Documenting Children Types/Samples

Method 1: Anecdotal Records

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An **anecdote** is a story. When used for observing, it is a story about a child's behaviour. Similar to how we might recount a story to family and friends, it is told in the **past tense**. It has its beginning when a child starts to participate in an activity and its conclusion when the child leaves/completes/exits the experience.

Anecdotes are the most commonly used tool in gathering information about children.

One of the main reasons for this is because they are quick to record. It is a good idea to carry a notebook and pen with you at all times. Quickly jot down some brief notes to jog your memory. Later when time permits refer to your notes and write them up as an anecdotal observation.

It is a good idea to develop your own style of shorthand or short note taking to assist you with this task. Make sure to be close to the action. Sit where you can see and hear the children clearly. This will help with the accuracy of your recording.

Date: 22nd March 2008	**Observer:** Claire
Time: 10:00 am	**Background information:**
Child: Hannah (3.8 yrs)	Hannah has been spending much more time outdoors.
Place: Playground	**Other children:** Tom (4.1 yrs),
Setting: Obstacle course	Jake (3.6 yrs), Beth (3.10 yrs)

Hannah walked towards the climbing frame. She placed her foot on the first step then stopped. Tom, Jake and Beth lined up behind her. She stood back and waved them on. 'You go,' she said. When they had passed she stepped up again but backed away when more children arrived for their turn at the climbing frame. Hannah stood at the base of the frame for a moment looked toward the painting easels. She walked towards them.

Assessment for learning:

Hannah is able to apply the social skills of turn taking and uses clear language to express her thinking. Hannah appears to be less self-confident when interacting with peers in small group experiences and appears to choose more solitary experiences. Hannah demonstrates the skill of decision making about her choice of experiences.

Method 2: Running Records

A **_running record_** is a very detailed description of behaviour or an event, which is recorded as it happens. It is a bit like a sport commentators running commentary at a football match. That is the commentator describes in detail what is exactly happening. In a similar way a running record records exactly what a child is doing and saying within a particular time-frame. Running records are used mainly to provide very objective information about a particular situation.

Running records are a useful tool and worth the time involved, especially when you are specifically looking for a child's skill acquisition, how a child initiates interactions with others, or discussions the children have with each other

This method of observation can be difficult to use on a regular basis because of the time element involved. It is one reason why running records are not used as frequently as other forms of documentation.

Devising your own fast method of note taking can be helpful in getting the information down quickly. You may need to write using a form of shorthand, for example:

- K - kneeling,
- RH – right hand,
- chn – children,
- prog – program

Missing words can be filled in later so that others will be able to understand the observation also.

When writing running records it is a good idea to use a clipboard on which to write. Quickly jot down the description of what is happening paying particular attention to the dialogue that is exchanged and the language that is used – both verbal and non-verbal.

Because you are writing a description of behaviour as it happens, the running record will be written in the **present tense**, e.g. Claire holds onto the string with one hand.

A **_specimen record_** is similar to a running record but focuses on one area of development. For example if you were observing language development – you would record a bit of the context, but the focus would be on the conversation. When writing a specimen record you need to identify which area of development you are focussing on e.g. Specimen record – language development.

Date: 15/07/2004	**Observer:** Donna
Time: 10:45 am – 10:48 am	**Background information:** Narita's play is centred on dramatic play. Narita is the middle child. She has a baby sister at home and an older brother in care.
Child: Narita (1.11 years)	
Place: Baby section indoor area	
Setting: Narita moving from morning tea to play area.	
	Others involved: Saya (Educator)

