



Observing and Assessing Children's Learning

Observing and assessing children's learning is an integral part of the teaching and learning process in early childhood education. There are six steps for observing and assessing children's learning and development.



Teachers can collect information about children's learning and development through systematic observation and documentation.

Systematic observation involves the teachers doing the following:

Establish a daily routine for observing children and create an observation plan to focus on an individual child or a group of children each time in a variety of planned and spontaneous situations rather than planning to observe all the children at the same time.

Be objective and verify observations with various stakeholders (e.g., fellow teachers, child's family members).

Gather sufficient information and evidence in each aspect of children's development and progress in the learning area at different times, in different contexts and from multiple sources.

Focus on children's developmental characteristics and keep a holistic and balanced view of children.

Look for patterns of learning and development and not isolated instances of child's achievement or challenges to make valid inferences based on understanding of child development.

Here are some suggested areas for observing children's learning and development.

Area for observation	Questions to bear in mind while observing children
Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the topics/activities that engage the child? • What does the child like to talk about or is curious to find out? • What does the child choose when given the opportunity to make a choice?
Skills and abilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the child do well in? • What does the child find challenging to do? • What skills are the child currently working on?
Learning dispositions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does the child do when faced with a challenging task? • How does the child express his/her feelings and thoughts about the learning experience? • How does the child respond to ideas from peers during group work? • How does the child approach new materials and new ways of doing things? • What questions does the child ask about the world around him/her? • To what extent does the child stay focused and engaged in learning?
Social interactions with peers and adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To what extent does the child interact with others? • How comfortable is the child when interacting with other children and adults? How does the child initiate social interactions or conversations with others? • What kinds of activities does the child like to do with others? • How does the child handle differences with others? • In what situation does the child seek help from teachers and/or others?
Use of verbal language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With whom does the child talk to most of the time? • When the child speaks, how much language does he/she have? • What does the child's use of language tell us about his/her language development (e.g., whether the child uses phrases or complete sentences, vocabulary)? • How comfortable is the child when speaking one-on-one or in a large group?
Use of body language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the child express his/her feelings through body language such as facial expression and body gesture? • How often does the child use gestures to convey ideas and feelings? • Is the child able to read others' non-verbal expression such as body language and facial expression?

Teachers can consider the following approach to collect and document information on children's progress in learning and development:

- Write anecdotal records
- Take photographs of children at work
- Collect children's work samples
- Gather feedback from children on their learning
- Seek information from the child's family
- Use ICT resources

Teachers can use the information collected and documented for meaningful interpretation and assessment of children's progress.

To form an objective interpretation and assessment of the children's overall progress, teachers may ask themselves the following questions:

Is there sufficient information about the child's learning and development in the various learning areas and key aspects of development?

Does the information reflect patterns of development or isolated instances of the child's achievements/challenges?

Have children's background and developmental characteristics been taken into account?

How does the child's social and cultural context influence his/her learning and development?

Is there evidence from multiple sources (i.e., the child, his/her peers, family, other professionals, child's work samples) to make a fair assessment of the child's learning and development?

What are the follow-up actions required to build on the child's learning needs?

Teachers can then organise and compile the information into a learning portfolio, and communicate and share the information with families.

It is also vital that teachers reflect on and make meaningful use of the information collected and documented to inform their curriculum planning and teaching practices.