3

Observing Children: A Tool for Assessment

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- list purposes of assessment.
- contrast initial and ongoing assessment.
- list the factors to consider in choosing a method of assessment.
- list the advantages and disadvantages of various assessment tools.
- compile a list of contents for a child's portfolio.
- summarize guidelines for observing children.

Terms to Know

assessment
developmental milestones
anecdotal record
checklist
participation chart
rating scale
visual documentation
portfolio

Young children are fascinating to watch. Just ask any new mother, father, or proud grandparent! A young child's awkward attempts to try new skills or early efforts at conversation can be captivating. Observing children is something everyone enjoys doing. Children are charming, creative, active, and emotional.

Observation also serves another purpose. It provides vital information about each child's needs, interest, abilities and learning styles. Observation is one of the oldest and best methods for learning about children. Most of what is known about child growth and development is the result of some form of observation. Many behaviors of children cannot be measured in any other way. A one-year-old, for instance, cannot answer questions orally or in writing, but the child's behavior can be observed, 3-1.

As a student of child development, much of what you will learn about children will come from observing them. You may be asked to observe the children in your program. At times you may be assigned to observe a specific aspect of a child's behavior or development. You will also be encouraged to observe children informally outside of school.

Jafar, a student majoring in child development, was assigned his first observation. He was amazed at the developmental differences he saw within the group of three- and four-year-olds. Jafar

3-1

Teachers observe largely through their eyes and ears.

noticed that Ben was doing an 18-piece puzzle. Sitting next to him was Hunter. He was asking the teacher for help with a puzzle that had only four pieces. Standing at the easel, Wyatt was printing his name across the top of his art project. Next to him was Wendy. She drew a circle in an upper corner of her work and exclaimed with a smile, "That's my name!"

Each of these children is unique. If you were the teacher in this classroom, how would you plan a curriculum that would meet the needs of each of these children? To begin the process, you would need to gather information. This, too, involves observation. You would need to determine each child's developmental stage. With this information, you could then determine the group's developmental status. The data gathered would help you plan a curriculum that

was sensitive to the needs of the individual children and the group.

Assessment

Assessment comes from a Latin word meaning *to sit beside and get to know*. It is the process of observing, recording, and documenting children's growth and behavior. To be an authentic assessment, observations must be done over time in play-based situations. This type of assessment is best because it is the most accurate. It is used to make decisions about children's education. Information is obtained on children's developmental status, growth, and learning styles. Sometimes the terms *assessment* and *evaluation* are used interchangeably, but they are two different processes. Assessment is the process of collecting information or data. Evaluation is the process of reviewing the information and finding value in it.

Purposes of Assessment

Information and data from assessment informs teachers about children's developmental needs. It is important for several reasons. The information collected is used in planning developmentally appropriate curriculum. Assessment keeps the teachers and the curriculum responsive to the needs of the children. An authentic assessment involves gathering information when children are performing tasks in natural settings. Assessment should include all developmental areas—physical, social, emotional, and cognitive. Assessment should provide information on each child's unique needs, strengths, and interests. It also charts progress over time.

During the assessment process, you, as teacher, gain insights into children's learning styles and needs, 3-2. What are their strengths and weaknesses? What does the group know? What are they able to do? What are their interests and dispositions? Finally, what

Each child has unique strengths, needs, and interests.

are their needs? Teachers who have good assessment skills will make better decisions.

Individual and classroom problems can often be identified through the assessment process. When specific examples of a child's behavior are observed and recorded, behavior patterns become more clear. Answers to behavior problems can more easily be found when the specific behavior is observed and noted.

Classroom problems can be identified through assessment. When a problem arises, plans can be made to remedy the problem. To illustrate, perhaps there have been many instances of pushing and shoving in the dramatic play area. By observing and evaluating, you may realize that more classroom space should be provided for this activity. If this is impossible, you may decide to limit the number of children in this area at one time to prevent the undesirable behavior.

