

Observation, Assessment and Planning

Rochelle Burgess

Introduction

Observation, assessment and planning is a cycle of co-dependent disciplines 'based on Bronfenbrenner's (1977) Ecological Systems theory' (Birth to Five Matters). Consistent observation requires active awareness and allows practitioners to build up a child-centred picture of the needs, personality and interests of children. By analysing these observations in relation to our understanding of the child we can recognise a child's development over time, including any gaps in their learning. These interpretations allow for the considered planning of appropriate experiences, interactions and resources for the children that effectively develop their learning.

Responsive/ In the moment OAP

Purposeful interactions with children where observing, assessing and planning takes place during a spontaneous 'teachable moment' where practitioners partake in child-led 'learning journeys' based on the child's interests. Recordings are concise and after the event, detailing the whole OAP cycle and the outcome. (Ephgrave, 2017).

Parental/Home based Observation

Observations of children by parents and from the home learning environment can 'contribute deep insight' (Whitters, 2018, p.62) and allows for a holistic overview of the child and their development. A sharing of observations is vital for parent partnership, is important during transitions and assists in getting to know the child.

Narrative/Long Observations

An extended account, supported by photographs and detailing context, actions, engagement, other children and the child's direct quotes. These often focus on a specific task, skill or goal. Online documenters can align observations with the curriculum and ELGs and provide a portal for a shared narrative between parents and settings.

Magic Moments

A concise capturing of spontaneous new skills, interesting developments or important milestone moments, dictated by child-led activities and often applying to several areas of learning at once. Multiple moments combine to build a natural picture of child-led development and learning.

Group Observations/Sociograms

A detached observation of a group allowing insight into child interaction, social skills and behaviours when with peers. Observation can be furthered by focusing on a specific child and noting their social circles and peer interactions allowing an in-depth view of their relationships and social abilities.

Planning for Children's Development

An understanding of the child, through observation and assessment is the starting point for planning. Informed planning will provide children with experiences that are engaging and appropriate for furthering their continuing development.

Statutory Assessments

There are three statutory summative assessments within the early years (ages 0-5). These are:
-The Progress Check (age 2)
-The Reception Baseline Assessment (within the first 6 weeks of Reception)
-The Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (within the last term of Reception)

Summative Assessment

An assessment built from observations to recognise progress and produce a summation of a child's development at a specific point in time. Assessment should be child-focused, achievement based and not dominated by expected results. (Smidt, 2013. P.76)

Planning for Activities

A balance of activities should be planned which provide adult-initiated teaching and support child-initiated learning. These should promote equality and diversity, be developmentally appropriate, and be based on the interests and needs of the children. (Smidt, 2013. p.9, p.69)

Formative Assessment

An ongoing analysis of observations that provide a continuously deeper understanding of the child and their learning. Practitioner's support children's progress through reflection and with a secure knowledge of child development. (Department for Education, 2021b, p.18)

Planning for an Enabling Environment

Well planned environments require the organisation of time, resources and staff. A considered setting allows children autonomy and results in more children being deeply engaged. Flexible and open-ended resources provide opportunities for varied child-led learning (Ephgrave, 2017). Well organised time and staff allow for more quality interactions with children.

Learning Stories

'Narrative forms of assessment such as learning stories make use of a formative assessment sequence: noticing, recognising, responding, recording, and revisiting valued learning' (Te Whariki). Child-led learning is recorded over time, with photographs and reflections from parents and practitioners, which create a personal dialogue and encourage children's autonomy over learning.

Evaluate and Reflect

Reviewing planned practice by revisiting initial observations and assessments allows us to gauge successes, mistakes and oversights in order to formulate appropriate responses. Evaluating our observations, assessments and planning encourages professional responsibility and promotes reflective, considered decisions.

Observation Checkpoints

An observation focusing on milestones or assessments, planned with knowledge of the EYFS and child development. (Department for Education, 2021a, p.5) It assists practitioners in identifying developmental delays and where additional support is required and can be supported by non-statutory guidance such as 'Development Matters' or 'Birth to 5 Matters'.

Time Samples

Brief recordings of a child's activity, involvement, behaviour and placement within the setting over regular intervals (commonly every 5 minutes over an hour). Time samples give practitioners an understanding of a child's interests, the focus of their activities and their dispositions. (Brodie, 2018, p.172)

Tracking

Observation of children in relation to their environment by using a floor plan to recognise engagement, patterns in play and use of resources. Individual tracking can help recognise children's schemas and dispositions. (Brodie, 2018, p.173)

Work Samples

Examples of creations such as writing, artwork and building can inform our observations when given context by the child (Kinney & Wharton, 2007, p.60). They allow practitioners to understand children's interests and can be used to show a child-led progression of skills.

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