DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 407 134 PS 025 367

TITLE	Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision Making. Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community.
INSTITUTION	Aspen Systems Corp., Rockville, MD.
SPONS AGENCY	Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (DHHS), Washington, DC. Head Start Bureau.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-16-042682-0
PUB DATE	[95]
NOTE	117p.; For other guides in this series, see ED 348 160, ED 398 220-222, and PS 025 368-376.
CONTRACT	105-93-1584
AVAILABLE FROM	U. S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Classroom Observation Techniques; *Decision Making; *Observation; Parent School Relationship; Performance; Preschool Education; Recordkeeping; Resource Materials; Staff Development; Student Evaluation; *Student Records; Training Methods; Workshops
IDENTIFIERS	Observation Criteria; *Observation Techniques; *Project Head Start

ABSTRACT

This training guide is intended to enhance the skills of Head Start education staff so they can accurately and objectively observe, record, and interpret young children's behavior and make thoughtful decisions about program planning for each child. Each of the modules in the guide details module outcomes, key concepts, and background information. Module 1 assists participants in identifying and using a variety of observational methods, matching observation goals to observation techniques, and writing a running record accurately and objectively. Module 2 addresses overcoming observation challenges and provides staff members with practice in identifying and challenging their personal biases, which could interfere with conducting and recording observations objectively. Module 3 addresses enhancing staff's ability to involve parents in the observation process and work with them as partners. Module 4 addresses interpreting and using observation results, and serves to increase staff's ability to make valid inferences and draw meaningful conclusions from collected observation data. Contains resources. Five appendices provide sample observation records, a description of observation instruments, and other information. (SD)

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HEAD START®

Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community

ED 407 134

Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision Making

PS 025367

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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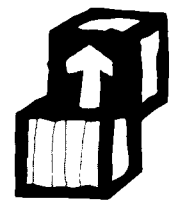

Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision Making

Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Head Start Bureau

This national training guide was developed by Aspen Systems Corporation, 1600 Research Boulevard, Rockville, MD 20850, under contract number 105–93–1584 of the Head Start Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services.

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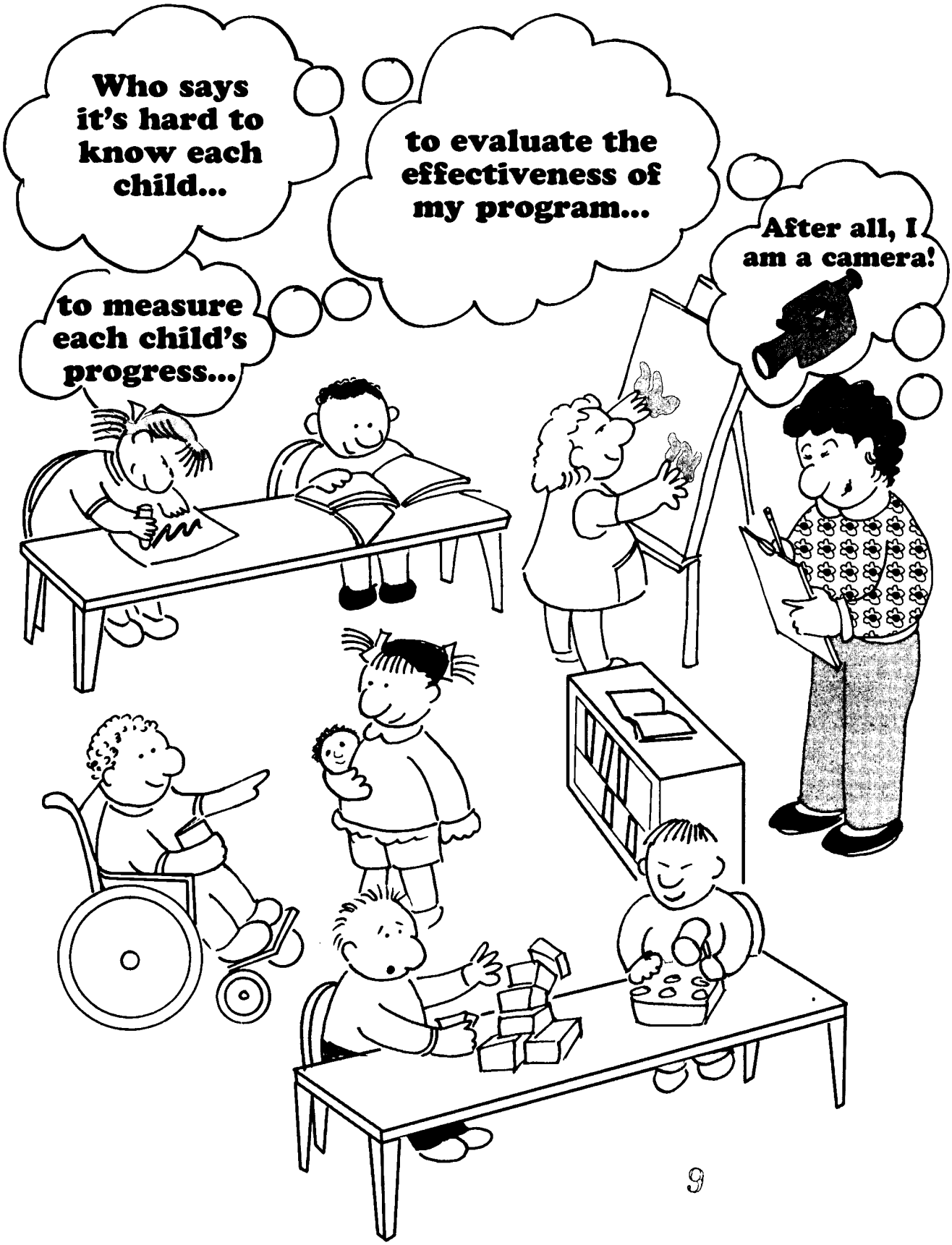
Who says it's hard to know each child...
to evaluate the effectiveness of my program...
After all, I am a camera!
to measure each child's progress...

Preface

A thoughtful, objective, and accurate observer in an early childhood setting uses all senses to record children's actions. Just as a camera records the actions of actors on a Hollywood sound stage, the observer's responsibility is to objectively view and accurately record a mental *film* of children's actions and behaviors. Creating such a film and interpreting what is seen allows education staff to better support, encourage, and evaluate children's growth and development. By carefully observing *how and what* infants, toddlers, and preschool children do in all settings, including the home, Head Start education staff can appreciate where children are developmentally and what they require for their growth and development. To do this, the Head Start education staff need to know the three-step process of observation:

1. Paying careful attention to the behavior
2. Analyzing the observations
3. Drawing conclusions

By completing the skill-building activities in this technical guide, education staff, the teaching teams, volunteers, and home visitors will effectively relate to each child in their program. As staff skillfully observe children's reactions to their world, they can evaluate their work with the children for effectiveness, make any modifications, and develop and implement child-centered, developmentally appropriate curriculums.

By providing quality staff development opportunities, the management team supports and encourages the education staff to become astute and accurate observers and thoughtful decision makers. Completing the activities of this technical guide is the first step to helping staff increase the quality of their program by making effective mental videos of the actions and behaviors of the children in their care.

Overview

Purpose

This technical guide enhances the skills of all education staff so they can accurately and objectively record young children's behavior and make thoughtful decisions about program planning for each child.

Observation is much more than looking at what a child does. Observation of a young child means carefully paying attention to details of the child's behavior, recording these details in a structured manner, and assessing the implications of the child's actions. By applying the concepts in this guide, education staff in home and center-based settings can develop skills to accurately and objectively observe and record the behavior of children. In addition, Head Start staff can help parents, who are their children's primary teachers, to better understand their child's needs, interests, and abilities. Parents and education staff, working together as partners, can significantly affect children's success when they base their understanding of children's growth and development on thoughtful and careful observations that are accurate and objective in nature.

Observation, an essential building block of all quality, developmentally appropriate Head Start programs, requires a well-trained education staff who are in tune with the actions and behaviors of the children in their care. While observation may seem deceptively simple, it requires training and practice. In the September 1994 issue of *Young Children,* Ann Benjamin stated that early childhood professionals increasingly need to refine their skills, abilities, and areas of expertise to meet the needs of the children with whom they work. To do this, staff must recognize that observation is vital to the overall assessment process and that it has a strong impact upon another professional responsibility: planning and evaluating programs for children. Because observation plays an important role in assessment, its use can help staff strengthen every aspect of an early childhood program. Education staff can use the observation process to fulfill these fundamental goals:

- Chart children's growth and development
- Identify, guide, and respond to children's behavior and actions
- Facilitate planning for individual children and groups of children

This training guide provides participants with a set of skills and a variety of techniques for accurately and objectively observing, recording, and interpreting children's behavior, and making decisions for program planning.

Introduction

Outcomes

After completing this guide, participants will:

- Recognize the important role that the observation process plays in working with children
- Incorporate the skill of accurately and objectively observing and recording children's behavior in home and center-based settings
- Use the observation process, in partnership with parents, as one of several strategies to monitor children's progress
- Recognize the implications of personal biases and program challenges on the observation process

Audience

This is a technical guide for education staff in center, home-based, and combination settings. Staff is defined as classroom teams (teachers, assistants, and volunteers) and home visitors.

Performance Standards

This guide supports the Head Start Program Performance Standards objectives for child education services to provide ongoing observation, recording, and evaluation of each child's growth and development. Staff and parents are encouraged to enhance their knowledge and understanding of the educational and developmental needs and activities of children in the program. Staff are encouraged to train parents to improve their skills to observe growth and development of their children in the home environment. The ability of staff and parents working as partners to analyze the implications of atypical development and to make referrals, as needed, is increased when the observation process is implemented.

Organization

This **technical guide**, *Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision Making*, is designed to further develop the skills of the education staff to accurately and objectively observe and record the behavior of children. Staff members can use this guide to chart children's growth and development, identify and respond to children's behavior and actions, and plan for individual children and groups of children. Parents can also use this guide to gain ways to more accurately assess their child's evolving needs, interests, and abilities.

Participants will meet the **guide outcomes** once they complete activities in this guide. These outcomes include:

- Recognizing the primacy of parents; understanding the important role that observation plays in working with children; and incorporating observing and recording of children's behavior into program practices

- Developing skills for staff and parents so that children's actions in home and center-based programs are accurately and objectively observed and recorded

- Using observation practices in partnership with parents as one of several strategies to monitor children's progress

- Analyzing and sharing observation results with parents in order to collaboratively determine the next steps and any referrals that may be required to plan for the children

- Incorporating observation information into the ongoing assessment of individual children and groups of children and in program planning

Each module includes module outcomes, key concepts, and background information. The **module outcomes** are based on the **guide outcomes**. *Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision Making* contains the following modules:

- **Module 1:** *Using Observation in Early Childhood Programs*

  This module sharpens the staff's ability to identify and use a variety of observational methods, match observation goals to observation techniques, and write a running record accurately and objectively.

- **Module 2:** *Overcoming Observation Challenges*

  This module provides the staff members with practice in identifying and challenging their personal biases that could interfere with conducting and recording observations objectively. Also, they will learn to identify and address, via planning, program-related challenges that affect the staff's ability to regularly conduct observations.

- **Module 3:** *Working with Parents to Enhance Observations*

  This module enhances the staff's ability to involve parents in the observation process and work with them as partners. In addition, staff will be better able to use observation as a tool for answering parents' questions and concerns about children.

- **Module 4:** *Interpreting and Using Observation Results*

  This module increases the staff's ability to make valid inferences and to draw meaningful conclusions from collected observation data. In addition, the staff will learn to determine with whom, in addition to

parents, they should share the results of observations and link observation results to making decisions about programming for children.

Each module has specific outcomes for participants to achieve, and each activity is designed to fulfill one of the outcomes. For easy reference, the outcome is listed with the activity. In addition, the **Next Steps**, the last activity for each module, introduces a unique staff development tool, the **portfolio**, a living document of one's professional growth and achievement. The material that is developed and added to the individual's collection is an important tool for self-evaluation and demonstrates to others one's professional growth.

The **Key Concepts** section appears in every module of the guide and summarizes the main ideas contained in each module. The Key Concepts are discussed more explicitly in the **Background Information** section of each module. The trainer can choose to present the Background Information section as a mini-lecture or as handouts or overheads in the coaching or workshop sessions.

The **Resources** section appears at the end of the guide. It lists additional materials that have further information on the topics covered in this guide.

The **Appendices** section of the guide provides participants with detailed information that they may use as they complete the activities in the guide and as a resource on the job.

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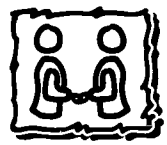
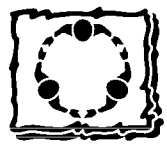
Definition of Icons

Coaching



A training strategy that fosters the development of skills through tailored instruction, demonstrations, practice, and feedback. The activities are written for a coach to work closely with one to three participants.

Workshop



A facilitated group training strategy that fosters development of skills through activities that build on learning through group interaction. These activities are written for up to 25 participants working in small or large groups with one or two trainers.

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Activities assigned by the trainer immediately following the completion of the module to help participants review key information, practice skills, and examine their progress toward expected outcomes of the module.

Continuing Professional Development

Follow-up activities for the program to support continued staff development in the regular use of the skills addressed in a particular training guide. It includes:

(1) Opportunities tailored to the participant to continue building on the skills learned in the training

(2) Ways to identify new skills and knowledge needed to expand and/or complement these skills through opportunities in such areas as higher education, credentialing, or community educational programs

At A Glance

Module	Activity	Time	Materials
Module 1: Using Observation in Early Childhood Programs	(W) Activity 1–1: Matching Goals and Approaches	120 minutes	*Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?* *Handout 2: What Would You Recommend?* *Appendix A*
	(C) Activity 1–2: Observation Has Many Forms	90 minutes	*Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?* *Handout 3: Observing Strengths and Weaknesses* *Handout 4: Try Your Hand at Observation* *Appendix A*
	(W) Activity 1–3: Off and Running	120 minutes	*Handout 5: Running Record Recording Form* *Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording* *Appendix B* Videotape clip
	(C) Activity 1–4: Writing a Winning Running Record	n/a	*Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording* *Handout 7: Accurate? Objective?*

Module	Activity	Time	Materials
Module 2: Overcoming Observation Challenges	(W) Activity 2–1: Scotty Must Have Done It!	120 minutes	*Handout 8: Scotty Must Have Done It!*
	(C) Activity 2–2: Breaking Down Preconceptions	n/a	*Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording* *Handout 9: Labels and Objectivity* *Handout 10: Tips for Overcoming Preconceived Notions during Observation* *Handout 11: Keeping Preconceptions in Check*
	(W) Activity 2–3: Making Time for Observation	120 minutes	*Handout 12: Overcoming Observation Challenges*
	(C) Activity 2–4: No Excuses	n/a	*Handout 12: Overcoming Observation Challenges* *Handout 13: Reflections on Observations* *Handout 14: How Did It Go?*
Module 3: Working with Parents to Enhance Observation	(W) Activity 3–1: What Would Parents Say?	120 minutes	*Handout 15: Portfolio #1—Dana Y.* *Handout 16: Portfolio #2—Eduardo H.* *Handout 17: What Else Do I Need?* *Appendix C* *Appendix D*

Module	Activity	Time	Materials
Module 3: Working with Parents to Enhance Observation (Continued)	(C) Activity 3–2: Making Parents Observational Partners	90 minutes	*Handout 18: Looking to Parents for Help* *Appendix D*
	(W) Activity 3–3: What Do Parents Want?	120 minutes	*Handout 19: I've Got a Question*
	(C) Activity 3–4: At Your Service	n/a	
Module 4: Interpreting and Using Observation Results	(W) Activity 4–1: Valid vs. Invalid	120 minutes	*Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data* *Handout 21: Making Inferences*
	(C) Activity 4–2: Time for Interpretation	60 minutes	*Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording* *Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data*
	(W) Activity 4–3: The Big Picture	120 minutes	*Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data* *Handout 22: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Dana Y.* *Handout 23: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Eduardo H.* *Handout 24: Action!*
	(C) Activity 4–4: Where Do I Go from Here?	90 minutes	*Handout 24: Action!*

C = Coaching Activities

W = Workshop Activities

Using Observation in Early Childhood Programs

In this module, participants learn about the various methods and instruments for observing and recording children's behavior and practice the most effective ways to use them.