Assessment also allows you to identify children who might have special needs. Perhaps a child has a hearing or vision impairment. Maybe a child has an emotional or behavioral problem that requires counseling. These needs can be identified and specialized services obtained.

Through assessment, you will be able to find out where the children are in their development. Information on each child should be recorded at regular intervals. In this way, you can see how each child is progressing in his or her development. This information will help you make better curriculum planning decisions. It will also help you decide how to set up the environment and stimulate each child's development.

The information gained through assessment can also be useful during parent conferences. Parents want to know how their children are progressing. You will be able to give them concrete evidence on their child's progress. Parents will also be assured you know and understand their child.

A final purpose for assessment is in evaluating your program. Information obtained through assessment can help your staff determine if your program is effective in meeting its goals.

When to Do Assessments

As a teacher beginning a new year, you will need to do an *initial assessment*. This will provide entry data and a baseline to use for each child. You cannot assume all children of a given age are alike. Developmental differences will exist. Culture, economic status, and home background will impact each child's development. Therefore, the purpose of an initial assessment is to get a "snapshot" of each child in the group. Observing children and acquiring information from the families are the most common ways to gather this information.

You will want to learn as much about the children as possible during your initial

assessment. Study the existing folders on each child. Review home background forms. Read the notes from past parent conferences. If possible, visit each child's home. An alliance with families is important. Families can give you useful information on a child's learning needs and interests.

In addition to this initial assessment, you will need to do *ongoing assessments* on individual children as well as the group. A single assessment is not an exact assessment of ability or performance. It is just an indicator.

Ongoing assessment may take more time, but it will also provide more in-depth information. The information gained will be useful in tracking each child's progress and documenting change over time. It should provide evidence of a child's learning and maturation. This information will also be helpful in making decisions for enriching or modifying the curriculum and classroom environment when necessary.

You can gather assessment data during classroom activities. Watch children as they work on art projects and listen to them as they tell stories, 3-3. Observe children as they construct puzzles or build with blocks. Listen in on children's conversations. Discreetly take notes on individual children, especially during free-choice activities. This is when children are most likely to reveal their own personalities and development. These notes will provide important assessment information.

Formal and Informal Observation

Two different methods of observation are used for assessing young children—formal and informal. They differ in how controlled the conditions are for using them. Formal methods include standardized tests and research instruments. As a result of such research, developmental milestones for children have been identified. **Developmental milestones** are characteristics and behaviors

3-3
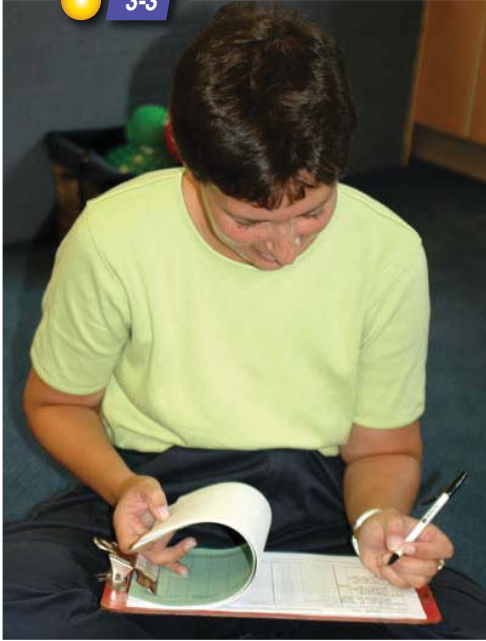
Teachers can quickly record what they see during classroom activities.

considered normal for children in specific age groups. Some educators refer to these as *emerging competencies*.

Developmental milestones will assist you in comparing and noting changes in the growth and development of children in your care, 3-4. They will also help you as you observe young children in preparation for your career working with young children. Examples of developmental milestones are included in the Appendix of this book. They are useful tools for assessing children's developmental status. They also form the basis for planning developmentally appropriate curriculum.

While formal observation methods provide important information, they require specialized training for recording data on carefully designed forms. Training is also needed for analyzing and interpreting the data.

