

Let's talk about...NAC Standard: *Teachers make on-going observations of each child and routinely make formal assessments of developmental progress.*

By Lois Gamble, Director of Accreditation

In our last e-newsletter, we talked using formal developmental assessments. When developmental assessments are used in conjunction with other tools, a more accurate assessment of young children is possible. Reflection on a collection of data provides a more descriptive picture of the child. A "*portfolio*" can be used to save and organize information about each child.

Portfolios may include:

- A collection of work that illustrate progress over time (drawings, emergent writing samples, cutting samples, draw-a-person picture, a story told by the child and written down by the teachers, etc.)
- Photographs providing evidence of accomplished tasks (bead stringing according to pattern, three-dimensional manipulative projects, block structures, collaborative projects and beginning and end-of year photos.)
- Developmental assessments
- Documentation of observations.

"Your ability to be a good observer—to see what's happening—can make a critical difference to what you do. And what you do about what you see can make a critical difference to the child."ⁱ

Observation is a most effective way of gaining information about young children. There are a number of effective methods of observing. The choice will depend upon the information being sought and the observer's comfort with the method design. The format will vary, but the purpose is always the same—to learn more about a child and his environment.

Anecdotal Records are short notes that accurately describe a child's activity, behavior, interaction, or expressed feeling and the context in which they occurred. These notes are written down promptly to assure they are factual rather than interpretive. Anecdotal records are sometimes referred to as "word pictures" of a single event and are an aid to teachers in understanding some aspect of a child's behavior or personality.

Running records involve an uninterrupted observation and detailed recording of ongoing behavior in natural settings over an extended period of time. Events are described in chronological order. The observer records the setting, the child's behavior and that of anyone who interacts with the child. The record is objective, with no evaluations or interpretations.

Event sampling defines specific behaviors or events that are of interest. When the pre-selected event occurs, the observer records behavior and the context in which it occurred. Recording continues as long as the event lasts. This type observation often reveals an unexpected source of cause and consequences.

Time sampling is similar to event sampling except it records a child's or children's behavior during predetermined intervals of time. This method is truly a "sample" of a child's behavior in that it reveals only what occurs during the selected time period. Time sampling is economical in terms of time and effort, but is limited in that there is no information about the environment or situation, and, therefore, seldom reveals cause-and-effect relationships.

Rating Scales and ***Check Lists*** are additional observation tools that can help teachers learn about children, what they know, and are able to do. Once teachers understand the children assigned to them, they will be able to plan meaningful curriculum and create suitable environments.

All methods of observation require:

- Observations must be objective. Write down only the facts. Any interpretations or comments from the observer are to be written separate from the actual observation.
- Observation is unobtrusive and is done while the child is doing what he/she is normally doing.
- Have a purpose in mind when you begin an observation. You are collecting data, asking the question, observing, and recording. You will reflect on the findings in order to find the answer.

There is a great deal more to using observation techniques effectively. For more detailed information refer to **Seeing Young Children A GUIDE TO OBSERVING AND RECORDING BEHAVIOR, Fourth Edition, Warren R. Bentzen, Delmar Thomson Learning.**

ⁱ D. Michelle Irwin and M. Margaret Bushnell, *Observational Strategies for Child Study*, (New York. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980), vii