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, the staff will be able to:

- Understand the role of observing and recording children's behavior in the Head Start program
- Identify and use a variety of observational methods
- Match observational goals to appropriate observational techniques
- Write a running record accurately and objectively

Key Concepts

- Observing and recording children's behavior is planned and ongoing.
- Staff gain an accurate picture of each child and assess how effectively the program meets children's needs by performing observations to collect unbiased data.
- In a quality early childhood program, observation is the basis for individualizing.
- To accurately record observations, the staff list children's behavior chronologically as it occurs.
- Factors such as emotions, motivation, self-image, and intelligence cannot be objectively observed and should not, therefore, be recorded. Only factual information should be recorded.

Background Information

The foundation for program planning by classroom teams and home visitors is the observation of children. *Observing* children's behavior is a process of developing objective and accurate descriptions of children's activities. It is a skill that is refined over time through practice. *Recording* is the system observers use to document and preserve what they have seen and heard.

Reasons to Observe

There are many reasons for classroom teams and home visitors to observe children. All these reasons relate to providing quality, early childhood programs:

- **To determine each child's interests, skills, and needs.** Observation allows staff to know the children as individuals so that they can motivate them and fully involve them in the program.

- **To measure children's growth and development over time.** Observation allows staff to see how children are progressing cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally during the program year.

- **To make changes to the environment.** By observing the way children use play spaces and materials, staff can determine whether materials are meeting the children's needs, if duplicates are required, or if traffic patterns interfere with play.

- **To identify concerns.** Observation helps staff see if children have special requirements that need to be addressed. These can range from a hearing problem to a need for extra attention. If indicated, specialists may be asked to help.

- **To determine how best to handle problem situations.** Observation allows staff to learn to anticipate how a child is likely to behave under certain conditions. For example, staff can observe a baby to determine when she is likely to have a tantrum, react to separation from parents, or get into squabbles over toys. With this knowledge, staff can then figure out how to prevent these problems from recurring.

- **To make changes to the curriculum.** Using observation, staff can determine if themes should be changed or if the schedule needs to be more responsive to the children's needs. For example, changes in gross motor activities may need to be implemented.

- **To provide information that staff and parents can share.** Observation offers insights about children, their interests, progress, social skills, and behavior challenges. Observation also provides details, anecdotes, and examples. Staff and parents can share their observations. This exchange of information creates a true partnership.

- **To help parents learn more about their children through observation.** By working with parents, staff can help families use observation to learn more about their children's strengths, needs, and behavior.

- **To enhance staff's abilities to communicate with children, parents, and colleagues.** Using observational insights, staff become better listeners and responders.

Kinds of Observations

There are many kinds of observations:

- **Running records** are brief, continuous descriptions. Staff use a narrative style to record information over a specific length of time, usually twenty to thirty minutes. Because of their versatility, running records are one of the most popular forms of observation—and the focus of this guide.

- **Anecdotal observations** are recorded information about one specific event or behavior. They range from notations about developmental milestones *(Matthew took his first step)* to behavioral descriptions *(Cooliana invited Tiffany to join her at the sand tub)*. The observer determines the events, timeliness of the record, and the richness of detail. To be most helpful, anecdotal records should be objective, factual, and followed up with supportive information.

- **Diary observations**, also known as journal entries, are the oldest method of observation. These observations are written narrative accounts of what happens in a home or center-based setting during a brief period of time. Entries can vary from a minimal, daily commentary to detailed reports.

- **Checklists** are observations of a specific list of items, skills, or behaviors to be performed. Completion indicates whether or not the observed child performed the skill or behavior. Checklists generally require a response of *yes*, *no*, or *sometimes* and can be completed during the observation period or later. Many safety- and health-related observations are conducted using checklists.

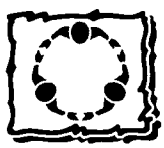
- **Rating scales** focus on specific behaviors and require the observer to judge the degree to which the behaviors are exhibited. Rating scales usually are numerical or use descriptive phrases that cover a range of behaviors.

- **Sampling observations** record behavior over a period of time or during a particular event. In time sampling, staff record what children are doing every ten or fifteen minutes. In event sampling, staff tally the number of times the children engaged in a specified behavior such as cooperative play.

Matching Approach to Purpose

Observations are most useful when they are done for a specific reason; this way, the best approach can be selected. For example, standardized checklists or rating scales can be used to objectively judge the presence or absence of behaviors. Sampling observations allow staff to tally how often behaviors are exhibited. Anecdotal records or journal entries help track developmental milestones. Running records, as noted earlier, serve a variety of purposes and are probably the best all-around method that the early childhood educator can use to record the ongoing behaviors of young children.

Activity 1–1: Matching Goals and Approaches



Purpose: In this activity, participants will be introduced to a variety of observational approaches and instruments and will learn to match observational approaches to observational goals.

Outcomes:

Participants understand the role of observing and recording children's behavior in the Head Start program.

Participants match observational goals to appropriate observational instruments.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?
Handout 2: What Would You Recommend?
Appendix A

1. As an icebreaker, ask participants to sketch a push-button phone pad that they use frequently. When they finish, discuss how well they remembered the details. For example: *Did they remember the *, #, and redial keys?* Ask the group to reflect on and discuss how memory differs from firsthand observation.

2. Ask the group, *How is observation like using a magnifying glass?* Be sure that the discussion addresses these points about what observation does:

   - Focuses your attention
   - Enlarges details
   - Blocks out the unimportant
   - Requires you to be a scientist
   - Enables you to see what is beneath the surface

3. Ask participants to brainstorm ways they currently use observation in their classroom and home visiting. As they respond, list their comments on chart paper.

4. (a) Place *Appendix A* handouts on a table in the front or back of the training room. Ask participants to pick up a copy of each form and read through the material once they return to their seats.

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> The materials in *Appendix A* include samples of running records, anecdotal records, diary entries, checklists, rating scales, and sampling observations. For comparison purposes, all the observations were done on one hypothetical child, Katy Nunez.

(b) Distribute *Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?* to the participants. Working in small groups, participants should use Handout 1 as a guide to develop notes on the advantages and disadvantages of each observational approach. When finished, ask the groups to share their findings. Use the answer key provided with the handout to keep the discussion focused.

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> Go back to the list of observation uses developed in Step 3. For each use, have participants decide on the approach for that observation. To illustrate, suppose that one use on the list was *to get to know children better*. Staff might then decide that good observational approaches include *running records, journal entries, and anecdotal records*. All these methods are appropriate because they provide in-depth information about children.

5. (a) Distribute *Handout 2: What Would You Recommend?* to the group. Have participants work in pairs to complete the worksheet.

(b) When the participants have completed the worksheet, discuss their choices. Ask them why they selected a particular technique, what they felt to be its advantages, etc.

(c) Have participants select one approach and over the course of a week try it out on a child of their choosing. They should record their experiences to share at a future training session. Ask them to note what went well during the observation and any problems they encountered.

Activity 1–2: Observation Has Many Forms

Purpose: In this activity, participants will be introduced to a variety of observational approaches and instruments and will build skills in using them.

Outcome:

Participants identify and use a variety of observational methods.

Materials:

Paper, pens
Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?
Handout 3: Observing Strengths and Weaknesses
Handout 4: Try Your Hand at Observation
Appendix A

1. Ask participants to describe on a piece of paper something that they use over and over again—a dollar bill, for example. After they finish, ask them to think about what they remembered. Then let them look at a real dollar bill and discuss how what they remembered about the dollar compared to what they can actually see and feel.

2. Give participants time to look through the variety of observational materials found in *Appendix A*. Meanwhile, distribute copies of *Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?* and *Handout 3: Observing Strengths and Weaknesses*. Ask participants to use these worksheets to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and the purposes for which they seem best suited.

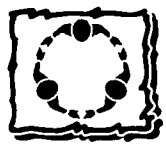
   When participants have completed the worksheet, use the answer key for Handout 3 to go over their answers.

3. Help participants identify three uses of observation that they regularly employ. Then work with participants to select appropriate approaches for conducting these observations.

4. Give participants three copies each of *Handout 4: Try Your Hand at Observation* and ask them to complete a form for each observational experience identified in Step 3.

5. Schedule meetings with the participants to discuss their experiences.

Activity 1–3: Off and Running



Purpose: In this activity, participants will learn to write accurate and objective running records.

Outcome:

Participants write a running record accurately and objectively.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Videotape clip
Handout 5: Running Record Recording Form
Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording
Appendix B

1. Begin this session by reviewing running records—what they are, how they are recorded, and what purposes they serve in Head Start. Encourage participants to share their experiences with using running records.

2. Introduce the featured activity for this workshop: observing and recording a running record.

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> To standardize this activity, all participants should view the same scene together. A videotape segment that is easily rewound is the best method for this. You can also use existing videotape of children from your program. If you have access to the Head Start videotape *Individualizing in Head Start*, use the segment that runs from 12:53 to 14:19. Turn the sound off as the voice-over is distracting when doing an observation.

3. Discuss with participants how they plan to record their observations. Either work with participants to develop a form or use *Handout 5: Running Record Recording Form.*

Trainer Preparation Notes:

In general, forms for recording running records have two parts:

- A *header*, which has space for the name of the observer and the child being observed, the child's age, the time and date of the observation, and the setting.
- *Space for writing* the observation. Sometimes this space is left blank for the observer to use; sometimes numbers are listed down the left-hand margin so that observers can list events chronologically as they occur.

4. Show the group the videotape segment and have participants record what they see. When they have completed the exercise, ask volunteers to share their running records with the group. As the records are read aloud, discuss the similarities and differences in their running records with the group.

5. Distribute *Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording*. Ask participants to work as pairs and to use the guidelines in the handout to critique each other's running records. When they finish, ask the participants to describe the critiquing experience.

   - *How did they think they did?*
   - *Did they use any non-objective words?*

   Hand out *Appendix B: Red Flag Words* during the discussion. For each of the red flag terms, ask the group to come up with objective alternatives.

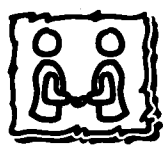
   Record on chart paper any non-objective terms used in the running records. Conclude the discussion by noting that certain attributes such as emotions, motivation, self-image, and intelligence cannot be objectively observed.

6. Introduce the next phase of this workshop by pointing out to the participants that one reason this exercise was difficult was that participants were **not** given a purpose or a focus for their observation. This time, ask the participants to observe the same scene, but with a specific focus or purpose in mind. If using the *Individualizing in Head Start* segment, ask staff to observe the cognitive skills of the boy with blond, curly hair who is wearing a blue tee shirt inside out.

When the group finishes its new running records, have participants share their observations with the same partner they had in Step 5. Ask the participants to again critique each other's work, using *Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording*. When they are done, have the pairs share their experiences with the entire group and ask them if they felt they did a better job of recording the second time. Ask participants to explain why they felt that they did a better job.

7. Conclude the workshop by assigning each participant the task of conducting an observation of a child playing with table toys in either a home or center-based program (indoors or outdoors).

Activity 1–4: Writing A Winning Running Record



Purpose: In this activity, participants will learn to write accurate and objective running records.

Outcome:

Participants write a running record accurately and objectively.

Materials:

Paper, pens
Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording
Handout 7: Accurate? Objective?

1. Distribute *Handout 7: Accurate? Objective?* Work with the participants to complete the worksheet. Use the answer key to guide the discussion. Conclude by noting that certain attributes such as emotions, motivation, self-image, and intelligence cannot be objectively observed.

2. Give each person a copy of *Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording*. Go over each item on the list so that participants are comfortable with all the recording tips.

3. Help the participants to select a child and define a purpose for an observation that they want to do. For example, observe a five-year-old with developmental delays who is using the computer for cognitive skill development or a two-year-old working on self-help skills at home.

4. Working with the participants, develop a form for collecting the running record. Agree on the amount of time to be spent in collecting the data and on the number of observations to be made.

5. Once the observations are completed, have the participants report back to you to discuss their experiences. At the end of the reporting session, work out a plan with the participants for sharing this information with the child's parents.

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Participants working independently or with other staff can build on the skills developed through this guide by completing activities such as the following ones. Some of the activities can contribute to the participants' professional portfolios.

Observation Instruments

Suggest that participants select an observation instrument that they would like to know more about, such as the High/Scope *Child Observation Record* (COR) or the *Work Sampling System* (Meisels), which requires training, and encourage them to get this training. Participants can then share what they have learned with their colleagues. For example, they can plan how they will incorporate use of these observation instruments into the program and discuss this use at staff meetings. *Appendix E* contains information on ordering these and other selected observation instruments.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Information learned about the observation instrument

Reliability

Encourage participants to improve their observation skills by becoming reliable observers. Reliability is the ability to record information so that if the observation were rerecorded, the new record would be almost identical to the previous one and substantially the same as someone else's observation of the scene. The ability of a person to consistently observe in the same way over time is known as **intra-rater reliability**. The ability of two observers to be consistent in how they observe is known as **inter-rater reliability**. Both are important because they ensure the integrity of the results.

To achieve intra-rater reliability, the observation is on a specific focus with a predetermined system for recording information using objective words. Inter-rater reliability is gained through practice and familiarity.

Have participants work on establishing high inter-rater reliability by practicing on checklists and rating scales. The *Developmental Profile for Early Childhood Education*—preschool or infant and toddler versions (Abbott-Shim & Sibley), the *Early Childhood Rating Scale* (ECERS), or the *Infant & Toddler Rating Scale* (ITERS) (Harms & Clifford) lend themselves to this effort. *Appendix E* contains information on obtaining these instruments.

Participants can work in pairs to complete these checklists and rating scales. Each should complete the form independently and then meet to compare results. Dividing the number of items on which there was agreement by the number of possible items on the instrument produces an inter-rater reliability score. Observers should strive for at least 85 percent agreement.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Completed checklists

Create Observation Forms

Have participants experiment with making forms that they can use to collect anecdotal records or running records. When they develop a model form they like, ask them to share it at staff meetings so that others can adopt it for their use. Compile the new forms into a notebook for all staff's use. Encourage participants to keep copies of these forms in an observation suitcase or in a key area of the classroom so that they are always available for planned and unplanned observations.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Forms for anecdotal or running records

Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?

As you examine each observation tool, think of the advantages and disadvantages of using each approach. Here are some guiding questions to help you.

- Can this kind of observation be completed without training?
- Is it easy to use?
- Does this approach produce accurate information?
- Does this approach produce objective information?
- What kinds of information will this approach give me?
- Does this kind of observation require advanced writing skills to use it?
- Does the observation have to be done while it is happening, or can it be recorded later?
- Does the observation require a lot of my time?
- What materials do I need to conduct the observation?
- Do backup staff have to work with the children while I am using this approach?
- Can I use my own form for recording behavior, or do I need a standardized one?
- How often do I need to use this tool in order to have useful information?
- Would I be comfortable using this approach?
- Can parents be easily trained to use this approach?
- How does this approach support Head Start's goals for children and families?

Note: Use with Activities 1–1 and 1–2

Handout 1: What's Helpful, What's Not?—*Answer Key*

There are no right or wrong answers for Handout 1. The following chart lists some advantages and disadvantages of the observation tools.

Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages
Running Record	■ Format is easy to learn; requires only paper and pencil to implement ■ Can be used in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes ■ Collects information accurately and objectively ■ Can focus attention on one child ■ Can find out aspects of a child's behavior that could be unnoticed	■ Requires practice to refine skills; training helps observers be more reliable ■ Difficult to record everything observed; may need to develop system of abbreviations ■ Requires good writing skills ■ May need backup support if done for extended period
Anecdotal Records	■ Can be done after the fact (minimum time with minimum effort) ■ Does not require training or extensive writing skills ■ Parents could readily do	■ Quality of information depends on abilities of observer ■ Reported behaviors may not be typical ■ Provide only minimal information unless done with consistent regularity
Diary Observations	■ Illustrate children's development over time and pinpoint patterns in behavior ■ Provide a history of a child's experiences ■ Training not required ■ Can be done after the fact ■ Parents might enjoy doing	■ Unreliable—quality and length of entries depend on observer ■ Unsystematic—regularity of entries depends on observer ■ Writing skills required ■ Biases difficult to remove from the approach
Checklists	■ Do not rely on judgments; force observer to decide ■ Easy to use and no writing skills required ■ Some require training, many do not ■ Can be used in various settings to meet many purposes	■ Quality of data depends on quality of instrument ■ Usefulness depends on comprehensiveness of instrument ■ Provide no information on frequency of observed behaviors ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments
Rating Scales	■ Good for assessing skills ■ Can be used in a variety of settings ■ Many can be done after the fact ■ Some require training, many do not ■ No writing skills required	■ Judgment-based: observer bias difficult to overcome ■ Quality of data depends on quality of instrument ■ Usefulness depends on comprehensiveness of instrument ■ Tendency for observers to rate at the midpoint and avoid extremes ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments
Sampling Observations	■ Training not needed ■ Reading skills not required ■ Easy to do and can involve children in the data collection process ■ Provide data on frequency of behaviors	■ Can get tedious ■ Require diligence on part of observer ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments

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Handout 2: What Would You Recommend?