Preschool teachers usually use informal observation methods to collect data. These methods are easier to use and more appropriate for program planning. They include observing children in the classroom, collecting samples of their work, interviewing parents, and talking with children.

Choosing a Method of Assessment

There are three considerations for choosing a method of assessment. First, the method chosen depends on the type of behavior you want to assess and the amount

3-4

Reviewing developmental milestones will help you assess the progress of children in your care.

of detail you need. Another consideration is whether the information needs to be collected for one child or the entire group. Finally, the amount of focused attention required by the observer needs to be considered.

Some methods of assessment will require more of your attention. For example, it is difficult interacting with children when you are in the process of writing an anecdotal record. Narratives need to be rich in information with detailed behavioral accounts. Checklists, videotapes, and participation charts are easier to use while working with the children.

Usually teachers use a variety of methods for gathering information about the children. Since no one method is the most effective or reveals everything, several methods are used. More complete information is obtained by using several types of assessment. Multiple sources of information also reduces the possibility of error when making evaluations.

Assessment Tools

There are several types of assessment tools that are used in early childhood programs. These include anecdotal records, checklists, participation charts, rating scales, samples of products, photographs, and tapes. Teachers can also interview families to obtain information.

Anecdotal Records

The simplest form of direct observation is a brief narrative account of a specific incident called an **anecdotal record**. Often an anecdotal record is used to develop an understanding of a child's behavior. Anecdotal records do not require charts or special settings. They can be recorded in any setting and require no special training. All you need is paper and a writing tool to record what happened in a factual, objective manner. The observation is open-ended,

continuing until everything is witnessed. It is like a short story in that it has a beginning, middle, and end.

The process of recording the incident requires a careful eye and quick pencil to capture all of the details. You will need to note who was involved, what happened, when it happened, and where it occurred. It needs to be done promptly and accurately. Figure 3-5 shows the contents of an anecdotal record.

When you use the narrative form of observation, your eyes and ears act like a video camera. You will be recording pictures of children playing, learning, and interacting. During your observations, you will record how children communicate, both verbally and nonverbally. You will record how they look and what they do. Physical gestures and movements should be noted. You will also detail children's interactions with people and materials. Record as many details as possible.

Anecdotal Records Must Be Objective

During the observation process, it is important to record only objective statements. To be objective, a statement must pass two tests. First, it must describe only observable actions. Thus, generalizations about the motives, attitudes, and feelings of the

3-5

Contents of Anecdotal Records
- Identifies the child and gives the child's age
- Includes the date, time of day, and setting
- Identifies the observer
- Provides an accurate account of the child's actions and direct quotes from the child's conversations
- Includes responses of other children and/or adults, if any are involved in the situation

Anecdotal records should include the items listed.

children are not included. Secondly, the recorded information must be nonevaluative. It should not include an interpretation of why something happened, nor imply that what happened was wrong, right, good, or bad. Labeling should be avoided. No judgments or conclusions should be inferred at this point. The following example is a narrative observation:

Sally arrived at school holding her mother's hand. She slowly walked over to her locker, removed her coat, and hung it on a hook. She turned to her mother and said, "You go to work." Sally's mother hugged her and said, "After work I'll take you to the dentist." Sally looked at her mother and started to cry. She said, "I'm not going to the dentist. I'm staying at school." Sally's mother reached out and hugged Sally. Sally continued crying and hung onto her mother. The teacher walked over to Sally and whispered in her ear. Then the teacher put out her hand and said, "Come and look, Sally. We have a new friend at school today. Jodi brought her new hamster." Sally stopped crying and took the teacher's hand. Together they walked over to see the hamster. Sally's mother watched her for a moment and then left the room.

Notice that only an objective description of the observed behavior is recorded. The statements do not include any of the following: causes, emotions, explanations, feelings, goals, motives, desires, purposes, needs, or wishes.

Interpretation of the Data

Once the narrative data is recorded, a second process begins. This process involves the interpretation of the data. An attempt is made to explain the observed behavior and to give it meaning. Why did the child behave as he or she did? What might have been the child's motives? Did someone or something cause the child to act in this way? This interpretation takes knowledge and skill. It should not be attempted without a thorough understanding of how children grow and develop. The observation itself serves no purpose without the interpretation of behavior to give meaning to the data.

