

Knowing the child – Observation

Look, listen, note, understand and share

Why do we need to do this?

- Each child is unique and will make progress at different rates. We need to get to know the child and their skills and needs through observing them in a variety of contexts. When we know how they learn, what they can do and what they need support with, then we can support their learning and development effectively.

What do we need to know?

- We need to find out where the child is developmentally across the EYFS when we first start caring/working for/with them in terms of their learning and development. Do we know if the child is working in-line with age related expectations?
- This knowledge of individuals needs to be maintained so that practitioners are aware of when the child does something new or different.
- Significant steps in learning that take place i.e. anything new or different for the child, what you don't already know or has not been previously recorded.
- How do they learn? What is their learning style?
- What are they interested in?
- Be aware that some groups of children may be more vulnerable to low achievement for example: Looked After Children (LAC) English as an Additional Language (EAL), Special Educational, Needs and Disability (SEND), summer born, higher attaining children, funded two year olds, free school meal entitlement, International New Arrivals (INA), ethnicity, gender.

Who will help?

- The key person/ class teacher is responsible for gathering this information together and usually keeps it all in a personal Learning Journal for the child.
- The key person/ class teacher should support parents to contribute their knowledge of their child to this process so a view of the child at home is also considered.
- This Learning Journal is a shared document and contributions may also be added from other professionals who may be involved with the child so a complete picture of the child evolves.
- Other practitioners in the setting should also be on the lookout for significant learning for any child and making sure they capture this and /or discuss it with the key person/ class teacher.
- Communication within the setting is crucial so everyone involved with the child knows what to look out for and how to support them during their interactions.

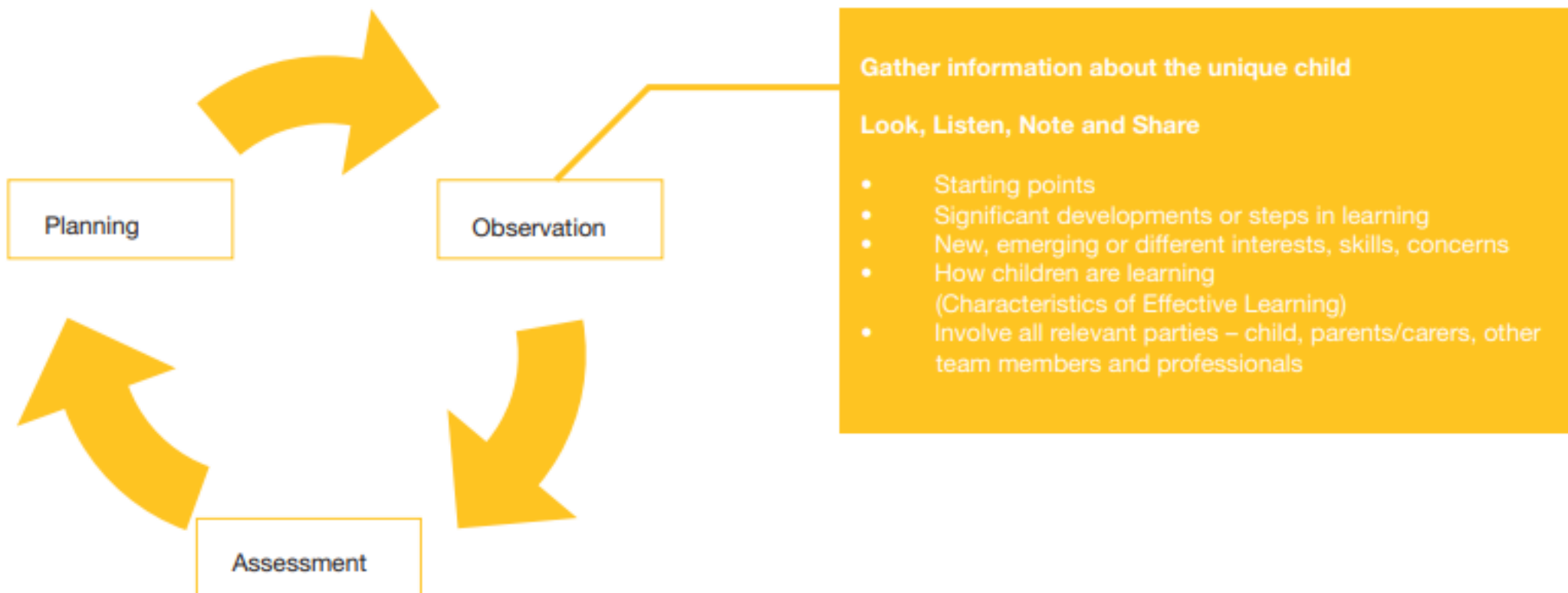
How can we find the information out?

- Through observing the child in a range of contexts and describing what actually happens. The adult must watch and take note of what they do, with the intention of doing something as a result.
- This is a skilled role and the adult will need to choose efficient ways of collecting useful evidence during everyday interactions, play and routines. The observation toolkit can be used by the practitioner to choose the most appropriate format or method to document what they are witnessing. The adult must be able to make quick meaningful notes. There is no set number of observations or correct way of doing this so we have shown a variety of examples, detailing when and why you might use them, which you can dip into and choose or adapt as needed.

When will we do this?

- Observation should be part of the adults' everyday role. They should be made over time in different situations and different times of the day to cover a breadth of learning opportunities.
- Daily contact with parents should be used to capture discussions and information which will support this developing knowledge of the child.
- Observations should be concise containing only the significant information so should be quick to record. This could be an annotation/ adult comment on a painting, a quote during a snack time discussion or a post it 'wow' moment observed during outdoor play.
- Observations should take place when and wherever significant learning takes place. Having post its placed at points around the setting will support this. It is important to look at children's learning holistically and value what they do, taking note of the full range of situations they engage in across the day.