Each of the Head Start staff in these three scenarios wants to conduct an observation. Based on what you know now about the available observational approaches, what kind of observation would you recommend to each individual? Give reasons for your choice of approaches under each scenario. Remember, more than one approach can be useful.

SCENARIO 1:

Mrs. Kane, a teacher in a full-day, center-based program, has been working with four-year-old Greg on his social skills. Greg has a slight hearing problem, which was negatively affecting his ability to pick up on the other children's auditory cues. The disabilities coordinator, with Mrs. Kane's assistance, has devised some strategies for him. Mrs. Kane has been using them with Greg so he can relate to the other children better. Mrs. Kane wants to know if these strategies are helping him. What kind of observational approach would you recommend to her?

SCENARIO 2:

Ms. Oliver, a home visitor, works with Mrs. York and her daughter, eleven-month-old Samantha. Lately, Ms. Oliver and Mrs. York have been encouraging Samantha to develop self-help skills such as feeding herself and cooperating with getting dressed. Mrs. York is worried that, by giving Samantha as much time as she wants to do these things, routines are now taking up the whole day. Ms. Oliver has suggested that Mrs. York conduct an observation that will let them know exactly how Samantha spends her day. She thinks Mrs. York will be surprised by the results. What kind of observational approach would you recommend to Mrs. York?

SCENARIO 3:

Mr. Haines, an assistant in a half-day Head Start program, has worked with his sponsoring community agency to obtain a garden plot in City Gardens, located around the block from the Head Start center. He would like to do a long-range observation of the children to chronicle their vegetable-growing project. What would you recommend?

Note: Use with Activity 1–1

Handout 2: What Would You Recommend? — *Answer Key*

Any choice that the participants can substantiate is a good choice. Here are some suggested responses.

SCENARIO 1: A **running record** is a good choice. Mrs. Kane might want to conduct the observation outdoors, where social skills are constantly being put into play. Spending fifteen to twenty minutes, Mrs. Kane would have an accurate and objective record of what takes place during Greg's play with other children. She could then examine this record, perhaps with the disabilities coordinator, to see if Greg is using the strategies they taught him and if the strategies are working.

SCENARIO 2: **Time sampling** seems a natural match for Mrs. York's needs. Ms. Oliver could help Mrs. York develop a form for tallying Samantha's behaviors, say every fifteen minutes. When this observation is complete, Ms. Oliver and Mrs. York will have a good idea of what Samantha's day is like so that they can review daily activities and revise as necessary.

SCENARIO 3: Mr. Haines might want to keep a **journal**, since he wants to observe the gardening project from start to finish. Mr. Haines will need to commit himself to making daily entries, so that he will have a complete chronicle of the children's gardening effort. With the diary entries, he will have at his disposal a history of the children's behavior over time.

NOTES:

Handout 3: Observing Strengths and Weaknesses

For each observational approach, indicate what you think are its strengths and weaknesses. Then decide on the kind of situation you believe is best suited for this observational approach.

Approach	Strengths	Weaknesses	Best Uses
Running Record			
Anecdotal Record			
Diary			
Checklists			
Rating Scales			
Samplings			

Note: Use with Activity 1–2

Handout 3: Observing Strengths and Weaknesses — *Answer Key*

There are no right or wrong answers for Handout 3. The following chart lists some advantages and disadvantages of the observation tools and the best uses for each.

Tool	Advantages	Disadvantages
Running Record ***Best Uses:*** *To observe skills, use of materials, and interactions. For any situation if done objectively/accurately.*	■ Format is easy to learn; requires only paper and pencil to implement ■ Can be used in a variety of situations for a variety of purposes ■ Collects information accurately and objectively ■ Can focus attention on one child ■ Can find out aspects of a child's behavior that could be unnoticed	■ Requires practice to refine skills; training helps observers be more reliable ■ Difficult to record everything seen and heard; may need to develop system of abbreviations ■ Requires good writing skills ■ May need backup support if done for extended period
Anecdotal Records ***Best Uses:*** *To record milestones, incidents, and noteworthy behaviors.*	■ Can be done after the fact in minimum time with minimum effort ■ Does not require training or extensive writing skills ■ Parents could readily do	■ Quality of information depends on abilities of observer ■ Reported behaviors may not be typical ■ Provide only minimal information unless done with regularity
Diary Observations ***Best Uses:*** To document *changes in behavior, events, and development.*	■ Illustrate children's development over time and pinpoint patterns in behavior ■ Provide a history of a child's experiences ■ Training not required ■ Can be done after the fact ■ Parents might enjoy doing	■ Unreliable—quality and length of entries depend on observer ■ Unsystematic—regularity of entries depends on observer ■ Writing skills required ■ Biases difficult to remove from the approach
Checklists ***Best Uses:*** *To track progress; document skill development.*	■ Do not rely on judgments; force observer to decide ■ Easy to use and no writing skills required ■ Some require training, many do not ■ Can be used in various settings to meet many purposes	■ Quality of data depends on quality of instrument ■ Usefulness depends on comprehensiveness of instrument ■ Provide no information on frequency of observed behaviors ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments
Rating Scales ***Best Uses:*** *To determine the degree to which behaviors or skills are exhibited.*	■ Good for assessing skills ■ Can be used in a variety of settings ■ Many can be done after the fact ■ Some require training, many do not ■ No writing skills required	■ Judgment-based: observer bias difficult to overcome ■ Quality of data depends on quality of instrument ■ Usefulness depends on comprehensiveness of instrument ■ Tendency for observers to rate at the midpoint and avoid extremes ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments
Sampling Observations ***Best Uses:*** *To assess the frequency of expressed behavior.*	■ Training not needed ■ Reading skills not required ■ Easy to do and can involve children in the data collection process ■ Provide data on frequency of behaviors	■ Can get tedious ■ Require diligence on part of observer ■ May need to purchase standardized instruments

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Handout 4: Try Your Hand at Observation

Name: **Date:**

Child Observed: **Setting:**

Purpose of Observation:

1. Why did you pick this method of observation?

2. How did you prepare for the observation?

3. Describe how the observation went.

4. Do you think the approach you selected was a good match for the purpose of the observation? Explain.

5. What aspects of the observation do you think went particularly well?

6. What aspects of the observation do you think could have been improved?

7. Will you use this observation approach again? Explain.

8. What do you plan to do with the observational data you collected?

Note: Use with Activity 1–2

Handout 5: Running Record Recording Form

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Child Observed: _____ **Child's Age:** _____

Setting: _____

Time of Observation: **Start:** _____ **End:** _____

Narrative:

39

Note: Use with Activity 1–3

Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording

1. **Record only facts.**

2. **Record every detail without omitting anything.**

3. **Use action words (verbs) whenever possible.**

4. **Observe without interpreting.**

5. **Record only what you see or hear. Be careful to avoid recording something that did not occur.**

6. **Use words that describe but do not judge.**

7. **Record the facts in the order they occur. Order makes a difference.**

Note: Use with Activity 1–3

Handout 7: Accurate? Objective?

Each scenario below describes a behavior that occurred plus two sample observations of this behavior. Decide if the observations are accurate **and** objective. Write down any problems that you find.

Scenario 1

Behavior: Tara and Jonas were at the sand tub. Jonas took a full cup of sand and poured it into the funnel. As the sand came through the funnel, Jonas shifted his body to the left, so that the sand flowed onto the floor. Jonas shook the last bits of sand out of the funnel. Tara stopped digging in the sand and laughed.

Observation 1: Tara and Jonas were at the sand tub. As Jonas took a full cup of sand and poured it into the funnel, Tara laughed. She stopped digging in the sand and helped Jonas fill the funnel. As the sand came through the funnel, Jonas shifted his body to the left, so that the sand flowed onto the floor. Jonas shook the last bits of sand out of the funnel. Both Tara and Jonas laughed.

Observation 2: Tara and Jonas were at the sand tub. Jonas took a cup full of sand and poured it into the funnel. As the sand came through the funnel, Jonas deliberately shifted position, so that the sand flowed onto the floor. As if that were not enough, he shook the last bits of sand out of the funnel. Tara stopped digging in the sand and laughed.

Notes:

Scenario 2

Behavior: Jasmine took hold of the coffee table and pulled herself up. *Good job*, said her mother. *You'll be walking any day now.* Jasmine's mother put her hands on Jasmine's hips and steadied her. After standing in this position several minutes, Jasmine slid to the floor.

Observation 1: *Good job*, said Jasmine's mother, as Jasmine took hold of the coffee table and pulled herself up. Jasmine's mother put her hands on Jasmine's hips and steadied her. After standing in this position several minutes, Jasmine slid to the floor.

Observation 2: Jasmine took hold of the coffee table and pulled herself up. *Good job*, said her mother. *You'll be walking any day now.* To help keep her steady, Jasmine's mother put her hands on Jasmine's hips. After standing in this position several minutes, Jasmine slid to the floor.

Notes:

Note: Use with Activity 1–4

Handout 7: Accurate? Objective? — *Answer Key*

Scenario 1

Observation 1

- Events are out of sequence (Tara laughs early on).
- Events are not accurately reported (Tara does not help fill the funnel; Jonas does not laugh).

Observation 2

- Non-objective wording used (Jonas *deliberately* ...)
- Editorializing occurs (*As if that were not enough*)

Notes:

Scenario 2

Observation 1

- Information omitted (You'll be walking any day now.)

Observation 2

- Action interpreted (to help keep her steady)

Note: The word *steady* is being used in two different ways: steadied used as a verb, which is correct usage, and the use of steady in the above example, which provides motivation for behavior.

Notes:

Overcoming Observation Challenges

In this module, participants learn to conduct accurate and objective observations.

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, staff will be able to:

- Identify personal biases they have that could interfere with conducting and recording observations objectively
- Take corrective actions to overcome personal biases in order to conduct objective observations
- Identify and address program-related challenges that impact the staff's ability to regularly conduct observations
- Develop a plan for overcoming challenges to observing and recording children's behavior

Key Concepts

- In a quality early childhood program, observation is a part of the daily program.
- Observing and recording children's behavior is planned and ongoing.
- Preconceived notions can adversely affect the accuracy and objectivity of observations.
- Education staff understand that cultural differences impact perception and that they cannot let their personal biases interfere with conducting objective observations.

Background Information

Most everyone agrees—in theory at least—that observing and recording children's behavior are important parts of quality early childhood education programs. Yet, accurate and objective observing and recording are an ongoing challenge in many Head Start programs for two main reasons:

- Preconceived notions
- Logistical issues

Preconceived Notions

Preconceived notions are stereotypical opinions that people hold about one another. They are attempts to *pigeonhole* people in particular ways. Like most stereotypes, they are often rooted in fact and experience.

The problem with preconceived notions is that they tend to *blur* one's vision. If one believes that people will behave in a certain way, there is a predisposition to observe those behaviors even if the facts are contradictory. People tend to see what they want to see.

Having preconceived notions is part of human nature. More often than not, they are not done willfully. Rather, they occur because most people have an instinctive desire to simplify things into predictable patterns. One tends to view one's fellow human beings according to ascribed labels, rather than seeing them as multifaceted.

An observer's preconceived notions can interfere with the collection of objective data. By typecasting children, staff may cut themselves off from the possibilities of observing subtleties in behavior.

What can staff do to remedy this situation? There are several strategies that can help. First, staff can become aware that the problem exists. Knowing one has a problem is the first step in overcoming it. Second, staff can be watchful for ways in which preconceived notions influence their interactions and observations. This will keep them on guard against acting on these notions. Third, staff can also ask supervisors and colleagues to observe along with them to make sure the recorded observations are objective. By understanding how preconceived notions work, staff can be sure that their preconceptions do not influence accuracy and objectivity.

Logistical Challenges

Effective observation has logistical challenges. This primarily relates to making time in the daily schedule for observing and recording. In her article in *Young Children*, Ann Benjamin[1] highlights this problem:

> *In principle, observation can be used to strengthen virtually every aspect of an early childhood program. In practice, taking the time to observe and record information often competes unsuccessfully with other teaching and administrative responsibilities, leading many practitioners to despair of ever finding the time or opportunity to keep careful, consistent, systematic observational records.*

As with preconceived notions, the best way for staff to overcome logistical challenges is to face them directly. Rather than getting caught up in

[1] From Ann Benjamin, "Observations in Early Childhood Classrooms: Advice from the Field," *Young Children* 49 (September 1994), 14.

what cannot be done, the best approach is to brainstorm solutions. The following strategies can be used to overcome logistical challenges:[2]

- Schedule observation time for doing running records regularly into the program day and include it on the weekly and monthly schedules.
- Supplement running records with other forms of observation such as anecdotal records, checklists, and rating scales. Include times for doing these observations in the written schedule.
- Arrange with supervisory staff to have substitute staff, parent volunteers, or supervisory staff present during scheduled observation periods so that staff are free to observe without having to worry about the children.
- Establish a schedule for observing children in individual interest areas so that all interest areas are evaluated on a rotating basis. Ensure that it is not just the children encountering problems who are observed regularly. Developmental observations might be appropriately scheduled one month after children are enrolled.
- Assemble observational materials and put them at predetermined observation stations to encourage their use. For example, prepare a prop box or kit containing observational materials.
- Suggest staff wear clothing or aprons with pockets containing index cards or Post-Its so they can quickly record observations.
- Enlist parent volunteers and even children to assist in some types of observation. For example, parents can complete time or event sampling checklists of their children. Children can track how often they use activity areas by putting clothespins in a bottle every time they enter the block or art area.
- Observation schedules should be periodically reviewed and updated to be sure that they are realistic for the early childhood program.

[2] From Laura J. Colker, *A Trainer's Guide to Observing Young Children: Learning to Look, Looking to Learn* (Washington, D.C.: Teaching Strategies, 1995), 44.

Activity 2–1: Scotty Must Have Done It!

Purpose: In this activity, participants will learn to recognize and address their preconceived notions about children and how they affect the ability to observe accurately and objectively.

Outcomes:

Participants identify personal biases that they have that could interfere with conducting and recording observations objectively.

Participants take corrective actions to overcome personal biases in order to conduct objective observations.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 8: Scotty Must Have Done It!

1. Begin the session by distributing copies of *Handout 8: Scotty Must Have Done It!* Ask for a volunteer to read the handout aloud, as the rest of the group follows along.

2. (a) Using this anecdote as a springboard, discuss the Scotty situation. Have the group focus on Sue Bredekamp's realization that it was she who had a problem, not Scotty. Ask participants if they too have ever labeled children in their care as troublemakers (like Scotty). How does a label affect the ability to see children objectively?

   (b) Ask participants to reflect on other labels that they have given children. For example, do they view particular children as helpers or whiners?

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> Labels do not have to be negative to adversely affect objectivity. For example, a teacher can see a child as a *helper*—a positive attribute. Yet, thinking of a child in this preconceived way may lead to negative consequences, such as giving this child too much responsibility.

3. Expand the discussion to include preconceived notions about the children's families. Ask the participants if they ever labeled parents: Max's mother cannot hold a job; everyone in the Howard family is a self-starter. Labels such as these can also affect the way staff view and observe children.

4. Have the full group form small groups. Assign each small group the task of developing a list of strategies that the participants can use to prevent preconceived notions from being a problem during observations.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Among the safeguards participants are likely to list are:

- Acknowledge that most people have some preconceived notions; denying their existence does not make the problem go away.
- Avoid attaching labels to children. Positive labels can be equally as damaging to objectivity as negative ones.
- Before doing an observation, list any preconceived notions about the child and his or her family.
- Anticipate examples of the child's behavior in which these notions might come into play. For example, if participants view Emily as a needy child, they might expect her to cling to adults while on the playground.
- Be on the lookout for examples of supporting behavior, so that staff observe what they actually see—not what they think they will see.
- Do not overcompensate. The goal in this situation is to be objective, not to see things in a different light. A *shy* child, for example, may still play alone when being observed.
- Be sure to check yourself for biases regularly.
- Consider asking someone else to be an observation partner to ensure objectivity and reliability.

