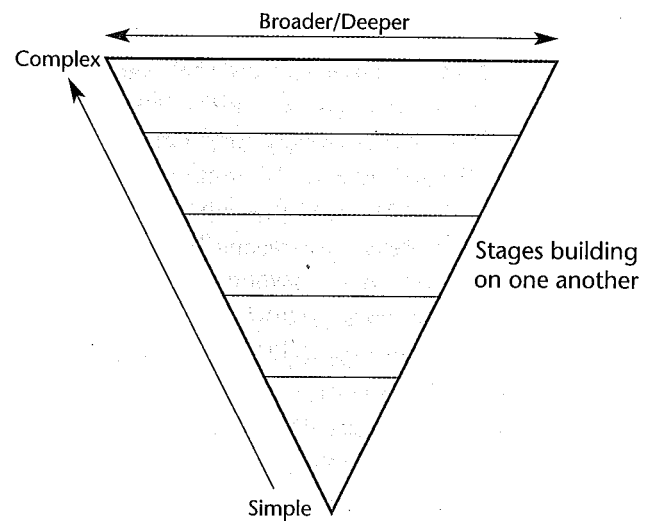


FIGURE 1-7 The triangle symbolizes development.

1-5e Features within the Chapter

Exercises. This feature occurs periodically within the book, designed to personalize the concepts, involve the reader, and focus attention on what follows. You are invited to think about and write the answers to these exercises to build connections with the content. When applicable, answers to the questions can be found at the end of the chapter.

It Happened to Me. Vignettes of my classroom experiences are scattered throughout the book. These anecdotes illustrate points about child development from children I have known and mistakes I have made that taught me what not to do. Some are observations my college students have written. Others are humorous stories related to me. All are stories, incredible, yet true. There are millions that *got away* because I never wrote them down! Many of these are remembered because after reflection on the real meaning of the incident they taught me a lesson. The stories are not all positive ones, but they are included because we often learn best from our mistakes. Many events became more important than I thought they were at the time. I hope you will begin to collect your own stories that have taught you lessons about teaching and life.

Topics in Observation. Within each chapter there is a separate section that gives insight into a topic related to child development or observation. This is to stimulate your thinking about an issue or a concept to deepen knowledge.

1-5f Features at the End of the Chapter

Helping Professionals. When working with children and families, teachers are often the resource or intermediary between people who need specialized advice and services and the professionals and agencies. This section is included in each chapter to acquaint the reader with the types of specialists to whom the teacher may refer the family. Each program should have a list of specific referral agencies and professionals from which the family can choose, with guidance from the people they trust.

Sharing with Children and Families. This feature gives some ideas for talking about observations with the family or the child. Talking about what has been observed is an important professional activity, but for students, sharing with the family is only done under the direction of and with the approval of the teacher. For practitioners, observations should be related to parents using tact and much deliberation about how they will be received.

Talking to the child in front of the family should also be done considerately. Sometimes children want privacy and a sense of being a person apart from the family. The teacher could ask the child, "May I tell your family about how long you painted today when we show them the painting?" Sometimes the child needs to hear his accomplishments related to the family. Discussing misdeeds or concerns, however, should be done in private, away from the child and other families.

Other Methods. Each developmental domain can be observed and recorded using various methods. These are mentioned at the end of each chapter as a reminder that there are some methods better suited for some developmental domains than others. There are many tools in the toolbox, but it is important to use the right tool for the job.

Related Readings. This listing of helpful books and articles on selected topics is included at the end of the chapters. These are books or websites that may be useful in further exploration of a chapter's topics.

References. With each edition I have researched to include the most current research and to cite references accurately so you can seek them out for further information. At the back of the book is a complete alphabetical bibliography of all the references used to substantiate the content of the book and give credit to ideas and concepts.

1-5g A Word about Some Words

Teacher. In *Week by Week*, when the word *teacher* is used, it refers to the recorder who is documenting the child's behavior. It may be the early childhood student in a practicum experience, a teacher in a child-care setting, a teacher in a classroom setting, or a home visitor from a formalized program. The recorder may have the minimum required hours of in-service training, a Child Development Associate (CDA) Credential, associate degree to advanced degrees, or teacher certification. Whatever the qualifications on paper, the children call this person "teacher" because she is in the teacher role, and she will be called by that worthy name in this text.

Family. You will probably notice the shift in language from *parent* to *family*. This term includes the parents and close family members who provide primary care for the child. Chapter 15 contains a further discussion of this rationale when it addresses sharing the Portfolio in family conferences (formerly parent conferences).

Key Terms. Every profession has terms that are common to people who work in that field. Throughout the chapter, important words appear in bold type to draw your attention. Their definitions appear in the margins of the pages for you to use as a self-check to be sure you understand their meaning, and an alphabetical list of all Key Terms is in the Glossary at the end of the book.