Time	Observation
10:45 am	As Narita enters play room, she places her left hand on the gate and looks around the room. Turning to her right she lets go of the gate and walks over to home area. She bends over and picks up a small doll with her right hand saying 'Baby.' Narita then turns around as she continues to hold the doll in her right hand. She walks across to the toy trolley.
10:46 am	Narita stops in front of soldier peg frame, drops the doll onto cushion beside her as she squats down in front of soldier pegs. With her left hand she holds the frame as she proceeds to pull one soldier peg out with her right hand. Still holding the peg in her right hand, Narita manipulates the peg in her fingers as she pulls out another peg. Lifting her left hand off frame, Narita takes the two pegs from her right hand with her left hand and sits them on floor next to her. Looking up at Saya smiling, she then holds the frame with her left hand again and pulls another peg out with her right hand.
10:47 am	Narita stops playing with pegs and looks at another child who walks past pushing a doll's pram. She drops pegs and frame. She quickly pushes to her feet using both hands in front of her for support. Narita then grabs the doll from the cushion with both hands and runs across room to another pram. She drops doll into pram then moves her right hand to the handle of pram pulling it towards her stomach. Gripping with both hands, and pushing the pram, she walks across the room quickly and out onto the veranda saying, 'Baby, baby,' as she joins other children playing near the gym.

Assessment for learning:

Narita demonstrates confident gross and fine motor skills throughout her physical movements. Narita has established labelling words that she is able to use confidently and uses non-verbal communication during her social interactions. Narita's focused attention span appears to be developing as she moves from experience to experience. Narita demonstrates parallel play with other peers.

Method 3. Diary Writing

Diary writing is useful in helping the educator to construct a child profile. When behaviour is recorded in a diary over a period of time, the tracking of development and growth can occur.

Diary entries are recorded from memory at a later time of day and are therefore written in the **past tense**. Because of this, the detail which is present in anecdotal and running records is usually not found in a child's diary entries. Shorter in length, they are a quick method of observation useful in adding to an overall picture of the child. As a form of observation this diary may lack detail and neglect the context of the behaviour. It is, however, a quick method of recording changes and, when combined with other methods, can add valuable information regarding the child's development.

This type of diary may be shared with parents, and parents may be encouraged to write their own observations also. Again, this can add to the richness of the information the children's service has about the individual child through traditional observation techniques. A photocopy of work, or photograph of the incident recorded, may also be included in the diary.

Examples of diary entries

6.4.12

Tim (7.5 yrs) sat alone in the book corner when he arrived today. He appears to do this most days. He didn't look at a lot of the books but seemed happy just to be sitting there.

7.4.12

When Tim arrived today he proceeded straight to the book corner again.

Michael (6.5 yrs) and Greg (7 yrs) were already sitting on the cushions, reading and laughing. Tim hesitated as though he was reluctant to go into the area. He chose a book off the shelf and took it to a spot on the edge of the mat. He didn't acknowledge the other boys that were present.

8.4.12

Tim arrived later than usual today. He seemed flustered. He went to the book corner. Michael said hello but he didn't respond. He didn't choose a book. He just sat on a cushion and looked at the other children.

Method 4. Checklist

Checklists can be useful when observing a particular skill or a certain aspect of a child's behaviour. In a checklist, children are 'checked off' against a list of skills or behaviours. Checklists are available in text books and diagnostic kits but it is usually in the best interests of the children in your care to develop your own. In this way they relate specifically to your situation or assist you to gather the specific information you require.

Checklists usually look at the skill level of a particular age group and consider developmental norms. They provide a typical/average approximation of development to assist in measuring development across an age range. Checklists can also be valuable in helping staff to evaluate their own program and level of service on certain issues, for example, safety.

There are disadvantages in the use of checklists. The major disadvantage is the disregard for the context within which the behaviour has occurred. Children's actions are shaped by what is happening around them. They are influenced by their environment and by the actions of others. Many checklists do not account for this, nor do they cater for individual difference among children.

Checklists tend to be based on the developmental norms determined by child development theorists and neglect to describe how the behaviour occurs, as well as individual differences and in what context.

Another problem with checklists is that staff may focus on the skills children have not yet demonstrated, rather than on the accomplishments of children. This can lead to planning only for what the child has not yet demonstrated by looking/using only the deficits of the child as a basis for planning.