5. Have each small group share its list with the full group. As each group reports, have a volunteer from the group record the groups' lists on chart paper.

6. Encourage participants to share the list of strategies they developed with colleagues at staff meetings.

Activity 2–2: Breaking Down Preconceptions

Purpose: In this activity, participants will see how their preconceived notions about children interfere with their ability to observe accurately and objectively and that these notions must be recognized and addressed.

Outcomes:

Participants identify personal biases that they have that could interfere with conducting and recording observations objectively.

Participants take corrective actions to overcome personal biases in order to conduct objective observations.

Materials:

Paper, pens
Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording
Handout 9: Labels and Objectivity
Handout 10: Tips for Overcoming Preconceived Notions during Observation
Handout 11: Keeping Preconceptions in Check

1. Distribute copies of *Handout 9: Labels and Objectivity* to participants. As they complete the worksheet, discuss with participants how these labels could affect these children, the childrens' families, and their ability to observe.

2. Talk with the participants about how they can compensate for preconceived notions. Distribute *Handout 10: Tips for Overcoming Preconceived Notions during Observation.* Go over the list, and add to it according to the participants' input.

3. Work with participants to select a child in their classroom or home-based setting about whom they feel they have a preconceived notion. (For example, she's shy, a leader, aggressive, or cooperative.)

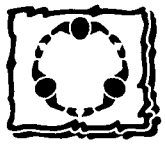
   Distribute *Handout 11: Keeping Preconceptions in Check.* Ask the participants to predict how they think this child will act in an outdoor play situation.

   After the discussion, ask participants to conduct an actual observation using both *Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording* and *Handout 10: Tips for Overcoming Preconceived Notions during Observation.* When participants have completed the observation, review the activity with them. In particular, discuss how the observation results compared with what they thought they would observe.

4. As a concluding activity, work with participants to develop a set of procedures they can follow to ensure that preconceptions do not influence their objectivity when conducting future observations.

5. Have participants share the topic of preconceived notions with parents. Encourage participants to talk with parents about the possibility that they, too, may have preconceived notions about their child, such as she is lazy, too nice, slow, or responsible. Explain that this type of notion affects their ability to objectively observe their child.

Activity 2–3: Making Time for Observation



Purpose: In this activity, participants will identify and address logistical challenges that make it difficult to observe children regularly.

Outcomes:

Participants identify and address program-related challenges that impact on the staff's ability to regularly conduct observations.

Participants develop a plan for overcoming challenges to observing and recording children's behavior.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 12: Overcoming Observation Challenges

1. Write the following question on chart paper:

   Why, if everyone agrees observation is so important, is it not done more regularly?

   Ask the group to respond with their opinions. Write a list of reasons as responses are given.

2. With the group's input, organize the responses into categories on chart paper.

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> Most responses will probably fall into these categories of challenges:
>
> - Lack of needed skills in observing and recording
> - Inability to locate appropriate instruments (including resources for purchasing standardized instruments)
>
> *(Continued)*

Trainer Preparation Notes (Continued):

- Time constraints
- Recordkeeping problems
- Confidentiality requirements (see *Appendix C*)

Participants may also come up with a category that disputes the premise of this exercise—namely, that some staff are not convinced of the value of observation.

3. Break the full group into working groups equal to the number of categories identified in Step 2. Assign each group one category and ask participants to brainstorm solutions to the challenge. When finished, have the work groups present their suggestions for overcoming challenges to the full group.

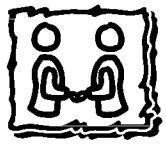
Trainer Preparation Notes:

Use strategies in the Background Information section of this module to supplement the participants' solutions.

4. Distribute *Handout 12: Overcoming Observation Challenges*. Direct participants to use this form to develop an action plan that they can use in their classroom or home-visitor setting.

5. Have participants implement the action plans they developed in their work setting.

Activity 2–4: No Excuses



Purpose: In this activity, participants will identify and address logistical challenges that make it difficult to observe children on a regular basis.

Outcomes:

Participants identify and address program-related challenges that impact on the staff's ability to regularly conduct observations.

Participants develop a plan for overcoming challenges to observing and recording children's behavior.

Materials:

Chart paper, pens
Handout 12: Overcoming Observation Challenges
Handout 13: Reflections on Observations
Handout 14: How Did It Go?

1. Direct participants to keep a journal of all observations that they conduct for one week.

2. Reconvene staff in one week's time. Distribute *Handout 13: Reflections on Observations*. Direct staff to complete this handout.

3. Go over Handout 13, focusing the discussion on question 5. Review with staff the problems encountered.

4. Distribute *Handout 12: Overcoming Observation Challenges*. Have participants complete the worksheet. Help participants to pinpoint the logistical challenges that impact their ability to regularly conduct observations and to come up with workable solutions.

5. Work out a timetable with participants for implementing the solutions identified in Step 2.

6. Direct participants to record their reactions to implementing these strategies on *Handout 14: How Did It Go?* Have participants report back on a regular basis.

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Participants working independently or with other staff can build on the skills developed through this guide by completing activities such as the following ones. Some of the activities can contribute to the participants' professional portfolios.

Developing Workshops

Ask participants to work with the mental health coordinator to conduct workshops on diversity that further explore the topic of preconceived notions as related to observation. During the workshop, staff can examine their biases and work proactively to develop strategies to counteract any personal biases they have.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Handouts and notes from the workshop

Videotaping Children

Encourage participants (with parental permission) to regularly videotape children in the home, indoors, and outdoors. Staff can then view these tapes and make observations at their leisure. Participants can also share this footage with parents as a means of dialoguing with parents about their child.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Notes from parent conferences

Creating an Observation Suitcase

Have staff put together an observation suitcase that they can bring with them on home visits to share with parents. Inside the suitcase might be a clipboard, paper, pens, a disposable camera, a timer, counters, a tape recorder, tape, Post-Its, and index cards.

Possible Portfolio Entry: List of contents for the observation suitcase

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Handout 8: Scotty Must Have Done It!

The following excerpt is from a videotape of the Early Childhood Professional Development Network (ECPDN), Seminar 12, Phase I, which focuses on developmentally appropriate practices. ECPDN was a four-year training program funded by the Head Start Bureau for classroom teams in geographically remote areas. Filmed on December 4, 1992, this excerpt is part of an interview with Dr. Sue Bredekamp, the Director of Professional Development for the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

Whenever I think of guidance of socio-emotional development, I think of my own personal experience teaching. I had a child in my class [for] two years in a row who was quite a challenge. His name was Scott. I remember everything about him very vividly. (I am sure some of you have children like this in your classroom!)

One day something negative happened in the classroom, and a chorus of children said, ***Scotty did it***.

I realized that Scotty wasn't there that day. At that point, I knew that I had a problem. I had done something that communicated, not just to all the children in the classroom—but certainly to Scotty—that he was a bad boy. Somehow, I had to change my behavior. I was not helping him to develop positive social strategies.

What I started to do was to observe Scotty very carefully, and what I found was that some of the things he did that got him in trouble were really strengths. He had incredibly good fine motor coordination—which meant that he could get into all kinds of difficulties in the classroom. So what I decided to do was to build on this strength and give him activities to do and ways in which he could help me as the teacher.

Not overnight—but in a couple of months, I could see a total change—not only in the way he related to me, but to the rest of the children in the classroom.

Note: Use with Activity 2–1

Handout 9: Labels and Objectivity

It is almost impossible not to have some preconceived notions about children. The chart below lists some common notions about children. Think of a child in your care now or previously that you labeled with one of these ideas. Then reflect on how this label influenced your behavior toward this child, your behavior toward the child's family, and your ability to objectively observe the child. Fill in as many of the cells in the chart as apply. A sample is provided below.

Label/Child Labeled	Effect on Child	Effect on Family	Effect on Observation
Helper (Maurice)	I regularly appointed him as room helper. Each time a mess appeared, I asked Maurice to help clean it up. Because he is such a good helper, I didn't give him the opportunity to try out other roles.	I praised Maurice so much, his mother gave him chores at home—probably more than he would ordinarily do. I'm afraid he missed some fun times because he was so busy helping out.	I only saw Maurice in this one role. While I thought this was positive, I realized I always placed him in helping situations. All my observational data of Maurice are helping behaviors.
Loner			
Whiner			
Shy			
Bully			
Follower			
Daydreamer			

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Note: Use with Activity 2–2

Handout 10: Tips for Overcoming Preconceived Notions during Observation

- Acknowledge that most people have some preconceived notions; denying their existence does not make the problem go away.
- Avoid attaching labels to children. Positive labels can be equally as damaging to objectivity as negative ones.
- Before doing an observation, write down any preconceived notions you might have about the child and his or her family.
- Anticipate examples of the child's behavior in which these notions might come into play. For example, if you view Emily as needy, you might anticipate that she would cling to adults while on the playground. This might make you be on the lookout for behavior that confirms your expectations.
- Be watchful for examples of this type, so that you are observing what you actually see—not what you think you will see.
- Do not overcompensate. Your goal in this situation is to be objective, not to learn to see things in a different light.
- Be sure to check yourself for preconceived notions.
- Consider asking someone else to observe with you to ensure objectivity and reliability.

Note: Use with Activity 2–2

Handout 11: Keeping Preconceptions in Check

Think about a child in your care whom you have labeled in some way—as shy, aggressive, helpful, etc. Now imagine that you are observing that child at play outdoors. You will be conducting a fifteen-minute observation of this child.

1. Answer the following questions **before** conducting your observation.

   - What do you expect to see during this observation?
   - How do you suppose the child will act?
   - How do you think the child will react to other children? How will the other children react to this child?

2. Review *Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording* and *Handout 10: Tips for Overcoming Preconceived Notions during Observation.* Conduct your observation, making every attempt to **not** see the child in a preconceived light. Answer **after** conducting the observation.

   - What did you observe?
   - Did the child react as you thought he or she would?
   - How about the other children?

3. Did being conscious of your preconceived notions about this child help you to observe more accurately and objectively? Why or why not?

4. In what ways did this exercise affect the way you will observe children in the future?

Note: Use with Activity 2–2

Handout 12: Overcoming Observation Challenges

Observing and recording children's behavior is basic to quality. Identify the challenges that prevent you from regularly including observation in your daily program. Then, for each challenge, think about how you will overcome it. Your goal is to make all challenges go away. To illustrate this process, one challenge and one solution are completed.

Planning for Observation

Challenge	*Solution*
Not enough staff to *cover* for me while I observe	Arrange for staff from Room 2 to serve as backup for me—my education coordinator approved this.

Organizing and Conducting

Challenge	*Solution*

Recordkeeping and Confidentiality

Challenge	*Solution*

Note: Use with Activities 2–3 and 2–4

Handout 13: Reflections on Observations

1. What types of observations did you conduct?

2. How did you decide which approaches to use?

3. Were you able to conduct observations of all the children that you wanted to?

4. Did you plan out the observations?

5. Did you run into any problems when conducting the observations? If so, which ones?

6. How did you use the observations?

7. With whom did you share the results of the observations?

8. How did you store the completed observations?

9. What could you have done differently to improve the observation process?

Note: Use with Activity 2–4

Handout 14: How Did It Go?

Date Change Was Implemented	Challenge Addressed	Strategy Used	What Happened?

Note: Use with Activity 2–4

Working with Parents to Enhance Observations

In this module, participants develop strategies for parents in observations of children.

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, staff will be able to:

- Include parents in the observation process
- Use observation as a tool for answering parents' questions and concerns about their children
- Work with parents as partners to better serve Head Start children

Key Concepts

- Early childhood professionals realize that parents play an important role in the observation process.
- Observations are stored in children's portfolios.
- When parents and Head Start staff work together, the child is best served.

Background Information

Parents are an integral part of observing and recording children's behavior. Since they know their children best, their input is vital to the observation process. Therefore, they can serve as members of the observation team or as observers in their own right. The following list summarizes the specific benefits of using parents in this role. Parents can help in the following ways:

- Supplement staff observations with their own observations.
- Assist staff in completing checklists and conducting other forms of observation during screening of their children.
- Provide observational information to determine if children need referrals.
- Assist staff with the ongoing assessment process by conducting classroom or home observations of children.
- Provide insight to staff in interpreting observational data of their children.

- Provide feedback to staff about the observations, including areas that staff and families want to target to work on with the child. These include both strengths and problem areas.
- Suggest areas in which staff can focus their observations.
- Assist in making the observation process more reliable by doing observations with staff.

Parents as Observers

For parents to be effective, education staff may need to train parents to be accurate and objective observers. At a minimum, parents must know the following principles:

- Observations are a way to obtain information about how children learn and develop.
- A variety of methods and tools are used to systematically observe children.
- To be accurate, observers record only the facts in the order in which they occur.
- To be objective, observers use descriptive words that do not judge or interpret.

Practice is a necessary part of training. Staff work in partnership with parents so they can learn to record events accurately and objectively. A workshop, a parent education meeting, or a home visit is an effective training opportunity.

Staff as Mentors

To help parents develop the skills as reliable observers, staff can be their mentors. Working independently but simultaneously, each parent and staff member can observe and record children at play for a period of twenty to thirty minutes. When finished, they can review and compare their recordings. The more reliable the observations, the more similar the running records will be.

Another approach is for the parent and staff member to work as a team. The parent quietly says what he or she observes, and the staff member records the details. This takes the pressure off the parent to both observe and write at the same time.

Staff can also train parents to use checklists and show parents how to tally behaviors for sampling observations. Parents may want to do such observations to help staff and for their own parenting purposes.

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By encouraging parents to be active participants in the observation process, the validity of the observations increases. In addition, parents often may have insights that can influence how the observations are used. They may also have additional ideas for the types and purposes of future observations.

Activity 3–1: What Would Parents Say?

Purpose: In this activity, participants will examine observational data and decide how parents and others can enhance the observation process.

Outcomes:

Participants involve parents in the observation process.

Participants work with parents as partners to better serve Head Start children.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 15: Portfolio #1—Dana Y.
Handout 16: Portfolio #2—Eduardo H.
Handout 17: What Else Do I Need?
Appendix C
Appendix D

1. Distribute copies of *Appendix D: The Portfolio and Its Use*, which is an overview of the purpose and use of portfolios. Have staff read this material. Distribute *Handout 15: Portfolio #1—Dana Y.* and *Handout 16: Portfolio #2—Eduardo H.* Go over the contents of each portfolio with the group.

> **Trainer Preparation Notes:**
>
> Find out how participants currently store observational data. Do their portfolios resemble those described in the handouts? You might want to bring in some real portfolios with the names of the children crossed out for confidentiality. The group can look at them and make comparisons. (See *Appendix C* on confidentiality.)

2. Have the participants work with a partner. Distribute *Handout 17: What Else Do I Need?* Ask each pair to review the portfolios and then decide on the next course of action. Ask them to decide what additional information they think is needed to have a complete picture of the child. Also, have them list questions that they would ask the child's parents and observations they want parents to do to supplement the child's portfolio.

Trainer Preparation Notes:

If training time is limited, an alternative approach is to have half the partners review Dana's portfolio and the other half Eduardo's. If this is done, have participants fill out the questions in *Handout 17: What Else Do I Need?* that apply to the portfolio they are reviewing.

3. When the partners finish their analyses, have them present their findings to the full group, focusing first on Dana and then on Eduardo. Ask the following questions:

   How similar were the strategies and recommendations?

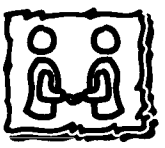
   Were the strategies suggested for Dana similar to the ones suggested for Eduardo?

Trainer Preparation Notes:

Most likely, staff responses will vary in their analyses of the portfolios. This is perfectly fine, providing the data in the portfolio support their judgements. Following the presentations, the group may wish to reach a consensus on the *best* responses to these questions.

4. Assign participants the task of analyzing three portfolios of children they work with in their program. Encourage them to use *Handout 17: What Else Do I Need?* as a guide for this task.

Activity 3–2: Making Parents Observational Partners



Purpose: In this activity, participants will examine observational data and decide how parents can enhance the observation process.

Outcomes:

Participants involve parents in the observation process.

Participants work with parents as partners to better serve Head Start children.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 18: Looking to Parents for Help
Appendix D

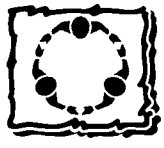
1. Ask participants to bring their running record completed in Activity 1–4. Review why they conducted this observation and what information they gained from the activity.