Though an observation may be factual and unbiased, various interpretations are sometimes made. Since no two people are exactly alike, no two people will interpret facts in the exact same way. Each person who interprets a child's behavior may determine different motives for the behavior based on their own personal experiences. Their personal feelings, values, and attitudes may also influence the interpretation of behavior.

To illustrate, an observer wrote the following about Tony:

Tony picked up the pitcher of milk. He moved the pitcher toward his glass. He hit the glass and tipped it over. The milk spilled.

In reviewing the observation of Tony, his behavior might be interpreted in several ways:

- Tony was careless.
- Tony was inexperienced in handling a pitcher.
- Tony wasn't paying attention to what he was doing.
- Tony lacked the strength needed to lift the pitcher.
- Tony lacked the hand-eye coordination necessary to pour from the pitcher.

To decide which interpretation is most accurate, you will need to observe Tony on several occasions over a period of time. You would also need a thorough understanding of how children grow and develop.

Figure 3-6 shows a form for an anecdotal record, although many teachers just use a file card or plain piece of paper. Teachers who record incidents throughout the year have a means of assessing progress. A series of

3-6

**SUNSHINE CHILD CARE CENTER
ANECDOTAL RECORD**

Child's Name: _____Carrie_____ Date: ___10/9/XX___

Child's Age: ____3____ Years ____9____ Months

Setting: ___Dramatic Play___ Time: __8:30__ to __8:45__

Observer: _Geneva Peterson_____

Incident:

Carrie went directly to the dramatic play area when she arrived at the center. She placed the cash register on a table. After this, she displayed empty food containers on a table. Tony entered the area. He stepped behind the cash register and said, "I want to play with this." Carrie said, "No, it's mine. I had it first." Then using her arm she hit Tony and began pushing him. Tony looked at Carrie, shrugged his shoulders, and walked away. As Tony walked away, a smile came across Carrie's face.

Interpretation:

You may want to use a form such as this one to record anecdotal events.

records over time can provide rich details. The records can be extremely valuable in noting progress, strengths, needs, and interests.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Anecdotal Records

There are advantages and disadvantages in using the anecdotal record. An important advantage is that it is the easiest method of use since it requires no special setting or time frame. Anecdotal records can provide a running record over time showing evidence of a child's growth and development. Therefore, teachers who record incidents throughout the year have a means of assessing progress.

There are also disadvantages with using anecdotal records. Because the incident observed is based on the observer's interest, a complete picture may not be provided. Records may not always be accurate. If the observer decides to write down the incident at the end of the day and is poor at recalling details, important information may be missed.

Checklists

Another form of assessment is the checklist. **Checklists** are designed to record the presence or absence of specific traits or behaviors. They are easy to use and are especially helpful when many different items need to be observed. They often include lists of specific behaviors to look for while observing. Depending on their function, they can vary in length and complexity. Checklists may be designed for any developmental domain—physical, social, emotional, or cognitive. A checklist that is carefully designed can tell a lot about one child or the entire class.

Checklists may be developed to survey one child or a group of children. The targeted behaviors are listed in logical order with similar items grouped together. Therefore, you can quickly record the presence or absence of a behavior. Typically, a check indicates the presence of a behavior.

Checklists require structuring. You may be able to purchase commercially prepared checklists. Most teachers working in child care centers structure their own. A typical checklist for use in observing an individual child is shown in 3-7. The developmental milestones found in the Appendix of this book may be adapted as checklists for assessing individual children or groups of

3-7

Name: _____Wyatt Anderson_____

Program: _____Sunshine Child Care Center_____

Child's Age: _____3_____ Years _____6_____ Months

Date of Observation: __2/9/XX__

Observer: _Sally Olm_____

Fine-Motor Skills

	Yes	No
Cuts paper	✓	
Pastes with a finger	✓	
Pours from a pitcher	✓	
Copies a circle from a drawing	✓	
Draws a straight line	✓	
Uses finger to pick up smaller objects	✓	
Draws a person with three parts		✓

Checklists are efficient to use and require little effort.

children. Figure 3-8 shows a checklist for assessing the gross-motor skills of a group of children.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Checklists

One of the advantages of a checklist is that there are no time constraints in collecting the data. The information can be quickly recorded anytime during program hours. In addition, checklists are easy to use, efficient, and can be used in many situations. Data from checklists can be easily analyzed.