If a checklist is not administered well, a child can be left feeling as if they have failed if they cannot achieve a skill expected of them and shown by others, for example, cutting along a line.

Checklists should be used after gathering information about a child using a variety of methods. When used in connection with other observations you may find that a checklist gives you an overall snapshot of the child's strengths, and interests.

Adding a comments column to your checklist, as well as using a cross or a tick, can assist in forming a more rounded scenario. Checklists are useful within a balanced folio of observations.

Example

Checklist for 0 - 12 months: Gross motor development			
Child: Date:			
Observer:			
Skill	**Present/ Observed (Date)**	**Not Yet Observed**	**Comments**
Sits without support			
Crawls			
Pulls self to standing and stands unaided			
Walks with aid			
Rolls ball in imitation of adult			
Checklist for 0 - 12 months: Self-help skills			
Child:			
Observer:			
Skill	**Present/ Observed (Date)**	**Not Yet Observed**	**Comments**
Feeds self with biscuit: munching, not sucking			
Holds drink with two hands			
Drinks with assistance			
Holds out arms and legs while getting dressed			

Checklist for 0 - 12 months: Understanding language			
Child:			
Observer:			
Skill	**Present/ Observed (Date)**	**Not Yet Observed**	**Comments**
Looks at people who speak directly to self			
Responds differentially to variety of sounds: e.g. phone, vacuum, closing doors, familiar adults			
Responds to simple directions accompanied by gestures: e.g. come, get, give			

Checklist for 0 - 12 months: Oral language			
Child:			
Observer:			
Skill	**Present/ Observed (Date)**	**Not Yet Observed**	**Comments**
Makes different vowel sounds			
Makes different consonant-vowel sound combinations			
Vocalises to the person who has spoken to self			
Uses intonation patterns that sound like phrases: e.g. intonations that sound like asking, telling			

(Nixon & Aldwinkle, 2003)

Method 5. Sociograms

A **sociogram** is a map or diagram of friendships and interactions within a group of children. It can be used across a range of age groups and can reflect a pattern of social interaction for a child. It should provide a clear indication of who children prefer to play with and identify children who may be socially isolated, need assistance, or are socially adept with forming friendship groups. Older children may be interviewed about which children they like to play with in their peer group. Each child may be asked to name a best friend and this information may be represented by a sociogram.