2. Give each participant a copy of *Handout 18: Looking to Parents for Help*. Have participants complete the worksheet as you discuss it with them. Ask them to list questions they would ask the child's parents and observations they want the parents to do to supplement the running record. For example, the participants might want parents to comment on whether the observed behaviors at the center are typical of how the child acts at home.

3. Direct participants to work with parents using ideas outlined in *Handout 18: Looking to Parents for Help* to train them how to do observations and use the feedback from them. Ask participants to report back to you throughout the process so that you can advise and assist them as necessary.

4. Ask the participants to add the observational information collected in Step 3 to the child's portfolio. To assist participants, provide them with a copy of *Appendix D: The Portfolio and Its Use*.

Activity 3–3: What Do Parents Want?



Purpose: In this activity, participants develop strategies for answering parents' questions about their children through observation.

Outcomes:

Participants use observation as a tool for answering parents' questions and concerns about their children.

Participants involve parents in the observation process.

Participants work with parents as partners to better serve Head Start children.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 19: I've Got a Question

1. Discuss how observation can be a powerful tool for addressing parents' concerns about their children. Ask participants to brainstorm questions that parents could have about their children that can be answered through observation. Have a volunteer keep a list of the questions on chart paper.

2. Introduce the group to the focus of this workshop: role playing to show how education staff can use observation to meet parental

concerns. Because some participants may be awkward or uncomfortable role playing, assure them that they will be role playing in small groups.

3. Form groups of three and distribute copies of *Handout 19: I've Got a Question*. Within each group, one person takes on the role of parent, one the Head Start staff member, and one the observer. Tell the groups that after each role play scenario, they rotate roles so that everyone takes a different role for each scenario.

4. Direct participants to role play each scenario one at a time. After each one, reconvene the full group. Have the observer from each report to the full group. Discuss how staff can address parental concerns according to the presented strategies.

5. Following the last role play, discuss how to use observation data to answer parental questions. A final point of the discussion should focus on how staff can cement the bond with parents by including them in the observation process.

6. Have participants select the parents of a child in their program and ask them if they have any concerns or questions about their child. In discussion with the parents, direct staff to explain how they will use observation data to answer parents' concerns. Participants then conduct an observation and provide the parents with feedback.

Activity 3–4: At Your Service

Purpose: In this activity, participants will develop strategies for answering parents' questions about their children through observation.

Outcomes:

Participants use observation as a tool for answering parents' questions and concerns about their children.

Participants involve parents in the observation process.

Participants work with parents as partners to better serve Head Start children.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers

1. Prior to the coaching session, direct staff to meet with selected parents during arrival, departure, a parent-staff conference, or a home visit. Participants are to interview parents to determine areas of concern or questions that they have about how their children are doing at Head Start. For example, parents might want to know if their child gets

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along well with others or if their child is getting better at using a pair of scissors.

2. Work with participants to formulate one concern or question into a focus for an observation. Together, determine the type of observation(s) that the participants could do and how many are appropriate.

3. Direct participants to conduct the observation(s) according to the agreed-upon plan. Once it is completed, they should then enter these data into the portfolio.

4. When they finish, have participants share the results of their observation(s) with the concerned parents. For example, the parents who are concerned about their child's ability to use scissors would be interested in an observation of the child making a collage.

5. Ask participants to report back with the results of their meeting with parents. Did the participants feel that this exercise strengthened the bond between participant and parent?

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Participants working independently or with other staff can build on the skills developed through this guide by completing activities such as the following ones. Some of the activities can contribute to the participants' professional portfolios.

Training for Parents

Ask participants to develop an outline to use for a parent education class that would train parents on how to observe their children. Participants may want to share their plans with their colleagues at a staff meeting for feedback.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Outline for parent education class

Keeping a Log of Red Flag Words

Have participants keep a running log in their professional portfolios of **red flag** (non-objective) words to be avoided when conducting written observations. Next to each word, they could note an objective term or phrase that is more appropriate. Encourage staff to share this list with colleagues and parents. (See *Appendix B* for a list of red flag words).

Possible Portfolio Entry: Log of red flag words

Developing a Parent Workshop

Encourage staff to develop a workshop for training parents to assist in the observations of children during screening and assessment. Staff could develop a handbook, perhaps in question-and-answer format, that parents could use as a reference tool.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Workshop outline

Handout 15: Portfolio #1—Dana Y.

Portfolio Contents

Note: This section is written as an exercise and contains interpreted observational data. A real portfolio includes only demographic information.

- Background information
- Accident reports
- Dated artwork (paintings, drawings, and collage)
- Photographs of block building, a cooking project, and a field trip to the fire station
- Log of books staff have read with Dana
- Computer printouts of work (artwork, classification program, and number program)
- Audiotape of Dana telling a story she made up about moving into her grandmother's house
- Results of developmental (Denver Developmental Screening) and health screening
- Skills matrix (areas of development staff targeted to work on with Dana)
- Anecdotal records (samples included here)
- Running records (samples included here)

Background Information

Child: Dana Y. ***Age:*** 4 ***Ethnicity:*** African-American ***Language spoken at home:*** English

Setting: Dana is in a full-day, center-based program. Her classroom has eighteen 4- and 5-year-olds.

Family history: Prior to January 1, Dana lived in a three-bedroom apartment with both parents, six older siblings (four boys and two girls) ranging in age from 5–17, and one infant brother. Both parents worked; her maternal grandmother, who lived nearby, provided child care for the baby and before- and after-school care for the older children. During Christmas, Dana's paternal grandmother became ill. Her parents returned to their native Trinidad to care for her and tend to family business. They took the baby and the three oldest children with them. Dana and three of her brothers and sisters moved in with her grandparents.

Skills and interests: Dana is a very verbal child. Her parents reported that she has begun to read and write on her own. She seeks out adults to read books to her and spends extended time in the writing center scribbling shapes and letters. She especially expresses pleasure in storytelling, both by adults and on her own. Physically she is quite petite. Her coordination and balance skills are excellent. Dana likes to play on her own, although she does not mind playing with others when put in a group or a paired situation. She regularly volunteers to be a room helper.

Handout 15: Portfolio #1—Dana Y. (Continued)

Sample Anecdotal Records

10/6 I spent 20 minutes with Dana today in the library corner. She asked me to read every book on the book rack to her. She held the book, pointed to pictures when I asked questions, and corrected me if I didn't read the text exactly right. She's got most of those books memorized! —Mrs. K.

11/2 Dana's father came in today to show the children how to make callaloo, a Trinidadian soup made with okra and spinach (since we did not have any callaloo). The children were very involved in the activity. Most of the ingredients came from our garden. Dana served as the hostess for the occasion. She broadly smiled the whole time. —Ms. G.

1/10 Dana spent 20 minutes playing with dolls in the dramatic play area. Ordinarily she does not spend much time here, so she caught my attention. Much of her conversation with the dolls had to do with their being bad and being sent away from home to live with their grandparents.—Mrs. K.

2/19 Dana asked if I would write a letter for her to her mother who is now living overseas. I suggested she do a tape recording that I would help her make and send. Her whole face lit up at the suggestion. —Ms. G.

Sample Running Records

Child: Dana Y. ***Age:*** 4 ***Observer:*** Mrs. K. ***Date:*** 10/28 ***Setting:*** Library corner during morning free play
Time: Began: 10:15 A.M. Ended: 10:30 A.M.

Dana entered the library area and took the book ***The Loneliest Firefly*** off of the rack. She carried it over to the beanbag chair and sat down. She got up and fluffed the chair with her right hand, while holding the book with her left. *Why you doing that?* Zach inquired. Dana did not answer him. She sat back down in the beanbag chair as Zach walked away. Dana turned the book around and opened it. She ran her hand down the page and began telling a story out loud. *You're a good little bug. Your mamma's proud of you*, Dana said while patting the picture of the firefly. Dana continued turning pages and talking to the firefly. Jasmine came over and sat next to Dana. Dana said nothing to Jasmine and kept talking to the firefly. When Dana turned the page, she patted the firefly and without looking up said, *He's a good bug, Jasmine.*

Child: Dana Y. ***Age:*** 4 ***Observer:*** Mr. M. ***Date:*** 3/5 ***Setting:*** Outside free play
Time: Began: 11 A.M. Ended: 11:12 A.M.

Dana and Jasmine are sitting under a tree with Mrs. K reading a book about tooth care. Dana is holding the book and Jasmine is turning pages. Dana gets up, dumping the book on the ground. Mrs. K. calls after Dana, *What's the matter, Dana? Don't you want to read anymore?* Jasmine shouts, *Come back here, Dana. You come back here! Dana! Dana! Come back here!* Without acknowledging them, Dana goes over to the sand table where Quentin is using the funnel to play. Dana pushes into Quentin, who says nothing. She then takes the funnel out of Quentin's hands and shoves him with her left hip. Quentin shouts, *Hey!* and moves to the other side of the table. Dana pours sand through the funnel, outstretching her arm into the air. She stands on her toes and pours a heaping scoopful of sand into the funnel.

Handout 16: Portfolio #2—Eduardo H.

Portfolio Contents

Note: This section is written as an exercise and contains interpreted observational data. A real portfolio includes only demographic information.

- Background information
- Dated artwork (paintings and drawings)
- Photographs of artwork, Eduardo feeding himself, and Eduardo putting curlers in a large jug
- Audiotape of Eduardo and his mother reading a story together
- Home visit reports of activities and follow-up
- Results of developmental (Batelle Developmental Inventory) and health screening
- Skills matrix (areas of development that the home visitor has targeted to work on with Eduardo)
- Anecdotal records (samples included here)
- Running records (samples included here)

Background Information

Child: Eduardo H. ***Age:*** 2 ***Ethnicity:*** Hispanic ***Language spoken at home:*** Spanish (Guatemalan)
Setting: Eduardo and his mother are in a home-based program. Their home visitor is Miss J.

Family history: Eduardo lives with his parents in a trailer provided by his father's employer. Eduardo is an only child. His parents are still in their teens. Both are attending night school to obtain their GEDs. The father works for a fruit grower and the mother stays home with Eduardo.

Skills and interests: Eduardo is a socially-oriented child. He enjoys playing with neighborhood children and includes his dog Chico in almost all play activities. Eduardo also seeks the company of adults. He has a preference for push and pull toys and puzzles. He spends long periods of time using materials that allow him to experiment with cause and effect—particularly filling and dumping activities.

Physically, Eduardo is of average size. He is walking and running with increasing skill. His fine motor skills are lagging; he cannot scribble with a pencil or put a round block in a form board.

Developmentally, Eduardo has been on the slow side, although his developmental screening did not indicate that further assessment was needed. He has been later than the norm in reaching most developmental milestones (such as sitting, walking, saying his first words, etc.); but once he reaches a milestone, he works on it with deep concentration.

Note: Use with Activity 3–1

Handout 16: Portfolio #2—Eduardo H. (Continued)

Sample Anecdotal Records

9/8 Mrs. H. was very excited because Eduardo had said his first two-word sentence and she wanted me to hear it. She went into the kitchen, and I asked Eduardo where his mother went. He replied, *Mama go!*

12/14 Eduardo helped Mrs. H bake holiday cookies. Eduardo helped measure and sift the flour, crack eggs, stir the batter, and roll the dough into balls. Though he had difficulty with each task, he showed great enthusiasm and delight.

2/9 Eduardo built a tower of three blocks for the first time.

3/11 Eduardo jumped off the bottom step of the trailer's front steps today. His mother says she saw him do this only once.

Sample Running Records *(Note: While all dialogue is written in English, Mrs. H. spoke Spanish to Eduardo in the real observations.)*

Child: Eduardo H. ***Age:*** 2 ***Observer:*** Miss J. ***Date:*** 9/15 ***Setting:*** Living room with prepared playthings
Time: Began: 9:15 A.M. Ended: 9:30 A.M.

Eduardo entered the living room from the hallway, holding onto his mother's hand. Under Mrs. H.'s left arm was an empty water bottle jug. A plastic bag of pink curlers was in Mrs. H.'s left hand. Mrs. H. sat down on the floor; Eduardo did the same. Mrs. H. sat the bottle on the floor. She then dumped the bag of curlers in front of Eduardo. *Eduardo*, Mrs. H. said to Eduardo, *Can you put these curlers in this bottle? Here, let me show you how.* Mrs. H. put two curlers in the bottle, one after the other. Eduardo watched intently. *Now you try*, said Mrs. H. to Eduardo. Eduardo picked up a curler and brought it to the mouth of the jug. He banged the curler against the top lengthwise. He then lifted the curler again, repeating the same procedure. On the third try, the jug fell over. *Here. Watch me*, said Mrs. H., demonstrating the correct procedure for Eduardo. Mrs. H. kept her hand on Eduardo's and helped him guide the curler into the jug. As the curler fell to the bottom of the jug, they both clapped. Eduardo picked up another curler. After four attempts, he worked the curler into the jug. Mrs. H. and Eduardo clapped, and Eduardo squealed.

Child: Eduardo H. ***Age:*** 2 ***Observer:*** Miss J. ***Date:*** 10/8 ***Setting:*** Living room
Time: Began: 11:00 A.M. Ended: 11:10 A.M.

Eduardo and his mother are sitting on the living room couch. Mrs. H. is at one end; Eduardo is nestled into her right side. Mrs. H. is holding a picture book on body parts. The book is opened to a double page spread of a young boy. *Where is the little boy's nose?* asks Mrs. H. Eduardo points to the boy's left ear. *No. That's his ear*, says Mrs. H. *Can you point to your nose?* Eduardo pats his head. *No*, says Mrs. H., moving Eduardo's hand to his nose. *This is your nose. Let's try something else. Point to the eyes.* Eduardo covers both his eyes with his hands and turns to look at his mother, but cannot locate her with covered eyes. *I'm here*, says Mrs. H. chuckling. *That's very good.*

Handout 17: What Else Do I Need?

The portfolios you examined contain a lot of information about Dana and Eduardo. However, what else do you think you need to know to get a better understanding about these children? Would you bring in colleagues and specialists to observe them? What would you share with their parents? What other observational information can parents provide? Think about what is going on with these children and answer the following questions. You may find that it is easier to answer all of the (A) questions first, and then the (B) questions.

1A. What do the observational data you have in the portfolio at this time tell you about Dana's needs, interests, and development?

1B. What do the observational data you have in the portfolio at this time tell you about Eduardo's needs, interests, and development?

2A. Do you think that Dana should be assessed for special needs? Why? Why not?

2B. Do you think that Eduardo should be assessed for special needs? Why? Why not?

3A. What should the staff's goals be for Dana's ongoing assessment?

3B. What should the home visitor's goals be for Eduardo's ongoing assessment?

Note: Use with Activity 3–1

Handout 17: What Else Do I Need? (Continued)

4A. Would you ask any colleagues or specialists to observe Dana? If so, who and for what purpose?

4B. Would you ask a supervisor or specialists to observe Eduardo? If so, who and for what purpose?

5A. What would you discuss with Dana's grandparents? List the specific questions you would ask. For example: Does Dana exhibit any of the behaviors observed at the Head Start center at home?

5B. What would you discuss with Eduardo's mother? List the specific questions you would ask. For example: Does Eduardo act differently when I am not here?

6A. Would you ask Dana's grandparents to do any observations of Dana? If yes, for what purpose(s)? What types of observation would you want them to do?

6B. Would you ask Eduardo's mother to do any observations of Eduardo? If yes, for what purpose(s)? What types of observation would you want her to do?

7A. If Dana's grandparents or parents were to do observations of her, how would you suggest staff train them for this exercise?

7B. If Eduardo's mother is to do observations of him, how would you suggest the home visitor train her for this exercise?

Handout 18: Looking to Parents for Help

The running record you completed in Module 1 provided you with information about a particular child's needs, interests, and development. Is there anything that this child's parents can contribute so you can have a truer understanding of this child? What other observational information could parents provide? What would you share with the parents? Think about what is going on with this child and then answer the following questions.

1. What do the observational data you collected in the running record tell you about the child's needs, interests, and development?

2. Based on what you observed, would you ask any colleagues or specialists to observe this child? If so, who and for what purpose?

3. Based on your observation, what is appropriate to discuss with the child's parents? List the specific questions you would ask.

4. Would you want the child's parents to do observations of the child at home to supplement what you have observed? If yes, for what purpose(s)? What kind(s) of observations would you want them to do? List specifics here.