A disadvantage of using a checklist, however, is the lack of detailed information. Checklists lack the richness of the more descriptive narrative. Because of the format, only particular behaviors are noted. Important aspects of behaviors may be missed, such as how a behavior is performed and for how long. Only the presence or absence of a behavior is noted in a checklist.

3-8

Gross-Motor Skills Group Assessment
Three-Year-Olds

	Henry	Ed	Jo	Vicki	Cari	Deb
Catches ball with arms extended	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Throws ball underhanded		✓			✓	
Completes forward somersault	✓	✓			✓	✓
Rides tricycle skillfully	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Throws ball without losing balance		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Hops on one foot		✓				✓

You can evaluate the gross-motor skills of a group of children using a form such as this one.

Participation Chart

A **participation chart** can be developed to gain information on specific aspects of children's behavior. Participation charts have a variety of uses in the classroom. For instance, children's activity preferences during self-selected play can be determined. See 3-9.

Richard O'Grady, an experienced teacher, uses participation charts to record the time each child falls asleep at nap time. He also charts the length of time each child sleeps. He records this information several times a year. After collecting the data, he decides if a change should be made in the scheduled nap time. Likewise, the length of the nap time can be adjusted to reflect the children's needs.

Sometimes teachers find that children's preferences do not match their needs. To illustrate, Randy has weak hand-eye coordination skills. A participation chart shows he spends most of his time listening to stories and music and watching other children play. To meet Randy's needs, the teacher could introduce him to interesting art activities, puzzles, and other small manipulative learning aids. These materials will help advance Randy's skills in hand-eye coordination, which will be necessary for reading and writing.

Rating Scales

Rating scales, like checklists, are planned to record something specific. They are used to record the degree to which a quality or trait is present. Rating scales require you to make a judgment about the quality of what is being observed. Where a checklist only indicates the presence or absence of a trait, a rating scale tells how much or how little is present. As a result, objectivity could be hampered by the observer's opinion.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Rating Scales

Rating scales are easy to use and require little time to complete. Some scales contain only a numerical range. Others define the behaviors more specifically.

3-9

Activity Preferences During Self-Selected Play

	Bryce	Tina	Saul	Ting	Bergetta	Tanya	Hunter	Shawn	Janus	Vida
9:00 - 9:10	b	dp	a	st	m	dp	a	b	st	s
9:10 - 9:20	b	dp	a	st	m	dp	a	b	st	s
9:20 - 9:30	b	dp	m	m	dp	dp	s	b	st	s
9:30 - 9:40	b	st	m	m	dp	dp	b	b	m	a
9:40 - 9:50	b	m	m	m	dp	dp	b	b	m	a
9:50 - 10:00	b	m	s	m	dp	dp	b	b	m	a

a=art; b=blockbuilding; dp=dramatic play; m=manipulatives; s=sensory; sc=science; st=storytelling

A participation chart is quick and easy to use, but can give you important information.

A disadvantage of the rating scale is that only fragments of actions are included. In order to choose a rating, the observer should have a good understanding of the behavior he or she is rating. Figure 3-10 shows a typical rating scale.

Collecting Samples of Children's Products

Collecting samples of children's work systematically over time is another assessment tool. These products can provide valuable information regarding the child's developmental status and growth. Products collected may include artwork, stories dictated or written, photographs, and records of conversations. Over time, these samples can be collected and compared. To illustrate, Chuck could make only random scribbles on paper at the beginning of the year. When Chuck's teacher asked him to tell her about his work, he explained it. She discovered the sample showed more than Chuck's scribbles. He said, "There is my name. That is how to write it. I wrote my mother's name and my sister's." Now he is able to draw a circle. A comparison of the two samples shows the progress Chuck has made in fine-motor and hand-eye coordination skills.