The frequencies of interactions, whether they are verbal or non-verbal, and with whom the interactions occur, are obvious through the use of a sociogram. Initiation of interactions and responses to others' initiations can be recorded.
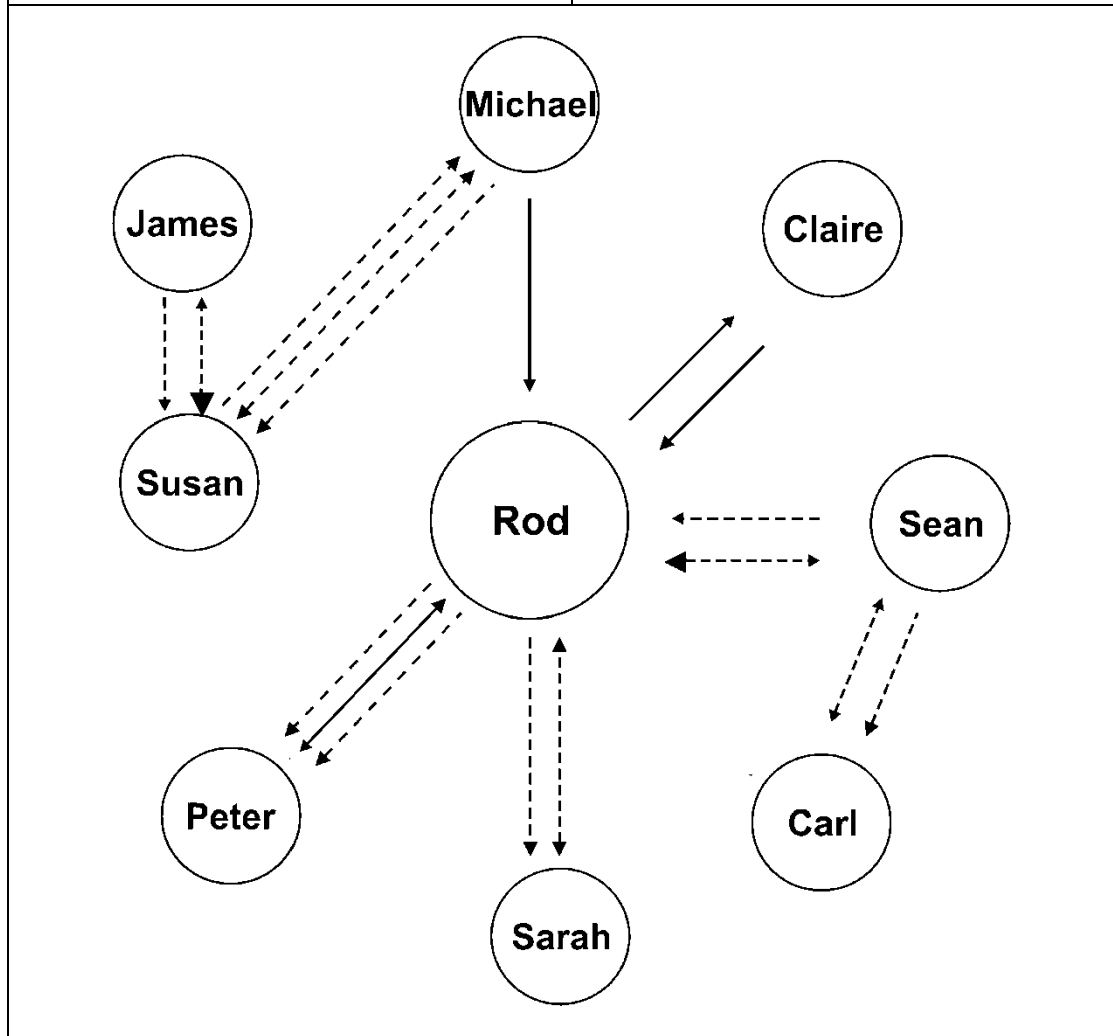
Sociograms will indicate the children who interact most regularly and with whom they are most likely to interact.

Try questions such as:

- What do you like best here?
- Is there an activity you like to do?
- Who do you like to do it with?

Example

Date: 14/10/07 **Time:** 9:35 am **Child:** Rod **Age:** 3.8 years **Observer:** Meg	**Setting:** After Morning Tea the children have begun outdoor play. Rod had just suggested to others in the group that they play hide and seek. **Background information:** Rod is an extremely social child.

- - - - - - - -	=	Verbal
_____	=	Non-verbal
———▶	=	Initiated
◀——▶	=	Responded

Key:

James 3.6 yrs	Michael 3.2 yrs
Susan 3.11 yrs	Carl 3.5 yrs
Peter 3.7 yrs	Sean 3.6 yrs
Sarah 3.11 yrs	Claire 3.8 yrs

Assessment for learning:

Rod demonstrates that he has strengths and skills at using verbal interactions within peer social settings. Rod's main peer interactions and responses are with Peter, Sarah, Sean and Claire.

Method 6. Time Samples

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A **time sample** provides a snapshot of a child's day. It is used to record the occurrence of a child's behaviour at particular times of day, for example group time or meal times. It is often used when an educator is concerned about a particular behaviour and needs to know how often it occurs. Time samples can be taken every half hour over a day or for shorter time intervals of five or ten minutes.

You may find this a useful method of observing a quiet child who you may seem to overlook, or if you want to get an overall picture of what experiences a child may be involved in during a specific period of the day.