5. If the child's parents were to do observations, how would you train them to do this?

Note: Use with Activity 3–2

Handout 19: I've Got A Question

Each role play has two parts. In Part A, act out a discussion between a Head Start staff member and a parent with a question about his or her child. In Part B, role play a discussion about the observations made by the Head Start staff member to address the parent's question. In both parts, the observer keeps notes of the discussion in order to report back to the full group. Rotate roles so that everyone in your group is a parent, a Head Start staff person, and an observer.

Role Play #1

Part A: The Parent Has a Question

Parent: You have a 5-year-old son who is going to kindergarten in the fall. Your question for the Head Start education staff member: *Does my child have the skills that he needs to do well in kindergarten?*

Staff Member: You can take your pick of roles: center-based teacher or aide or home visitor. Your task: *Discuss what you plan to observe and how this will answer the parent's question.*

Observer: Your job is to take notes on what takes place during the role play—accurately and objectively.

Part B: After the Observation

Parent: You want an answer to your question.

Staff Member: Your task is to discuss the results of what you observed. Based on your observations, explain if the child is ready for school.

Observer: Your job is to take notes on what happens during the role play—accurately and objectively.

Role Play #2

Part A: The Parent Has a Question

Parent: As a result of screening and assessment, you were told that your 4-year-old daughter has developmental delays. You recently participated in the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for your child. Your question for the Head Start staff member: *Since my child has special needs, will she be able to keep up with the Head Start curriculum?*

Staff Member: Take your pick of roles: center-based teacher or aide or home visitor. Your task: *Discuss what you plan to observe and how this will answer the parent's question.*

Observer: Your job is to take notes on what takes place during the role play—accurately and objectively.

Part B: After the Observation

Parent: You want an answer to your question.

Staff Member: Discuss the results of your observations. Explain how the curriculum is meeting this child's needs.

Observer: Your job is to take notes on what happens during the role play—accurately and objectively.

Note: Use with Activity 3–3

Handout 19: I've Got A Question (Continued)

Each role play has two parts. In Part A, act out a discussion between a Head Start staff member and a parent with a question about his or her child. In Part B, role play a discussion about the observations made by the Head Start staff member to address the parent's question. In both parts, the observer keeps notes of the discussion in order to report back to the full group. Rotate roles so that everyone in your group is a parent, a Head Start staff person, and an observer.

Role Play #3

Part A: The Parent Has a Question

Parent: You recently placed your 18-month-old son in the Head Start center-based program. Your question for the Head Start staff member: *Is my baby having problems with separation?*

Staff Member: Choose a role: center-based teacher or aide or home visitor. Your task: *Discuss what you plan to observe and how this will answer the parent's question.*

Observer: Your job is to take notes on what happens during the role play—accurately and objectively.

Part B: After the Observation

Parent: You want an answer to your question.

Staff Member: Discuss the results of your observations. Explain how the child is reacting to being separated from the parent.

Observer: Your job is to take notes on what happens during the role play—accurately and objectively.

Interpreting and Using Observation Results

In this module, participants learn to evaluate data from observation, recognize the value of sharing it with parents, and use it for decision making about what children need.

Outcomes

As a result of completing this module, staff will be able to:

- Make valid inferences and draw meaningful conclusions about collected observational data
- Determine with whom, in addition to parents, they should share observational interpretations
- Link observation results to program decisions about children

Key Concepts

- Interpreting observational data is a two-step process that involves making inferences and drawing conclusions.
- Interpretations of observational data are not made until data are collected from all sources, including parents.
- Jumping to conclusions can lead to invalid interpretations that can be harmful to the child and/or the child's family.
- Observation plays an essential role in making program-related decisions about children.

Background Information

A recorded observation that is accurate and objective is **valid**—it represents what occurred. If observations are performed consistently over time, they are considered **reliable**. Observations that are both valid and reliable allow staff to use these data in meaningful ways.

Reviewing Observations

How do staff do this? The first step is to look at the **observations as a whole**. One running record, checklist, or time sample does not provide a complete picture of a child. Therefore, staff must look at all the collected observations before interpreting any data. Think of a single observation as a snapshot of a child; staff need an entire album of snapshots before making use of the observations.

Determining Patterns

Once the data are collected, the second step is to reflect on the observations and look for **patterns**. How do the different observations relate to

one another? Are there trends in the behavior? For example, does Sharona consistently cry at the end of the day, right before her grandmother comes to pick her up?

Drawing Inferences

Establishing patterns and trends in recorded observations leads naturally to the third step—making an **inference**. Janice Beaty[1] defines an inference as *a statement considered to be true—tentatively at least—because it is founded upon a previous statement considered to be true*. For this reason, logical inferences are objective in nature.

Drawing Conclusions

The fourth step in interpreting the data is to draw a **conclusion**. Conclusions are educated guesses and are subjective. To draw a conclusion, one looks for the meaning behind what was observed. Staff members draw on their knowledge and experience.

- *Is there an educational or psychological theory that can explain what was observed?*
- *Has similar behavior been observed in the past?*
- *Is this behavior typical of a child this age and at these stages of development?*
- *Is there a cultural explanation for the child's behavior?*

The more objectively the behavior is recorded and inferences made, the more valid the conclusions.

It is important that every attempt be made to interpret the data validly since, by definition, interpretations are both objective and subjective. Therefore, when interpretations are not straightforward, staff should consult parents, colleagues, their supervisor, or specialists for advice because their ideas add insight into what is going on with the child. Staff must be able to support their interpretations with what they observe.

Using Observations

Once the observations are interpreted, the final step is to put evaluations to use. The purpose of observation is to get to know each child better and to respond to each child as a unique individual. Interpreted observational data can be used by staff in several ways, including:[2]

[1] Janice Beaty, *Observing the Development of the Young Child* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 25.

[2] Adapted from Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Social Services, Division of Licensing Services, *Helping and Nurturing Developmental Stages: Systematic Preparation for Credentialing in Child Care and Education (Birth to Twelve Years)*, August 1994, 40–41.

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- *To have a clear picture of the specific needs of individual children.* This includes screening and assessing children to see if special services and/or referrals are required.

- *To have **authentic** or real information on children's skills and capabilities as part of the ongoing assessment process.* This information base helps staff to see how the combination of individual skills and capabilities help a child become a competent, functioning person. Carefully recorded observations show how skills and capabilities are used in the child's world. This information can then be translated into sound decisions for individualizing the curriculum and creating child-centered environments.

- *To gain insight into more effective ways to relate to each child.* By observing children's reactions to their world and their interactions with Head Start staff, staff can evaluate the effectiveness of their actions and can provide information on how they influence each child.

- *To make better decisions about activities that will interest and challenge children, causing them to stretch their intellectual, physical, and social powers.* When staff are aware of what children are like and what they can do, they have a solid basis for deciding which activities will challenge the children and which ones will frustrate them.

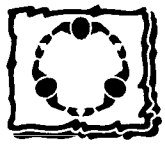
- *To enhance staff's abilities to attend to details and listen carefully and effectively.* These skills are required for improving communication with children and adults, including parents, co-workers, spouse, and friends.

- *To demonstrate interest in each child.* Paying close attention to a child communicates caring, concern, and interest.

- *To demonstrate to families staff's interest in, concern for, and attention to their child.* Parents learn to trust staff and view them as competent professionals when they view them as observers. Also, staff can answer parents' questions about their children with interpreted observational data.

Observing is a skill that goes beyond one's job. It is a life skill with many applications. By learning to observe accurately and objectively, staff can gain insight into broader social issues and problems. Staff can learn to discern their biases and those of others. They can rationally confront these biases and celebrate what is good in their communities and world. Being skilled in observing and recording enlightens everyone as an individual.

Activity 4–1: Valid vs. Invalid



Purpose: In this activity, participants will learn to distinguish between valid and invalid inferences and to correct invalid ones.

Outcome:

Participants make more valid inferences and begin to draw meaningful conclusions about collected observational data.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data
Handout 21: Making Inferences

1. Begin this workshop by discussing when and how staff should interpret the observational data they collected in previous workshops. Ask participants to reflect on the following questions:

   - *At what point do you have enough data?*
   - *Does every purpose require the same amount of observational information?*
   - *Can one data collection ever be considered sufficient?*
   - *Do observations have to be done daily to get a true picture of a child?*
   - *How would you go about interpreting data?*
   - *How would you know if your conclusions are valid?*

   During the discussion, try to solicit a wide range of opinions and thoughts.

2. Following this discussion, introduce the six-step strategy for interpreting data as described in *Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data*. Focus on how to make inferences that are valid.

3. Divide participants into three groups. Distribute *Handout 21: Making Inferences*. Give only one version to each group. Tell the groups that the vignettes are the same for each version, but that the validity of the inferences varies on each one. For example, one version has all valid inferences, another has all invalid ones, and another has three invalid and two valid inferences.

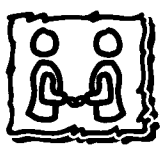
Trainer Preparation Notes:

The answer sheet to Handout 21 is a guide. Some participants could strongly disagree with the provided answers because there may be several valid interpretations or not enough information to make an inference. Use these responses to discuss the difficulty in making valid inferences.

4. Instruct the groups to determine which vignettes have valid inferences and which have invalid ones. If they believe that an inference is invalid, ask them to rewrite it to make it valid. When they are finished, ask the small groups to report back to the full group and to discuss what they learned from this exercise.

5. Assign participants the task of interpreting the observational data in the three portfolios that they examined in Step 4 of Activity 3–1, Module 3. Encourage participants to use *Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data* to assist them.

Activity 4–2: Time for Interpretation



Purpose: In this activity, participants will learn to distinguish between valid and invalid interpretations and to correct invalid ones.

Outcome:

Participants make more valid inferences and begin to draw meaningful conclusions about collected observational data.

Materials:

Paper, pens
Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording
Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data

1. Ask staff to bring in the observation journals that they kept in Activity 2–4: No Excuses.

2. Review selected observations with the participants.

Coach Preparation Notes:

In doing this review, have participants refer to *Handout 6: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording.*

3. Using *Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data*, help participants interpret their observations. Discuss what they should do if they do not have enough data to interpret their observations.

Activity 4–3: The Big Picture

Purpose: In this activity, participants will use observational data to make programming decisions about children.

Outcomes:

Participants link observation results to making decisions about programming for children.

Participants determine with whom, in addition to parents, they should share the results of the observation.

Materials:

Chart paper, markers
Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data
Handout 22: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Dana Y.
Handout 23: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Eduardo H.
Handout 24: Action!

1. Distribute the same portfolios that participants used in Activity 3–1, Module 3. Ask participants to work with the same groups as when they worked on the portfolios in Module 3.

   Distribute *Handout 22: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Dana Y.* and *Handout 23: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Eduardo H.* These handouts contain supplemental information from parents that needs to be put into the portfolios. Ask participants to work in pairs to interpret the observational data in these portfolios using *Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data* as a guide.

2. When they have finished interpreting the data, ask participants to share their conclusions with the entire group. Ask questions such as:

   How do your conclusions compare?

   Did everyone come up with the same general conclusions?

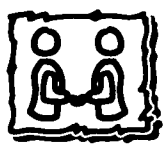
   If not, have the participants resolve their differences so there is a general consensus as to how to interpret the data in the portfolio.

3. Distribute *Handout 24: Action!* Have participants use this worksheet to develop a plan of action for using the observational data in the portfolios.

4. Have each paired group present a plan to the full group. As they report, compare and contrast the action plans.

5. Conclude the workshop by having the group commit to developing action plans for the three portfolios that they analyzed in Step 4 of Activity 3–1, Module 3. Have them use *Handout 24: Action!* to help them with this activity.

Activity 4–4: Where Do I Go From Here?



Purpose: In this activity, participants will use observational data to make programming decisions about children.

Outcomes:

Participants link observation results to making decisions about programming for children.

Participants determine with whom, in addition to parents, they should share the results of the observation.

Materials:

Paper, pens
Handout 24: Action!

1. Distribute a copy of *Handout 24: Action!*, which is a guide to developing an action plan. Go over this worksheet with the participants so that they will understand the process.

2. Using the running record developed in Activity 1–4, Module 1, and updated for the portfolio in Activity 3–2, Module 3, ask participants to develop an action plan for the child that they observed.

3. When participants complete their plan, review it with them.

4. As a final activity, direct participants to implement this action plan for the targeted child.

Next Steps: Ideas to Extend Practice

Participants working independently or with other staff can build on the skills developed through this guide by completing activities such as the following ones. Some of the activities can contribute to the participants' professional portfolios.

Planning for Confidentiality

Have participants develop a plan for confidentially storing and providing access to children's portfolios as needed. This plan, written in their portfolios, can be shared at staff meetings and visibly posted. (See *Appendix C* on confidentiality.)

Possible Portfolio Entry: Confidentiality plan

Creating a List of Specialists

Encourage participants to interview their colleagues for the names, addresses, and phone numbers of experts and specialists in the community who can be called on to do supplemental observations of children or to assist in interpreting observational data. When the list is completed, it can be circulated to all Head Start staff for their use.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Lists of specialists

Scheduling Observations

Ask participants to regularly include planned observations in their weekly and monthly lesson plans. This information can be shared at staff meetings so that coverage, if needed, can be arranged.

Possible Portfolio Entry: Lesson plans

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Handout 20: Interpreting Observational Data

You need to know the following items in order to interpret observational information:

STEP 1 Look at the **observations as a whole**. Because one running record or checklist or time sample does not give a complete picture of a child, look at all the collected observations together before interpreting the data. Think of the single observation as a snapshot of the child; an entire album of snapshots is needed before you can use the observations.

STEP 2 Once the data are collected, the next step is to reflect on the observations and look for **patterns**. How do the different observations relate to one another? Are there trends in the behavior? For example, does Sharona consistently cry at the end of the day, right before her grandmother comes to pick her up?

STEP 3 Establishing patterns and trends in recorded observations leads naturally to the next step, which is making an **inference**. Janice Beaty[1] defines an inference as *a statement considered to be true—tentatively at least—because it is founded upon a previous statement considered to be true.* For this reason, logical inferences will be objective in nature.

STEP 4 The next step in interpreting the data for use in decision making is to draw a **conclusion**. Conclusions are educated guesses. For this reason, they are subjective. To draw a conclusion, look for the underlying meaning of what was observed. Draw on knowledge and experience. Is there an educational or psychological theory that can explain what was observed? Has similar behavior been observed in the past? Is this behavior typical of a child this age and at these stages of development? Is there a cultural explanation for the child's behavior? The more objectively the behavior is recorded and inferences made, the more valid are the conclusions.

STEP 5 In those instances in which interpretations are not straightforward, consider consulting parents, colleagues, supervisors, or specialists for advice. Their ideas can add insight into what is going on with a child. It is important that every attempt be made to interpret the data validly. Since, by definition, interpretation has objective and subjective components, one must be sure to make interpretations that support what is observed.

STEP 6 Once the observations are interpreted, the final step is to use them in decision making. The purpose of observation is, after all, to get to know each child better and to be able to respond to each child as a unique individual.

Note: Use with Activities 4–1 and 4–2

[1] Janice Beaty, *Observing the Development of the Young Child* (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 25.

Handout 21: Making Inferences—Version A

Each vignette below contains an inference about an observation. For this exercise, assume that you have a file of five vignettes that match the facts recorded in the following ones. Then, decide whether or not the inference is valid, and explain your reasons. If the inference is invalid, rewrite it so that it is valid.

Vignette #1: After Mary (age 4) spilled some juice while pouring it for snack, she got a sponge and mopped it up.

Inference: Mary has mastered the self-help skill of cleaning up spills.

Vignette #2: While being diapered, Tomas (14 months) pulled off his socks and tossed them on the ground. He then grabbed at Miss H.'s necklace and pulled on it.

Inference: Tomas can successfully coordinate eye and hand movements.

Vignette #3: Mr. N. picked up Cindy (age 5) out of her wheelchair and placed her on the floor of the table toys area. Mr. N. moved a foam wedge under Cindy's upper torso, so that her head was elevated and her arms reached the floor. He then moved a puzzle of community workers so that it was within Cindy's reach. *Here you go, Cindy*, said Mr. N. as he sat down on the other side of the puzzle facing her. Cindy lifted the puzzle in the air, turned it upside down, and watched the pieces hit the floor.

Inference: The environment was adapted to accommodate Cindy's special needs.