A child's products can be stored in a folder or portfolio. Whenever possible, store materials and items in chronological order. This will save you time when evaluating progress or sharing the materials with families.

3-10

Social/Emotional Rating Scale

Child's Name: ___Jo Ellen___ Date: __4/6/XX__

Child's Age: ___4___ Years ___1___ Months

Observer: _Mark Zenk_____

Behavior	Never	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Shows increased willingness to cooperate			✓	
Is patient and conscientious		✓		
Expresses anger verbally rather than physically				✓
Has strong desire to please		✓		
Is eager to make friends and develop strong friendships			✓	
Respects property rights of others			✓	

On a rating scale, teachers record the degree to which a quality or trait is present.

Records may be kept in different forms. Samples may be preserved by photographing, sketching, or diagramming children's products. These methods are especially useful for large structures such as block displays and three-dimensional artwork that cannot be stored conveniently.

Using Technology for Assessment

Technology is a very useful tool for recording children's development. Making videotapes and audiotapes are excellent ways to preserve information. Tapings may focus on an individual child, a small group of children, or an entire class. Videotapes can preserve both action and speech. Recordings may be made of children telling stories, acting out stories, or explaining their projects.

Health and Safety

Videotaping and Photographing Safety

Be sure to consult parents, families, or caregivers before videotaping or photographing children. Many centers require written consent to be on file before staff can videotape or photograph children for educational purposes. Some families do not want images taken of their children for privacy reasons.

Dramatic play interactions and music experiences can be recorded. By viewing or listening to the tapes, you can note progress in language and speech. The children might also enjoy viewing or listening to the tapes.

Be careful that the presence of the videocamera does not become intrusive. You may want to ask other adults, such as teacher aides or parent volunteers, to assist with the taping. This will allow you to be included in the taping. By reviewing the tape, you can do a self-evaluation of your own interactions with the children.

Visual Documentation

You have probably heard the phrase "seeing is believing." **Visual documentation** refers to collecting or photographing samples of a child's work that portrays learning and development. Visual documentation provides a record that can be studied. Other assessment methods such as rating scales, checklists, anecdotal records all involve on-the-spot interpretation. This can make it difficult to be completely objective when recording the children's behavior.

The digital camera is a convenient way to visually document children's development. The camera can be used to photograph children engaged in creating artwork, participating in dramatic play, or taking part in field trip activities. The camera can also be used to take pictures of a child's accomplishments, such as artwork or building-block structures. In an infant program, the camera may be used to record self-feeding, playing peek-a-boo, sitting up, creeping, or walking. It can be used to record self-help skills such as dressing or brushing teeth. It is important to date all pictures taken on the digital camera for visual documentation. A brief description should also be recorded to show its significance.

The digital camera is also a convenient way to record children's development. Pictures taken by the digital camera are

stored inside the camera as electronic image files that can be downloaded to a computer. Once the files are downloaded, they can be printed or saved onto the hard drive or a CD for later use. Teachers can use a digital camera to take pictures of classroom activities. They can download and print these photos for use in a portfolio. Teachers might want to feature photos on the bulletin board before filing them.
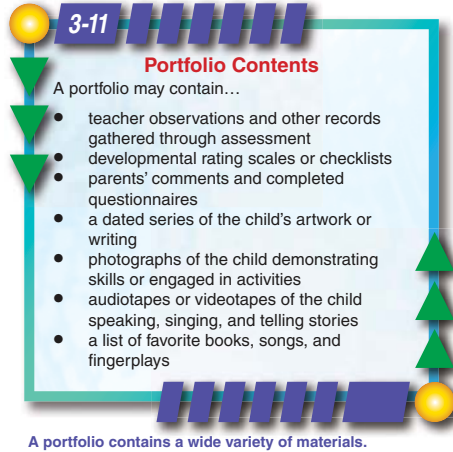
Portfolios

Materials you have collected as a part of ongoing assessment should be placed in each child's portfolio. A **portfolio** is a collection of materials that shows a person's abilities, accomplishments, and progress over time. Portfolios you create for the children in your care summarize each child's abilities. A portfolio includes items that show the child's growth and development over time. Documenting learning is an important skill for teachers to develop.