1-5h The Week by Week Plan

The *Week by Week* plan guides the observer so that all developmental areas are observed at least once. In real life, the areas must be revisited repeatedly to accomplish the objective of seeing change over time, so the plans are extended to 40 weeks in the total plan. Care has been taken to observe each child equally in all developmental areas using a variety of methods.

Setting up Portfolios. Portfolios are easy to set up if you are systematic about it:

1. You will need a new file folder for each child in your class, plus a few extras for new children throughout the year. You will need one folder labeled "Class File." Write names on tabs, last name first, and place the folders in alphabetical order. In each folder place any information supplied by the parents.
2. Make a list of the names of the children in your classroom and divide it into four groups, A, B, C, D. The *Week by Week* plan is a system to observe and document all the children in the class, but it is systematized to be manageable by dividing the work over the course of 40 weeks, observing the whole class with recording methods that are quick and easy and observing small groups with recording methods that are more focused and take more time. That is where the plans for your smaller group plans for A, B, C, and D will guide you. Following the *Week by Week* plan over the course of the 40 weeks, you will have a Portfolio for each child with documentation on all developmental domains taken at least three times during the 40 weeks to see the progress the child has made.
3. Copy the Portfolio Evidence Sheet (Figure 1-8) for each folder. This is a notation of all the recordings in the Portfolio so that the reader can see at a glance what is contained there—a type of table of contents. Place this sheet in each Portfolio. A note is made in each child's folder on the Portfolio Evidence Sheet that an observation in that particular developmental area has been made and where it resides (usually in the Child's Portfolio). When observation recordings are focused on a particular child, that observation is placed in that child's Portfolio and a note made on the Portfolio Evidence Sheet. As you can see the Portfolio Evidence Sheet serves as an index of all the documentation about that child and where it can be accessed.
4. Label another folder "Class File." Some recording methods gather information on all the children on the same form. The recording methods that gather data on the whole class or small group at the same time are filed in the Class File. Because the information gathered on each child should be kept separate from all the others, this type of recording is kept in the Class File and the teacher will make note on the Portfolio Evidence Sheet that there is information in the Class File on that child.
5. An ethical way to inform the families and the program of who has seen the contents of the file is to include a File Access Log (Figure 1-9) in each file. Each person who views the file, other than the teacher(s), signs the log, providing the date, identity, agency represented, and reason for looking at the file.

File Access Log

a form in the Portfolio that records the name, purpose, and date of each person who views the file

This introduction sets the stage, gives you the background, and acquaints you with the format of the book. The next steps are yours. Complete the exercises and adapt the plans for your particular group of children. At the end of 14 weeks, you will have accumulated sizable Portfolios on each child, with documentation in each developmental area. If you continue the plans throughout the year, you will see the progress the children make and you will become a better observer, recorder, and teacher.

Plans for Recording. The plan for 40 weeks, which is listed on the inside back cover, provides you with a week-by-week plan for observing and recording individual children and the whole group on a specific developmental domain. This book focuses on the first 14 weeks. By looking at the chart on the inside back cover, you can see the different recording methods you will learn about and use with small groups of children or a whole group. When you observe and document children's development week by week, you will become a better observer, recorder, planner, and teacher.

Professional Preparation Standards. In professional preparation, whether in the initial licensure of early childhood teachers or in associate degree programs, observation and assessment of children's development is an integral part. We are guided by the National Association for the Education of Young Children's *Preparing Early Childhood*

The record of _____ was reviewed by the following:
(child's name)

DATE	NAME/TITLE	AGENCY	REASON	SIGNATURE

FIGURE 1-9 File Access Log



TABLE 1-1 Key Elements of Standard 3

How Week by Week Meets the Key Elements of Standard 3

3a.—Understanding the goals and benefits, and uses of assessment—including its use in development of appropriate goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies for young children.

Week by Week—explains the reasons why observation of all developmental domains is important in assessing and planning for the young child.

3b.—Knowing about and using observation, documentation, and other appropriate assessment tools and approaches, including the use of technology in documentation, assessment, and data collection.

Week by Week—introduces and leads practice of several methods of documenting observations, pointing out the benefits and disadvantages of each. It presents information on standardized assessments and their proper use as well as how technology can collect and manage documentation.

3c.—Understanding and practicing responsible assessment to promote positive outcomes for each child, including the use of assistive technology for children with disabilities.

Week by Week—stresses the ethics of equitable, factual, and confidential documentation.

3d.—Knowing about assessment partnerships with families and other professional colleagues to build effective learning environments.

Week by Week—provides guidance in sharing documentation with the child, the family, and specific helping professionals in each weekly plan. (See inside cover for correlation chart of *Week by Week* chapters and these standards.)

ethics

the moral principles and practices under which an individual operates

Related Readings

Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (eds.). (2009). *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Helm, J. H., Beneke, S., & Steinheimer, K. (2007). *Windows on Learning: Documenting Young Children's Work* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Snow, C. E., & VanHemel, S. B. (eds.). (2008). *Early Childhood Assessment: Why, What, and How*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.