Vignette #4: Chloe (age 3) lifted one of the dolls out of the crib in the dramatic play area. Terrianne (age 3) approached Chloe, looked at the doll, and grabbed it out of Chloe's arms. Chloe screamed and went running to Mrs. S. *Perhaps you can play with one of the other dolls*, suggested Mrs. S. *No! Mine!* said Chloe loudly.

Inference: Chloe does not wish to share the doll.

Vignette #5: Lance (12 months) is sitting on Mrs. O.'s lap. Mrs. O. is reading Lance a story about turtles. Lance reaches down and picks up a dirty tissue from the floor and puts it in his mouth. *Give that to me please, Lance*, says Mrs. O. Lance takes the tissue from his mouth and hands it to Mrs. O. *Thank you*, replies Mrs. O.

Inference: Lance can follow simple directions.

Note: Use with Activity 4–1

Handout 21: Making Inferences—Version B

Each vignette below contains an inference about an observation. For this exercise, assume that you have a file of five vignettes that match the facts recorded in the following ones. Then, decide whether or not the inference is valid, and explain your reasons. If the inference is invalid, rewrite it so that it is valid.

Vignette #1: After Mary (age 4) spilled some juice while pouring it for snack, she got a sponge and mopped it up.

Inference: Mary is accident prone.

Vignette #2: While being diapered, Tomas (14 months) pulled off his socks and tossed them on the ground. He then grabbed at Miss H.'s necklace and pulled on it.

Inference: Tomas does not like to be diapered.

Vignette #3: Mr. N. picked up Cindy (age 5) out of her wheelchair and placed her on the floor of the table toys area. Mr. N. moved a foam wedge under Cindy's upper torso, so that her head was elevated and her arms reached the floor. He then moved a puzzle of community workers so that it was within Cindy's reach. *Here you go, Cindy*, said Mr. N. as he sat down on the other side of the puzzle facing her. Cindy lifted the puzzle in the air, turned it upside down, and watched the pieces hit the floor.

Inference: Mr. N. and Cindy have a special bond.

Vignette #4: Chloe (age 3) lifted one of the dolls out of the crib in the dramatic play area. Terrianne (age 3) approached Chloe, looked at the doll, and grabbed it out of Chloe's arms. Chloe screamed and went running to Mrs. S. *Perhaps you can play with one of the other dolls*, suggested Mrs. S. *No! Mine!* said Chloe loudly.

Inference: Chloe and Terrianne do not get along.

Vignette #5: Lance (12 months) is sitting on Mrs. O.'s lap. Mrs. O. is reading Lance a story about turtles. Lance reaches down and picks up a dirty tissue from the floor and puts it in his mouth. *Give that to me please, Lance*, says Mrs. O. Lance takes the tissue from his mouth and hands it to Mrs. O. *Thank you*, replies Mrs. O.

Inference: Lance is bored with the story being read to him.

Note: Use with Activity 4–1

Handout 21: Making Inferences—Version C

Each vignette below contains an inference about an observation. For this exercise, assume that you have a file of five vignettes that match the facts recorded in the following ones. Then, decide whether or not the inference is valid, and explain your reasons. If the inference is invalid, rewrite it so that it is valid.

Vignette #1: After Mary (age 4) spilled some juice while pouring it for snack, she got a sponge and mopped it up.

Inference: The pitcher is too big for Mary.

Vignette #2: While being diapered, Tomas (14 months) pulled off his socks and tossed them on the ground. He then grabbed at Miss H.'s necklace and pulled on it.

Inference: Miss H. has not made the diapering process interesting enough to hold Tomas' attention.

Vignette #3: Mr. N. picked up Cindy (age 5) out of her wheelchair and placed her on the floor of the table toys area. Mr. N. moved a foam wedge under Cindy's upper torso, so that her head was elevated and her arms reached the floor. He then moved a puzzle of community workers so that it was within Cindy's reach. *Here you go, Cindy*, said Mr. N. as he sat down on the other side of the puzzle facing her. Cindy lifted the puzzle in the air, turned it upside down, and watched the pieces hit the floor.

Inference: Cindy can do anything the other children can do.

Vignette #4: Chloe (age 3) lifted one of the dolls out of the crib in the dramatic play area. Terrianne (age 3) approached Chloe, looked at the doll, and grabbed it out of Chloe's arms. Chloe screamed and went running to Mrs. S. *Perhaps you can play with one of the other dolls*, suggested Mrs. S. *No! Mine!* said Chloe loudly.

Inference: Chloe does not wish to share the doll.

Vignette #5: Lance (12 months) is sitting on Mrs. O.'s lap. Mrs. O. is reading Lance a story about turtles. Lance reaches down and picks up a dirty tissue from the floor and puts it in his mouth. *Give that to me please, Lance*, says Mrs. O. Lance takes the tissue from his mouth and hands it to Mrs. O. *Thank you*, replies Mrs. O.

Inference: Lance is able to follow simple directions.

Note: Use with Activity 4–1

Handout 21: Making Inferences

Answer Key

- Version A: All inferences are correct.
- Version B: None of the inferences are correct. Most are conclusions that cannot be supported by the data.
- Version C: The first three inferences are incorrect; the last two are correct.

Explanations

Vignette #1	After Mary (age 4) spilled some juice while pouring it for snack, she got a sponge and mopped it up. **Inference:** Mary has mastered the self-help skill of cleaning up spills. **Explanation:** Mary cleaned up after herself, which is a self-help skill.
Vignette #2	While being diapered, Tomas (14 months) pulled off his socks and tossed them on the ground. He then grabbed at Miss H.'s necklace and pulled on it. **Inference:** Tomas can successfully coordinate eye and hand movements. **Explanation:** We see Tomas constantly using his physical skills; therefore we can make an inference about this activity without even relating it to diapering, which is the context in which this takes place.
Vignette #3	Mr. N. picked up Cindy (age 5) out of her wheelchair and placed her on the floor of the table toys area. Mr. N. moved a foam wedge under Cindy's upper torso, so that her head was elevated and her arms reached the floor. He then moved a puzzle of community workers so that it was within Cindy's reach. *Here you go, Cindy*, said Mr. N. as he sat down on the other side of the puzzle facing her. Cindy lifted the puzzle in the air, turned it upside down, and watched the pieces hit the floor. **Inference:** The environment has been adapted to accommodate Cindy's special needs. **Explanation:** By observing that there is a wedge enabling Cindy to play with the puzzle, this is a valid interpretation.
Vignette #4	Chloe (age 3) lifted one of the dolls out of the crib in the dramatic play area. Terrianne (age 3) approached Chloe, looked at the doll, and grabbed it out of Chloe's arms. Chloe screamed and went running to Mrs. S. *Perhaps you can play with one of the other dolls*, suggested Mrs. S. *No! Mine!* said Chloe loudly. **Inference:** Chloe does not wish to share the doll. **Explanation:** We can't interpret anything about the girls' relationship other than the fact that Chloe did not wish to share the doll.
Vignette #5	Lance (12 months) is sitting on Mrs. O.'s lap. Mrs. O. is reading Lance a story about turtles. Lance reaches down and picks up a dirty tissue from the floor and puts it in his mouth. *Give that to me please, Lance*, says Mrs. O. Lance takes the tissue from his mouth and hands it to Mrs. O. *Thank you*, replies Mrs. O. **Inference:** Lance is able to follow simple directions. **Explanation:** This inference directly grows out of the observation that Mrs. O. asked Lance to follow a one-step direction, which he did.

Note: Use with Activity 4–1

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Handout 22: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Dana Y.

The following information was added to Dana's portfolio:

Dana Y.

(1) Interviews with Dana's grandparents confirmed that Dana was acting out at home in unusual ways. She often blew up at her siblings. Most often, though, her grandparents observed that she withdrew to her room where she liked to cuddle up with one of her many picture books. Her grandmother also reported hearing her tell her imaginary friend Vincent that if he were not a good boy, his mamma would leave him.

---

(2) Dana's grandmother did a time sampling of her behavior over the course of two hours one Saturday. This is what she recorded:

9:15—Dana in room talking to doll

9:30—Older brother Victor asks her to play outside: she says ***No***

9:45—Dana joins siblings looking at television in living room

10:00—Dana back in room, reading a book to her doll

10:15—Dana talking to parents on telephone, very excited

10:30—Dana says she has stomachache and wants to go to bed

10:45—Dana lying on bed fully dressed, clutching her doll

11:00—Dana at kitchen table eating soup; barely eats any

11:15—Dana still at table, playing with soup

---

(3) Dana's grandmother has spoken to the director about her concern for Dana. She wants to know if the child should see a mental health professional.

Note: Use with Activity 4–3

Handout 23: Supplemental Parent Information for the Portfolio of Eduardo H.

The following information was added to Eduardo's portfolio:

Eduardo H.

(1) Interviews with Eduardo's parents (in particular, his mother) reveal their delight in his sweet disposition and the enthusiastic way he approaches things. His father has no concerns, but his mother is worried because he has trouble grasping things. She is especially concerned because he cannot feed himself with a spoon.

---

(2) Mrs. H. has been keeping a journal. Her primary focus has been on Eduardo's small muscle movements. Her entries support Eduardo's trouble in this area and growing frustration in trying to manipulate objects. For example, she reports that Eduardo kept dropping the jumbo crayon every time he attempted to scribble with it on paper.

---

(3) Mrs. H. has asked Miss J., the home visitor, if perhaps Eduardo should be assessed by a specialist. She is getting increasingly worried that he is falling behind.

Note: Use with Activity 4–3

Handout 24: Action!

Now that you interpreted the observational data, what will you do with it? The following questions will guide you in developing an action plan.

1. What are your next steps?

2. With whom is it appropriate to share your observations and conclusions?

3. Do you think this child needs further assessment? If so, what and by whom?

4. Do you think any colleagues or specialists should be consulted? If so, who and what would they do?

5. How will you use this observational data to individualize the child?

6. How will you individualize your curriculum to meet this child's needs?

7. How will you build on this child's interests?

8. How will you build on this child's strengths?

9. How will you help this child grow developmentally in all areas (cognitively, socially, emotionally, and physically)?

10. What are your plans for ongoing assessment of this child?

11. How and where will you store this child's portfolio?

12. How will you preserve the child's and family's confidentiality?

13. Are there any special ethical issues involved with respect to this child or family? If so, elaborate.

Note: Use with Activities 4–3 and 4–4

Continuing Professional Development

Participants can do many things to sustain and enhance the skills developed in this guide. The following suggestions should be considered starting points.

CDA Program

The Child Development Associate (CDA) credential represents demonstrated competence in the field of early childhood education. Administered by the Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, the CDA is considered to be the standard for the field. To find out how to obtain the CDA, call the Council at 800–424–4310, or write the Council at 2460 16th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20009–3575.

College Courses

Many four-year and two-year community colleges offer courses in child development, human development, and child study—all include in-depth information on observation. These courses can be taken independently (for credit or audit) or to fulfill requirements for CDA or towards a degree. To find out what courses are being sponsored by local institutions, contact the admissions office or continuing education or adult education departments.

NAEYC

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) is the chief professional organization for the field of early childhood education. Joining this organization of 60,000 colleagues not only provides networking opportunities, but learning opportunities as well. NAEYC holds an annual conference, usually in November, that provides hundreds of workshops, seminars, and presentations, including many that are observation-related. NAEYC also publishes a monthly professional journal, *Young Children*, in which observation is often covered. Staff interested in joining NAEYC can call 202–232–8777 or the toll-free number 800–424–2460 or write to NAEYC at 1834 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20009–5786. Those with computer resources and Internet access can find out more about NAEYC on its World Wide Web home page:

http://www.naeyc.org/naeyc/

Workshops/Training

In addition to workshops on observation offered at NAEYC's national conference, workshops are available on the local level. Most states and large cities, such as Washington, D.C. and Chicago, have NAEYC chapters that are dedicated to serving local clientele. As such, they sponsor workshops and bring in experts and guest speakers throughout the year. Contact NAEYC at its toll-free number to locate the local affiliate in your area.

As mentioned earlier in this guide, participants interested in learning more about how to use any of the major, nationally used observation instruments that are for sale, such as the *Child Observation Record* (COR), the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale* (ECERS), or *The Work Sampling System*, can find out about training through the publishers and/or

authors of these instruments. See *Appendix E* for names, addresses, and phone numbers.

Conduct Workshops

Participants may want to sponsor workshops on observation. Taking a leadership role is one of the hallmarks of professional development. Participants may want to work through their local NAEYC affiliate, a community college, parent education program, or adult education program to offer such workshops.

Resources

The works cited below provide the philosophical underpinnings of many of the activities in this guide. It is recommended that the trainer be familiar with their basic contents and make their availability known to participants who need further information.

Beaty, Janice. *Observing the Development of the Young Child.* 2d ed. New York: Macmillan, 1986. Rev. 1995.

This book presents a systematic method for observing and recording the growth and development of children ages two to six years old in an early childhood classroom setting. The author concentrates on observation of the six major aspects of child development: emotional, social, motor, cognitive, language, and creative. Each chapter concludes with a discussion of an actual child observation in the particular area and an interpretation of the data gathered, which is used to assess children. The book can be used by teachers and assistants who are upgrading their observation skills.

Benjamin, Ann C. "Observations in Early Childhood Classrooms: Advice From the Field." *Young Children* 49 (November 1994): 14–20.

This article describes strategies for incorporating observation into early childhood classrooms. The article stresses using observation as a tool of professionalization and is based on the real-life experiences of Wheelock College graduate students.

Boehm, Ann E. and Richard A. Weinberg. *The Classroom Observer: Developing Observation Skills in Early Childhood Settings*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1987.

This guide to observation focuses on collecting data through observation and making valid inferences on that data. Using real classroom data, the authors analyze the strengths and weaknesses of various approaches, focusing on issues of reliability and validity.

Cohen, Dorothy, Virginia Stern, and Nancy Babalan. *Observing and Recording Behavior of Young Children*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1983.

This text describes methods for keeping observational records that provide a realistic picture of children's interactions with the environment and for studying children engaged in such activities as eating, dressing, using materials, relating to other children and adults, and role playing.

Resources

Colker, Laura J. *Observing Young Children: Learning to Look, Looking to Learn*. Videocassette/training guide. 28 min. Teaching Strategies, Inc., 1995.

This videotape is intended for training early childhood educators to use running records. Participants view children at play and doing routines for the purposes of getting to know children better, measuring children's progress, and evaluating their program. The accompanying viewer's guide features five workshops on the topic of observation in early childhood settings.

Commonwealth of Virginia, Department of Social Services Division of Licensing Programs. *Helping and Nurturing Developmental Stages: Systematic Preparation for Credentialing in Child Care and Education: Observation and Recording*. 1994.

This handbook prepares Child Development Associate (CDA) candidates to meet the training requirements for observing and recording children's behavior. The handbook is organized around five objectives that are essential to accurately and objectively observing children and measuring progress. The authors review and evaluate different observation instruments, such as the time sample, anecdotal record, checklists, and conversation or interviews. The handbook contains twenty-one exercises that help the candidate gain an understanding of sound observation and recording practices.

Mitchell, Anne and Judy David, eds. *Explorations with Young Children*. Mt. Rainier, MD: Gryphon House, 1992.

This curriculum, put out by the Bank Street College of Education, includes illustrated observations on infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and school-age children. A chapter by Amy Dombro provides practical advice on conducting observations.

Phillips, Carol Brunson, ed. *Essentials for Child Development Associates Working with Young Children*. Washington, D.C.: Council for Early Childhood Professional Recognition, 1991.

This book has eight units based on the CDA Competency Standards. It discusses characteristics of children as they pass through development stages, describes the skills used by competent teachers of young children, discusses the early childhood profession, and describes the steps in preparing for CDA candidate assessment. The book contains NAEYC's Statement of Commitment and Code of Ethical Conduct.

Sample Observation Records

Sample 1: Running Record

Observer: Ms. Han

Child Observed: Katy

Age: 18 months

Date: 2/5

Time: 9:30 A.M.–9:45 A.M.

Setting: Indoor free play

Katy walked over to the book area, where Mrs. Fernandez, the foster grandmother, was sitting with two-year-old Luis, reading a book. Katy stood for over a minute, watching the two and waving her arms excitedly. Mrs. Fernandez smiled and nodded at Katy, but kept reading to Luis. Luis looked only at Mrs. Fernandez and the book they were reading. Katy walked over to the plastic book bag hanging on the room divider and banged her hand against a book that had a colorful caterpillar on the cover. *Read! Read!* said Katy, banging the book bag with enough force that the bag started swinging.