Depending on the materials collected, the contents of a portfolio can be stored in a variety of forms. Some teachers prefer three-ring binders. Others prefer to use boxes or large folders to store the portfolio contents.

Contents

A child's portfolio needs to be carefully planned and organized. It should be more than a file of anecdotal records, checklists, and questionnaires. Most teachers include work samples as well. Examples include art projects, audiotapes of conversations, and child-dictated stories. Work samples can provide evidence in all developmental areas. In addition, the portfolios include summaries of parent conferences and parent questionnaires. Figure 3-11 shows the contents of a typical portfolio.

Teachers include work samples for each child that reflect unique skills and interests.

3-11

Portfolio Contents
A portfolio may contain…

- teacher observations and other records gathered through assessment
- developmental rating scales or checklists
- parents' comments and completed questionnaires
- a dated series of the child's artwork or writing
- photographs of the child demonstrating skills or engaged in activities
- audiotapes or videotapes of the child speaking, singing, and telling stories
- a list of favorite books, songs, and fingerplays

A portfolio contains a wide variety of materials.

If Thomas built a complex and interesting block structure, his teacher might sketch or photograph it for inclusion in his portfolio. Likewise, teachers may record stories that children dictate to them.

A portfolio should be continually evolving, documenting evidence of a child's progress. Over time, this method provides a vivid picture of each child's development. Visual documentation included in a child's portfolio is a helpful tool when conferring with families. It should be a summary of a child's development. Information gained from evaluating the portfolio can guide teachers in making curriculum decisions, structuring interactions, and setting up the classroom. Families, too, will gain from reviewing the child's portfolio with the teacher.

By reviewing the portfolios of children in a program, you should be able to identify unique characteristics of each child. For instance, according to Mark's portfolio, he remains in the cooking area until the entire snack is prepared every day. Often he provides the teachers with other methods of preparing the foods. Cory develops elaborate and imaginative buildings in the

blockbuilding area. During self-selected play, Maria always chooses the same theme. She dresses as a ballerina in the dramatic play area. Blake is fascinated with the hamster and rabbit. He wants to learn more about different kinds of animals, their eating habits, and behaviors.

Guidelines for Observing Children

During your study of young children, you will observe them in many situations. Whether in the play yard, in a classroom, or on a field trip, your behavior as an observer is important. Whether you are in an outside child care facility or in your school's own laboratory, certain guidelines must be followed.

Whenever you gather data about children, you must use special care. The information you collect must be kept confidential. This is perhaps the most important guideline for you to follow. Though you can discuss a child's behavior in your own classroom, you must refrain from doing so outside that setting. Whenever you are talking, other people are listening. The information you share could be embarrassing or even damaging to a child, parent, or teacher.

To protect confidentiality, your teacher may request that you avoid using a child's name during classroom discussions. First names only are permitted in other classrooms. Both practices will help protect the real identity of a child. These practices will also prevent information about a particular child from leaving the classroom.

While you are observing, coats, books, and other personal belongings should not be brought into the classroom. Young children are specially curious about purses and bags. Such items may cause an unnecessary distraction. Cosmetics and medications could endanger their safety.

During your observation time, avoid talking to the children, other observers, or the staff. However, it is likely that your presence will spark the curiosity of some of the children. A child may ask you what you are doing. If this happens, answer in a matter-of-fact manner. You might say that you are watching the children play or that you are writing notes on how children play.

One of the best ways to learn about young children is to observe them and to make note of their behavior, 3-12. By sharing your observations with other class members, you will be able to see children as they really are. These records will help you understand children and become a better child care professional.

