



Australian Children's
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Quality Authority



OBSERVATION AND RECORDING

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Observation and recording... For so many of us educators these words are enough to make us shudder! Then we worry about how many observations we should do; what form of recording these should take; how we can interpret the information for our planning... aaaggghhhhhhhhh!

This post is for those who are STUCK! If you have already worked out your answers to the above issues, that is wonderful. You don't need what I am going to suggest.

Rather than trying to answer the above questions (How many observations? What form of recording? How we can interpret the information?), try this instead:

1. Choose a way to keep each child's records together – maybe a small notebook for each child. Maybe a large notebook divided into sections. What about a clipboard with loose paper you can file later? The iPad? The most important thing about this choice is that it is something that works for YOU.
2. Write down one child's name. Don't worry about observations. Although you may not know it, you have done HEAPS of observing already. Don't worry about the format of recording you are going to use. Just write!
3. What are you going to write about? You are going to write what you already know about the child. Some people prefer to brainstorm and jot down anything and everything they can think of – then sort it out later. Others prefer to write under headings from the beginning. (See the example at the end of this article.) Again, this is YOUR choice.
4. Write today's date and a heading which says something like 'Summary of observations of (child's name) to this date'.

5. If you are a person who likes headings, or if you are struggling to think of what to write, try jotting things down under headings. You can choose the headings that suit you best. The following are suggestions ONLY:
 - a. Child's interests, preferred activities
 - b. Child's friends, preferred peers
 - c. Child's personality
 - d. Child's strengths (what the child is good at)
 - e. What the child needs help with (needs)
 - f. Child's likes and dislikes
 - g. Child's self-help skills (For example, do they need help to eat? Are they toilet trained? This one may be more relevant for younger children.)
 - h. Changes in the child since the beginning of the year (For example, settles easily now whereas used to cry on arrival at beginning.)
 - i. Child's relationships with others: family, peers, educators
 - j. Anything special I have noticed about this child (positive or negative)
 - k. Any other things I think are useful (Consider such things as any concerns you may have about the child, but do not focus solely on these.)
6. You will probably be surprised about how much you already know about the child from what you have observed. Those areas that you can NOT answer should be the focus of your specific observations for this child in the near future.
7. Can you add photos to your written observations that support what you have written? For example, photos of the child playing with preferred peers; photos of child during preferred activities.



8. You can do this by yourself or in consultation with other educators. You can write your observations as a combined effort, or you can write your own observations and then add a section at the end with a heading like: 'More observations of (child's name) by Bob and Beulah (other educators)'.
9. You might be responsible for writing up observations on only some of the children, or you might be expected to make observations on all of them. Either way, as a starting point try to write up what you know about each child. Now you have written observations on each child – or each child you need to observe (depending on how your service does it).
10. Wouldn't it be great if you could stop right there? But no – this is just getting started! NOW you need to start looking specifically at individual children to fill in any gaps you have in your knowledge about them. Some children fly under the radar and we can be surprised to realise we don't really know much about them. Others may be challenging for us so we find that much of what we know about them is how they challenge us! For these children we need to concentrate on identifying their strengths.
11. Deliberately plan to specifically observe the individual children for whom you do NOT have full pictures. Ask other educators to help, if appropriate. For example: 'Can you let me know who you see Ella playing with today? I'm trying to get a better understanding of who she likes to play with.' When you add these new observations, be sure to date them. This shows you are now observing and recording over time.
12. Your service may expect you to write your observations in certain ways. If so, you need to discuss with your supervisor (Room Leader, Educational Leader) what they want you to do, and if there is a set number of records of observations required. Now that you have basic information written down for each child, you will find these requirements are not as difficult as they may have seemed previously.

13. The suggestions above are BY NO MEANS the only things you should be recording observations about! You can record observations about specific activities, spontaneous learning experiences, conversations between children or between children and educators, events such as excursions or incursions – pretty much anything and everything that happens!
14. And all of these recorded observations are of value to you (and fellow educators) when you are planning. USE the information. Preferred activities? Preferred play-mates? Children's likes and dislikes? Strengths? Needs? By using the information you have acquired about the children as individuals in your planning for them, you are demonstrating child-focused planning.
15. Finally, if this method does not appeal to you, or your service does not want you to do it, then IGNORE it! The reason for making these suggestions comes from seeing how difficult it is for many Educators to get started on RECORDING their observations. Because whether you have been thinking of yourself as 'doing observations' or not, you HAVE been doing just that every day!

Summary of observations of _____ to (date) _____	
Child's interests, preferred activities	
Child's friends, preferred peers	
Child's personality	
Child's strengths	
Child's likes and dislikes	
Child's self-help skills	
Changes in the child since the beginning of the year	
Child's relationships with others: family, peers, educators	
Anything special I have noticed about this child (positive or negative)	
Any other things I think are useful	

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Content

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