CHAPTER 6

OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT: LEARNING TO READ CHILDREN
WHAT IS OBSERVATION?

- Mental notes of the important details in each interaction.
- Teacher’s responsibility is to notice all the clues and put them together in meaningful ways.
- The ability to observe – to “read” the child, understand a group, “see” a situation - is one of the most important and satisfying skills a teacher can have.
- It influences how a teacher sets up the environment and how and when it will be changed. It helps a teacher create the daily schedule, planning appropriate time periods for various activities.
- It takes energy and concentration to become an accurate observer. Teachers must train themselves to record what they see on a regular basis.

Small Group Exercise
Seeing Children Through Observation

- Understanding children is difficult because so many factors influence their behavior.
  - A child's stage of development, culture, health, fatigue, and hunger can all make a difference in how a child behaves.

- Additionally, environment factors such as noise level, congestion, or time of day can add to the complex character of children’s actions.
Seeing Children Through Observation

- An alert teacher will notice the way a child begins each morning.
- Another important behavior to watch is how children use their bodies. (eating, napping, toileting, and dressing)
- Seeing children in relation to other people.
- In selecting play materials and equipment, children show what they like to do, how well they use the environment, and what they avoid.
Why Observe?

• To Improve Your Teaching
  
  ➢ Bias and Objectivity: Observing is not a precise or wholly objective act. No two people will see something in identical ways.

  ➢ Whatever is observed passes through the filter of the observer’s beliefs, biases, assumptions, history, understanding, and knowledge.

  ➢ Ex: “assertive and independent” OR “bossy and uncooperative”

See Figure 6-2 page 231 Check Your Lenses!
Why Observe?......Guidelines

- Cultivate an ability to wait and see what is really happening.
- A good observer makes a clear distinction between fact and inference.
- By separating what happens from what you think about it or how you feel about it, you are able to distinguish between fact and inference.
Why Observe?

- To Help Parents
- To Use as an Assessment Tool
  - Observation can be used as a tool for teacher to assess the accuracy of their own impressions.
  - The results lead directly into curriculum planning for the class.
  - Many classroom problems can be solved if teachers will take time to make observations.
Understanding What We Observe

- **Children as Individuals**
  - How do children spend their time at school? What activities are difficult? Who is the child’s best friend?
  - By watching individual children, teachers help them learn at their own pace, at their own rate of development, in their own time.
- **Individualized Curriculum**
  - Helps spot a child’s strengths and areas of difficulty.
Understanding What We Observe

- Children in General
  - When recording behavior, teachers see growth patterns emerge.
  - Observing children can provide the answer to these questions?
    - What might you expect when a two-year old pours juice?
    - What will children do when their parents leave them at school the first day?
    - What is the difference between the attention at story time of a 2-year old and a 5-year old?
    - What kind of social play is typical for the 4-year old?
  - Observation gives a feeling for group behavior as well as a developmental yardstick to compare individuals within the group.
  - Review Fig. 6-3 – Interpreting Observations
Recording What We See

- Common Elements of Observations
  pg. 177
  - FOCUS
  - SYSTEM
  - TOOLS
  - ENVIRONMENT
Types of Observations

- Narratives – attempts to record nearly everything that happens. A running record. It’s an attempt actually recreate the scene by recording it in thorough and vivid language. Fig 6-4
- Time Sampling – is an observation of what happens within a given period of time. Fig 6-5
- Event Sampling – observer defines an event, devises a system for describing and coding it, then waits for it to happen. Fig 6-6
- Checklists – contains a great deal of information that can be recorded rapidly. Fig 6-7 and Fig 6-8
- Rating Scales – are like checklists, planned in advance to record something specific. Fig 6-9
- Shadow Study – similar to a diary description and focuses on one child at a time. Fig 6-10
Beginning to Observe

1. Plan the Observation – have a goal/focus
2. Observe and Record – be objective. Write only the behavior, the “raw data”. Fig 6-1
3. Re-read your notes and make some conclusions. Your observation was WHAT happened; the *interpretation* is the place for your opinions and ideas of *why* it happened.
4. Final step is implementing your solutions; plan what you will do next, and then follow through with your ideas.
Guidelines for All Observers and Visitors

- (Keep these in mind when you do your Child Observation Assignment)
- See page 187, Fig 6-12
Assessment: Evaluating Children

- Why Evaluate?
  - Because teachers and parents want to know what the children are learning.
  - Educational planning and communicating with parents.
  - Identifying children with special needs.
  - Program evaluation and accountability.
  - Evaluations provide teachers with an opportunity to distance themselves from the daily contact with children and look at them in a more detached, professional way.

See Fig 6-13, 6-14, 6-15, 6-16, 6-17, 6-19, 6-20