Mrs. Fernandez came over to Katy and took out the book with the caterpillar. She sat Katy down, who then stuck her legs straight out. Mrs. Fernandez put the book in Katy's lap. Walking back to the bench where she had been sitting with Luis, Mrs. Fernandez said out loud, *Can you wait until I'm through reading to Luis? Then I'll be glad to read to you.* Katy responded by saying *Read!* in a loud voice. She got up, walked over to Mrs. Fernandez, stood there several seconds, and then started to cry. From her sitting position, Mrs. Fernandez picked up Katy. As she cradled the child in her arms and wiped her tears with a tissue, Mrs. Fernandez said, *I guess you can't wait, Katy.*

Appendix A

Sample 2: Anecdotal Record

The following notes are on Post-Its and index cards in a folder labeled **Nunez, Katy**:

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Nunez, Katy</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">9/12
Katy removed the top of a box to retrieve a key ring I had hidden inside.</td><td>9/26
Katy spent 20 minutes in the block area building a tower four blocks high.</td></tr>
<tr><td>9/29
For the first time today, Katy took a nap without fussing.</td><td colspan="2">10/3
Katy's father came into the classroom this afternoon. (It was the first time he had done so!) Katy came to get me to meet her father.</td></tr>
<tr><td>10/15
Katy spent all of her free play today in the house corner with Tomasina, although the two hardly interacted.</td><td>11/16
Katy unzipped her jacket by herself for the first time today.</td><td>11/29
Katy wanted me to read her four books today.</td></tr>
</table>

ERIC

Sample 3: Diary Entry

Tuesday, December 11

Katy's fascination with language has been carrying over to books. It seems that not a day goes by without Katy getting me to spend some one-on-one time with her in the book area. She especially likes it when we sit together under the loft, where the other children can't so easily find us. Katy insists on holding the book and turning the pages whenever we read a story. I can tell from the way she moves her whole body in synch with me that she's following along. Whenever I ask her to find something in a picture, she does so with great gusto. Her vocabulary seems to get bigger every day, since she repeats almost everything I ask her to find in the pictures. It's a real pleasure to see how much Katy is learning to love books!

Appendix A

Sample 4: Checklist

Language Assessment of Mobile Infants[1]

Child: *Katy Nunez* **Age:** *18 months* **Date:** *2/12*

Does the mobile infant:	Yes	No
1. Use sounds to get attention?	x	
2. Understand statements such as *Give it to me* or questions such as *Where did it go?*	x	
3. Look for a person or common objects when they are named?	x	
4. Respond appropriately to words such as *up, bye-bye*, and *pattycake?*	x	
5. Stop his or her activity when you say *no, stop,* or *come here?*	x	
6. Use single words and gestures to indicate *mine, see,* or *more?*	x	
7. Label some people or things?	x	
8. Listen for brief periods to stories and picture books?	x	
9. Use two words together in *telegraphic* sentences?	x	
10. Carry out simple directions (for instance, getting a ball)?	x	
11. Answer simple questions with *yes* or *no?*	x	
12. Use some three-word sentences?		x

[1] Source of checklist: Christine Z. Cataldo, *Infant and Toddler Programs* (California, Addison-Wesley, 1983), 211–212.

Sample 5: Rating Scale

Developmental Assessment of Mobile Infants' Cognitive Skills

Child: *Nunez, Katy* **Age:** *18 months* **Date:** *2/9*

For each item listed below, rate the child's proficiency. The **least** amount of skill in this area is **1**; the **highest** level of skill is **5**. **NP** indicates that this skill is **Not Present** in the child.

Developmental Skill	Skill Level
1. Solves problems on own	NP 1 2 3 **4** 5
2. Able to make choices between clear alternatives	NP 1 2 3 **4** 5
3. Plans action before carrying it out	NP 1 2 3 **4** 5
4. Engages in dramatic play	NP 1 2 3 4 **5**
5. Follows simple directions	NP 1 2 3 4 **5**
6. Imitates animal sounds	NP 1 2 **3** 4 5
7. Looks at picture book and turns pages	NP 1 2 3 4 **5**
8. Scribbles spontaneously	NP 1 2 3 4 **5**
9. Completes three-piece formboard (circle, square, triangle)	NP 1 2 3 **4** 5
10. Refers to self by name	**NP** 1 2 3 4 5

Sample 6: Event Sampling Observation

Child: *Nunez, Katy* **Age:** *18 months* **Date:** *2/15*

Tally of Times	Duration of Stay (in minutes)
1	2
1	6
1	1
1	1
1	11
1	2
1	5
1	–
1	6
1	–
1	–
1	2
1	4
1	5
1	7
1	1
1	–
1	9
1	–
1	–

- Tally of times Katy Nunez entered the book area on 2/15 and stayed at least 1 minute: 14
- Of the 14 times Katy Nunez entered the book area on 2/15, tally of times she stayed at least 5 minutes: 7
- Total amount of time Katy Nunez spent in book area on 2/15 = 62 minutes

Red Flag Words

Red flag words are those that are subjective. Because they do not describe behavior in a factual way, they do not belong in observations. Here are some of the more common red flag words—avoid them!

- **Feelings** cannot be objectively observed. Avoid these red flags: happy, sad, mean, kind, angry, mellow, apathetic, bored, interested, proud, sympathetic, understanding, nasty, mischievous, lazy, crabby, laid-back, cooperative

- **Intelligence** cannot be objectively observed. Avoid these red flags: smart, stupid, bright, dumb, mediocre, above-average, overwhelmed, overachiever, underachiever

- **Reasons for doing things** cannot be objectively observed. Avoid these red flags: provoked, helpful, forced to, tricked, determined, undirected, out-of-control, motivated, spiritual, conscientious, frivolous

- **Self-concept** cannot be objectively observed. Avoid these red flags: self-esteem, competence, weak, pretty, ugly, athletic, strong, secure, insecure

Confidentiality

When dealing with observing and recording behavior, the issue of confidentiality must be discussed. Because observations become a part of a child's portfolio, the same rules that govern the use of portfolios need to be in effect. Here are some guidelines for protecting the confidentiality of children and families:

- Code the children's names to protect their identities, if necessary.
- Use observational techniques that will not break a parent's confidentiality.
- Do not leave observations out of the portfolio where they can be seen by other staff or parents of the other children.
- Provide access to written observation records only to parents and professionals on a **need-to-know** basis. Written parental consent should be obtained before anyone other than the teacher, home visitor, or parent is allowed access to the information.
- Discuss observations with other staff only on a **need-to-know** basis.
- Store portfolios in locked files, drawers, or closets. Limit the number of access keys.
- Determine a policy on how long records are maintained. Typically, records move with the child. When children are ready to transition to school, portfolios are transferred to the school, with the parents' permission.

Conducting observations is a vital part of quality programming. At the same time, it carries with it an ethical responsibility to protect the privacy of Head Start children and families. When in doubt, discuss issues with the education coordinator or program director. In most instances, it is wise to err on the side of caution. The rights of children and families should always come first.

The Portfolio and Its Use

Contents

What goes into children's portfolios? You already know about much of the portfolio's contents. Records from comprehensive screening, developmental assessment (if conducted), and ongoing assessment go in the portfolio. All of your observations—informal as well as formal—should be housed in the portfolio, too.

The other major component of the portfolio is work samples—**examples of children's work that have been saved as records of the children's progress**. You might appropriately include any number of items as work samples. Here are some suggestions:

***AUTHENTIC* OR ACTUAL WORK COMPLETED BY CHILDREN (AT HOME AND IN CENTER-BASED SETTINGS):**

- Drawings, paintings, and collages (including those inspired by stories or music)
- Writing and number writing
- Books dictated and illustrated by children
- Computer printouts of art, writing, or creative experiences
- Graphs of science-related experiments

PHOTOS OF CHILDREN'S WORK:

- Artwork
- Cooking activities created on their own or as part of group projects
- Dramatic play activities
- Block building

WRITTEN RECORDS:

- Questions, issues, and brainstorming notes from observing children in small-group project work
- Logs of books read with the child at Head Start and at home
- Notes and comments by children about their work, including descriptions of artwork recorded by staff directly onto drawings and paintings

- Interviews with children about favorite play activities
- Children's personal reactions to Head Start experiences (for example, after a trip to the pet store)
- Children's self-evaluations of their work

AUDIOVISUAL RECORDS:

- Tape recordings of children reciting stories they have made up
- Tape recordings of children making animal sounds, singing alone or with the group, or engaged in dramatic play
- Videotape recordings of special projects, events, or performances

Suggestions

Education staff and children jointly select the work samples to put into the portfolio. Parents might contribute items such as drawings done at home or notes on examples of behaviors they have observed. Staff should make sure that taken together, the examples of children's work represent the child and reflect his or her progress during the year. They should also show the child's growth in all areas of development: social, emotional, physical, and cognitive. They should also reflect the child's experiences in all interest areas, both indoors and outdoors.

It is recommended that you add something to each child's portfolio every two weeks. Share the responsibility and set a staggered schedule so you do not have to make entries to all of the portfolios at one time. Date each entry with the *month, day,* and *year* to show **when** in the year the work was completed.

At first you might find it difficult to decide what to put in a child's portfolio. It takes practice to become skilled in selecting examples that are truly representative of the child's work. Ask a colleague or your education coordinator for some help. Try to remember that you are creating an ongoing record of the child's growing skills that will be an alternative to a standardized test. Just as a test tries to measure children's progress and mastery of skills, so too should the samples you put in a portfolio illustrate the child's progress and skills. Therefore, if Hakim has just learned to make a tower of blocks, this is a milestone worthy of inclusion in his portfolio. You could complete an anecdotal record or take a snapshot of one of his creations. In the same vein, if Desiree habitually plays with baby dolls in the housekeeping area, then this is a behavior that represents her interests and play preferences. Again, observation notes of her play or an audiotape of her talking to a doll as she feeds it would be appropriate for her portfolio.

Every two weeks, ask children what they would like to include in their portfolios. This helps children make judgments about their work, and they get the message at an early age that self-assessment is an important part of learning and growing. If children need help selecting samples, ask a probing question such as, *Which painting was the most fun to do?* or *Which of these books that we worked on together do you think would be nice to have in a library?*

Organizing the Portfolio

Portfolios are growing documents. To be useful, they must be expandable, durable, accessible, and portable. The containers used as portfolios should fit in the locked storage area, such as a closet with shelves or a tall cabinet with shelves and doors. Accordion files, unused empty pizza boxes donated by a local business, or plastic containers with lids can serve as portfolio containers. As long as the container has enough room for organizing the contents, it is appropriate.

As there will be a number of portfolio entries throughout the year, it is a good idea to group them by subject matter. Within each category, put **dated** items in the container chronologically. The following may be a useful way to organize portfolios:[1]

- **Art Activities** (fine motor development)—drawings, photos of block constructions, collages, samples of writing letters
- **Movement** (gross motor development)—videotapes of movement activities, observations of outdoor play, interviews with the child about favorite games
- **Math and Science Activities** (concept development)—photos of the child measuring during a cooking activity, chart of activities performed by the child in caring for plants, and checklists covering the child's use of creative thinking and problem-solving skills
- **Language and Literacy** (emerging reading and writing skills)—tape recordings of stories, signs written by the child, stories or poems dictated by the child
- **Personal and Social Development** (self-concept, social skills, self-help skills)—observation notes on social skills, chart of the child's choices, notes from conversations with the parents

[1] From S.J. Meisels and D.M. Steele, *The Early Childhood Portfolio Process* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991).

Appendix D

Using the Portfolio

Portfolios serve three major purposes. First, they are a natural vehicle for **sharing information with parents**. Your agendas for parent conferences and home visits can come directly from the portfolio's contents since it is a complete profile of the child's ongoing development. You also have answers to most questions at your fingertips. Suppose a parent wants to know if Ruthie will be ready for kindergarten. You can share the checklist assessment of Ruthie's skills, show examples of alphabet letters that Ruthie wrote spontaneously, and go over the log of books Ruthie explored in the library area. You can also share your anecdotal observations and running records that document Ruthie's refined motor skills, mastery of self-help skills, and creative approach to problem solving. In fact, you will probably have dozens of items to share that will answer the question about Ruthie's readiness.

Second, portfolios help education staff with **planning**. Because portfolios are a living record of children's progress, they provide an ongoing source of information that can be used for individualizing. Just as screening and assessment information were the basis for your original plans for individualizing, the information from portfolios can be used to update goals and plans for each child.

Third, because portfolios move with the child, they **support the transition to school**. With parental permission, the child's portfolio goes with him or her to kindergarten. Thus, the more complete and easy-to-use a child's portfolio is, the easier it will be for the child's new teachers and administrators to offer an appropriate curriculum. You can help children long after they have left Head Start by keeping portfolios that are self-explanatory and representative of children's backgrounds, skills, interests, and needs.

Appendix E

Description of Observation Instruments

Introduction

This guide references several standardized observation instruments. Participants may want to make use of these instruments in their work with children. Although some of these instruments are primarily designed for program evaluation, they all have components that require observations of adult interactions with children. These instruments have all been field tested and lend themselves to being used with a partner to increase inter-rater reliability skills.

Assessment Checklist

Abbott-Shim, Martha and Sibley, Annette. *Assessment Profile for Early Childhood Programs*. Atlanta: Quality Assist, 1987.

This easy-to-use checklist has several versions that would be of interest to Head Start staff: preschool (with separate instruments for research and training purposes), infant, and family child care. The preschool version examines the components of quality in six areas: safety, health, learning environment, scheduling, interacting, and individualizing. All versions may be purchased for $27.75 each from:

Quality Assist
P.O. Box 15034
Atlanta, GA 30333
1–404–577–8880

Rating Scale

Harms, Thelma and Clifford, Richard. *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1980.

The *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale* (ECERS) and its companion instruments, the *Infant & Toddler Environmental Rating Scale* (ITERS) and the *Family Day Care Rating Scale* (FDCRS), are observation-based instruments used to assess the quality of care. All use a seven-point scale that judges caregiver skills. Scores represent care that ranges from inadequate to minimal to good to excellent. The rating scales examine the following components of caregiving: space and furnishings for care and learning, basic care, language and reasoning, learning activities, social development, and adult needs. Copies of versions may be purchased for $8.95 each (sets of 30 extra scoring sheets are $7.95 each) from:

Teachers College Press
Columbia University
1924 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10027
1–800–575–6566
1–212–678–3929

Appendix E

Observation Record

High/Scope *Child Observation Record* (COR) *for ages 2 1/2–6*, is an innovative evaluation instrument that measures the effect of the early childhood program experience on the developmental status of young children. The use of this instrument helps observers to: focus observations to capture meaningful and objective information about child development; streamline the note-taking process; incorporate information gained from the COR into daily/weekly plans for children; empower parents through parent reporting and parent-teacher conference strategies; and develop effective training and monitoring procedures.

The COR KIT, WP1084SET, $90.00, includes all the materials needed for observing a classroom of twenty-five children. Replacement components and Parent Report Forms in Spanish are available separately.

COR Key Experience Notes were developed as a supplement to the COR KIT in an alternative note-taking format for teachers who wish to record COR information in terms of the High/Scope key experiences. Order number WP1092, $4.00.

These materials may be purchased from:

High/Scope Press
600 N. River Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198–2898
1–800–40–PRESS; Fax: 1–800–442–4FAX (4439)

Sampling System

Meisels, Samuel J. *The Work Sampling System.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 1992.

This comprehensive approach to the assessment of children from age three to grade three combines developmental checklists, portfolios, and teacher summary reports. Assessments, which take place three times per year, are designed to reflect the actual goals and objectives of the classroom and to help the teacher keep track of continuous progress. The observation-based developmental checklist examines seven areas: personal/social development; language and literacy; mathematical thinking; scientific thinking; social and cultural understanding; art and music; and physical development. Copies may be purchased (teacher materials are $61, a one-time cost, and student materials are $3 per student and come in sets of 20, 25, 30, 35, and 40) from:

Rebus Planning Associates
P.O. Box 1746
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
1–800–435–3085

Professional Development Opportunities

The High/Scope Educational Research foundation offers two-day seminars on the COR in locations throughout the United States. For more information or to cosponsor a workshop at your location, call 313–485–2000, ext. 218.

The publishers and authors of the other instruments discussed in this section also provide training. For more information, call the phone numbers listed.

ISBN 0-16-042682-0

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
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