3-12
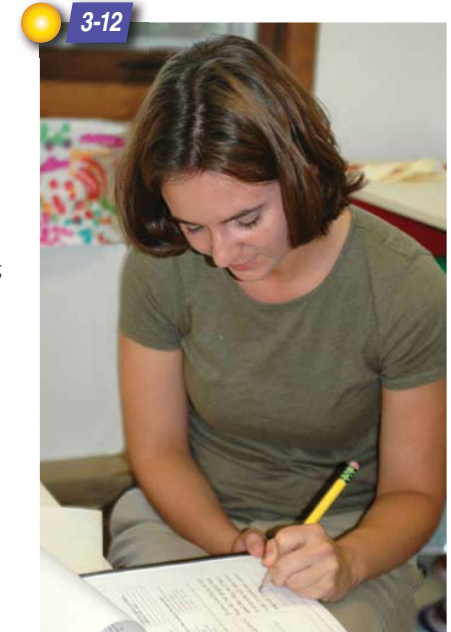
By observing children and recording their behavior, you will become a better early childhood professional.

Summary

Assessment is the process of observing, recording, and documenting children's growth and behavior over time in order to make decisions about their education. Assessment has many purposes, but it is primarily used in planning developmentally appropriate curriculum. An initial assessment is made of all children when they enter a program, but ongoing assessment continues as long as a child remains enrolled in a program.

Most assessment methods involve observing children. Formal observation by researchers has led to the creation of developmental milestones. Early childhood teachers usually use informal observation methods to collect data.

There are several types of assessment tools that are used in early childhood programs. These include anecdotal records, checklists, participation charts, rating scales, samples of products, photographs, and tape recordings. All of these methods have advantages and disadvantages. Materials that have been collected during the assessment process should be placed in a portfolio for each child. Portfolios document children's learning and development.

When observing children, it is important to record only objective statements. Once data is recorded, it may be interpreted. This interpretation takes knowledge and skill. It requires a thorough understanding of child development. Information you collect on children must also be kept confidential. This is perhaps the most important guideline to follow.

Review and Reflect

1. List three purposes of assessment.

2. What is meant by the term *authentic assessment*?

3. Which of the following is considered a formal method of assessment?
   A. Checklists.
   B. Standardized tests.
   C. Rating scales.
   D. Anecdotal records.

4. List three considerations for choosing a method of assessment.

5. Which of the following are objective statements?
   A. Pours milk.
   B. Rocks the doll.
   C. Gets even.
   D. Feels lonely.

6. Why is the anecdotal record considered the simplest form of direct observation?

7. Which assessment tool would you use to determine the degree to which a quality or trait was present?

8. List one advantage and one disadvantage in using a checklist.

9. What three methods could you choose to add information on a three-dimensional project to a child's portfolio?

10. Describe how technology can be used as an assessment tool.

11. List five items that might be included in a child's portfolio.

12. Name three guidelines to keep in mind when observing children.

Apply and Explore

1. Prepare a checklist for a group of children to assess color recognition skills.

2. Interview an early childhood teacher about how she or he develops and uses portfolios.

3. Develop a participation checklist for the use of outdoor play equipment.

Cross-Curricular Link

Writing

1. Have each student in the class observe a child for 15 minutes and write an anecdotal record of the observation. Compare and discuss the results. Which records contained the most detail? Which records contained only objective statements? Did any of the records contain interpretive statements? If so, what were they?

2. Videotape a group of children interacting. Show the tape to classmates. Have each class member write a narrative of what he or she sees. Compare the contents of the narratives.

Math

3. Using the Appendix, develop a rating scale to assess the motor skills of four-year-olds.

Technology

4. Use a search engine to find information on the observation of young children.

5. Check NAEYC's position statement in early childhood programs at the following Web site: www.naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/standlcurrass.pdf

Workplace Link

Survey area preschools, career/technical centers, and community colleges, with observation facilities. What guidelines are used during observation? Can students be seen during observations? Compare findings in class.