

Using Observations to Plan Curriculum

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

IV. Supporting Children's Development

A. The provider has clearly defined developmental goals for children.

2. The provider gathers information about individual children from discussion with parents and her own observations and/or assessment. The provider can give specific examples of how this information is used in planning a program that is culturally and developmentally appropriate for each child.



The Basics

What is intentional observation? Early childhood educators are constantly observing and responding to young children as a way of guiding, nurturing, and expanding learning. Intentionally recording observations helps educators discover new information, track child progress, and support growth. Observations must...

- be based on **objective, factual evidence** (what the educator can see, hear, touch, smell, and taste).
- **not** include subjective language like assumptions, opinions, beliefs, and biases.
- incorporate a **variety of methods** and tools.
- be documented at **various times** throughout the day.

Why use observations to plan curriculum? Observation, documentation, and reflection help early childhood educators become experts in the individual children of their program. With a deep understanding of children's strengths, weaknesses, preferences, and interests, educators can plan engaging environments and respond effectively to children's unique needs. The observation cycle helps educators identify patterns and therefore predict what children may be interested in exploring or mastering. Children in programs with responsive environments more often reach school-readiness goals by kindergarten.

How can I use observations to plan curriculum?

- **Identify a method.** Choose to observe with or without a focus, such as a specific child or developmental domain. Choose to observe with or without interacting with the child or group. Choose how you will document your observations. Experiment to find what works well for you.
- **Collect observations.** Record what you can identify through your senses using your identified method. Use a combination of notes, photos, videos, artwork and writing samples. Avoid using subjective descriptors and interpretation in your observation.
- **Spend time reflecting.** Reflect on the observations by wondering about the perspective of the child, searching for patterns, and looking for indicators of developmental level. What message is the child sending? What may the child be feeling or thinking? How do I respond? How do I feel while observing this child? Then brainstorm ways to further support the child's development through adjusting or introducing routines, materials, experiences, or interactions. How can I support this child? What comes next? What would happen if...?
- **Implement a plan.** Adjust practice and introduce the targeted support. Now begin the process again!

I want to learn more!

- [Reviewing and Reflecting on Observation Information](#)
- [Using Observation to Guide Your Teaching](#)
- [Observation with Purpose: Curriculum and Learning](#)
- [Becoming a Reflective Teacher](#)

Books available through Satellite's lending library:

(for Satellite participating programs only)

- *Spotlight on Young Children: Observation and Assessment* (NAEYC, 2018)
- *Really Seeing Children* (Curtis, 2017)
- *Windows on Learning: Documenting Young Children's Work* (Steinheimer, Benke, & Harris Helm, 2007)
- *Focused Observations: How to Observe Young Children for Assessment and Curriculum Planning* (James & Gronlund, 2005)
- *The Art of Awareness: How Observation Can Transform Your Teaching* (Curtis & Carter, 2000)