A table needs to be drawn up with regular time intervals marked on it. For example, the observation may run for 30 minutes with five minute intervals recorded on the table. Comments or tally marks are recorded every five minutes to track the frequency of the behaviour being observed.

When writing a time sample:

- Focus on the situation, e.g. a particular child gets very loud around mid morning.

- Determine the skill, area of development, or the interactions the child is engaged in that you want to find out more information about.

- Think about what time of day would be the most appropriate to obtain this information.

- Once you decide on the information you require, and the best time of day to observe, pick your time frame.

Example

Date: 2/7/07 Name: Ben Age: 2.5 years Time: 10:50 am – 11:20 am Frequency: every five minutes		Background information: Ben has started to cry around midmorning for the past three days. Focus: Emotional development and social development
Time	**Code**	**Behaviour**
10:50 am	P	Ben sitting in the sandpit with Charlie and David.
10:55 am	N	Ben hiding behind the bush.
11:00 am	O	Ben is sitting alone on the rocks watching three children riding the bikes.
11:05 am	N	Ben at his bag.
11:10 am	N	Ben in the bathroom with the assistant, complaining about Jack.
11:15 am	N	Ben crying outside the bathroom.
11:20 am	N	Ben at his bag sucking his dummy and holding his 'lamby'.
Code: Type of Play **N – Non-play** **S – Solitary** **O - Observer** **P – Parallel** **G - Group**		**Assessment for learning:** During this time sample period Ben demonstrates a high level of non-play. Ben's emotional dispositions appear to be that he is tried and needing to feel a sense of secure attachment to familiar objects. Ben is using non-verbal communication to express his need for comfort and reassurance.

Method 7. Frequency Count

There are situations when it might be important to know how often a child exhibits a particular behaviour, perhaps especially when that behaviour is a disruptive one, such as aggression.

A *frequency count* is used to record the number of incidents of targeted behaviour as they occur.

They should only be used to measure distinct behaviours. These are behaviours that have a clear beginning and end, or when you do not know how often the behaviour occurs. Some behaviours that are generally suitable for recording frequency count include:

- Verbal aggression
- Physical aggression
- Destructive behaviour
- Separation anxiety

The term frequency immediately identifies this method's primary characteristic. The observer simply makes a mark on an observation sheet every time a particular behaviour occurs.

The use of frequency count is used to establish base-lines in behaviour guidance plans. This method of observation would not need an *assessment for learning*.

Example

Date: 13.02.08		Observer: Angela		
Child: Patrick		Focus: Social development		
Age: 10 years		Background information: Patrick is a very quiet child.		
Settings: During indoor play				
Date	Verbal Aggression (VA)	Physical Aggression (PA)	Totals	
			VA	PA
Mon 14/5/12	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓	9	7
Tues 15/5/12	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	8	9
Wed 16/5/12	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	8	8
Thurs 17/5/12	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	11	8
Fri 18/5/12	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓	8	9

Summary

Total instances of verbal aggression	**= 44**
Average number of VA per day	**= 8.8**
Round off to	**= 9**
Total instances of physical aggression	**= 41**
Average number of PA per day	**= 8.2**
Round off to	**= 8**

Method 8. Event Sample
(ABC Narrative)

An **event sample** can give an indication of the reasons why a particular behaviour occurs. It can help assess what sparks a certain reaction in a child. Nixon & Gould (2000, p. 205) suggest event samples allow you to identify the possible causes or consequences of concerning behaviour. When more information is gathered about what triggers certain behaviour, strategies may be planned to alter the behaviour. This can be recorded using the ABC format:

- A for Antecedent behaviour (what happened just before the event).
- B for Behaviour (a short record of the event itself).
- C for Consequence (what happened immediately after the event).

Event and time samples are less frequently used than anecdotes, checklists and running records, however, it is important to be aware of these methods and their use. This method could also be used in conjunction with a frequency count in a behaviour guidance plan.