Observation - gathering evidence

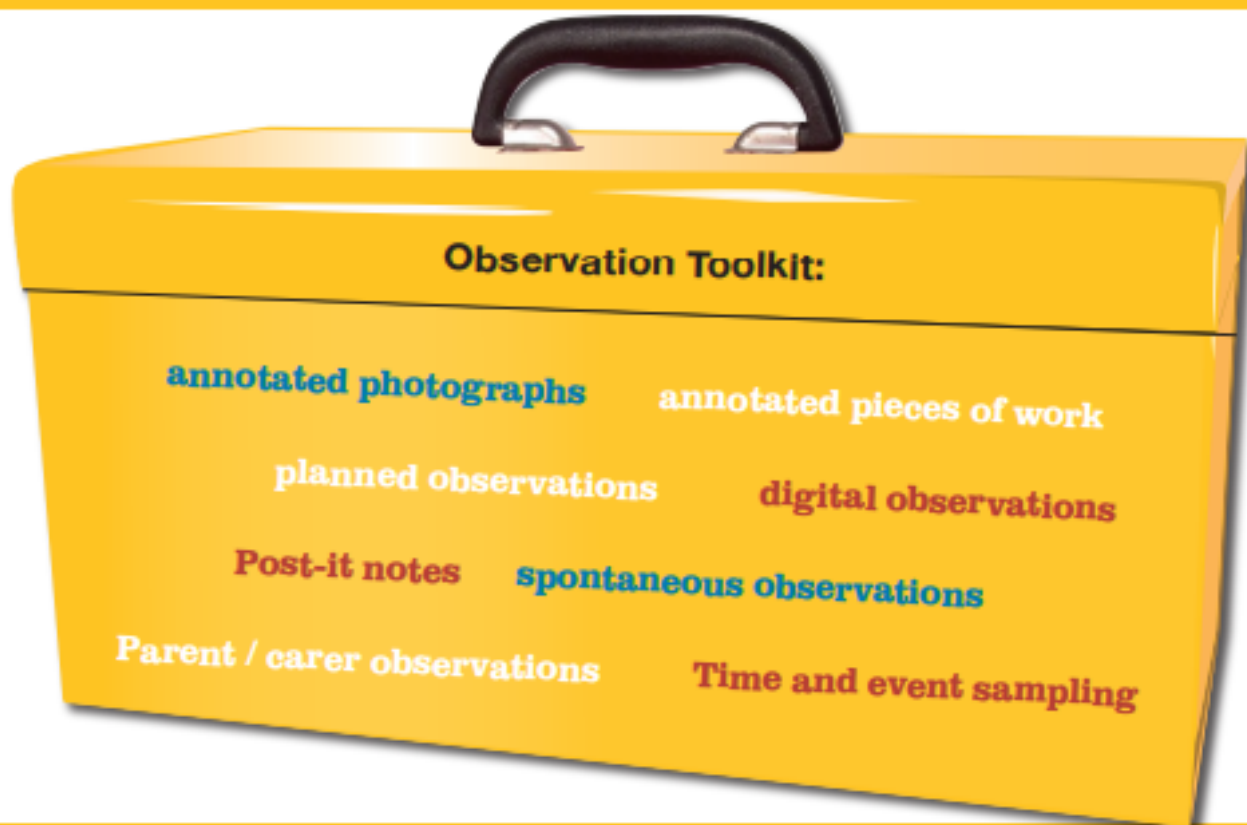


Reflecting on Observations:

- Are making and reflecting on observations seen as an integral part of every practitioner's role?
- Is appropriate time given to discussing observations, making assessments and planning together as a team?
- Do you have a toolkit of methods for observing which are understood and utilised effectively by practitioners?
- How do you support new and existing practitioners in developing the skills necessary to recognise and record significant learning?
- How do you ensure that all involved practitioners feed observations into the assessment process for individual children?
- How do you encourage parents to contribute and value observations and information from home?
- What systems do you have in place to enable the sharing of observations with the wider team?
- How do you ensure that important elements, such as date, actual age and context, are always included in observations?
- Do the observations you make enable you to detail a clear starting point and progress made for individuals and groups?
- How do the observations made impact on planning, activities, resourcing and the environment?

Observation - gathering evidence

The gathering of this crucial information can take many forms. There are a variety of ways to gather information and these should be seen as a toolkit to choose from to suit the learning and context. In the Observation section of this resource each method shown in the toolkit is explored further.



Effective Practice:

- Observation systems should be manageable and form an essential part of the observation, assessment and planning cycle rather than generate surplus or duplicate information. To be manageable it is essential that all EYFS practitioners are able to make accurate and relevant observations. This may require training and development for practitioners new to EYFS, through training courses and in-house support and mentoring.
- Effective observation systems are flexible to ensure all significant learning is captured for all children. Practitioners should observe holistically and link to the 7 areas of learning afterwards, as only ever looking for one area of learning can create too narrow a picture.
- Children's learning journals should be a shared document which shows clearly children's starting points and progress made.
- All practitioners should be confident to use a variety of methods to ensure significant moments in learning and development for all children are captured and then acted upon.
- It is essential that practitioners have time to reflect upon and share their observations with key people in the child's life to ensure appropriate next steps in learning and development are followed.
- Observations are informed by most current assessments / knowledge of the child's learning and development.