Example

Date: 13.3.08	Observer: June
Child: John (4.3 years)	Background information:
Setting: Block Corner	John has been exhibiting aggressive behaviour in small group situations.
Others involved: Chris (5 years) Blake (4.10 years)	

Time	Antecedent Event	Behaviour	Consequent Event
9:45 am	In solitary play J constructed a complex block tower. C and B asked if they could join in.	J yelled at C and B and told them they could not play.	J knocked the tower to the ground and moved to another area in the room. C and B left the block area.

Assessment for learning:

John is engaged in solitary play and appears to be self directed, persistent and imaginative in his block creation.

John's trigger is that the other children want to join in his play. His communication is through verbal and physical aggression.

The consequence for John was that his play was disruptive.

This event sample isolates one incident of John's behaviour. It allows for some interpretation of the cause of his aggressive behaviour. You will need to take a number of event samples to determine the accuracy of your findings. Used with other observational tools, it can help to provide a balanced, professional analysis of the child's behaviour.

Method 9. Work Samples

An assortment of **work samples** collated over a period of time can help trace the child's development. Work samples can include drawings, paintings, collages, writing samples, and photographs of construction projects. Dated examples of children's work reflect creativity and provide specific examples to share with parents.

Children's original work samples are hard evidence of the child's developing cognitive and creative abilities. Over time, as you view the child's collection of work samples, you are able to physically see the distance travelled in each child's learning and development. It enables the adult to learn something new about the child's emerging abilities and interests.

Work samples can include a comment from the child about their work. These work samples can be displayed in a portfolio of learning as a record to share with family and friends as a method of documenting on going assessment of learning. Adding additional information, observations or brief comments to children's work samples enhances the meanings behind the work created by the child. These could include adding children's interpretations, ideas, theories or brief comments on the setting or circumstances surrounding the event.

Example

Date: 22nd March 2008 **Time:** 10:00 am **Child:** Blair (3.8 yrs) **Place:** Indoors **Setting:** String painting experience	**Observer:** Claire **Background information:** Blair has shown interest in different methods of painting. **Other children:** Tom (4.1 yrs), Jake (3.6 yrs), Beth (3.10 yrs)
  Blair discussed with T, J & B "This is the fire from camping. We're eating marshmallows they're cooking in the fire"	**Assessment for learning**: Blair demonstrates a learning disposition of creativity and imagination. Blair shows fine motor control when using the string and wool for painting. He is also able to clearly express his own experiences of camping through language and visual arts.

Method 10. Photographs

Photographs of **significant events or learning** of the child at work, play or on an outing are very valuable. When using photographs as an observational method for assessment of learning the focus is different from when taking photographs for parents to share their child's day. The focus is on the child's learning and development, rather than a 'photo opportunity'. An example of significant events or learning may be a child who is a very active child who sits and reads for 3 minutes.

They are a valuable means of recording the stages of a child's development and learning. As well as, gathering information on how a child explores their environment and develops their ideas.

Photographs could also be used to record and chart everyday routines that incorporate children's developing self-help skills e.g. hand washing, dressing and feeding.

It is essential to always seek parental permission for the use of their child's photograph in any publication.

Example

Date: 22nd March 2008 **Time:** 10:00 am **Child:** Joe (2.6 yrs) **Place:** Indoors **Setting:** Bathroom	**Observer:** Claire **Background information:** Joe has been showing interest in washing hands by himself. This is the transition from play to morning tea.
	Joe independently turned the tap on and lathered his hands with soap.
	Joe turned around and said to Claire "Me, wash hands".
	Joe finished washing his hands and attempted to turn the tap off and said "Stop Claire, stop you do". Joe grabbed his purple hand towel and dried his hands.

Assessment for learning:

Joe's learning disposition is that he wants to take on increasing self-help tasks for himself and is persistent. Joe is showing a strong sense of wellbeing and an increased sense of responsibility. Joe is able to ask for help when he is unable to turn off the tap.