

- activity where the observations took place;
- the children involved (as the child may not always be with these children; this might be a new grouping);
- drawings, sketches are added to help clarify notes (as appropriate); and
- notes are recorded on the spot, or as soon as possible after the observation occurred, as they will be more accurate.

Notes may be added to the back of children's drawings/paintings/recordings so that they remain with the work sample. These notes elaborate on the work and provide a context for reflection at a later time.

One of the limitations of observation is that educators' personal biases may be incorporated into their written anecdotes. To avoid this,

educators write down only what they *see* or *hear* during their observations, without making judgment statements. For example, there is a difference between noting that, "Colin is aggressive" versus "Colin hit Neelam on her arm using a wooden block at the small block centre". The first record is a subjective interpretation that labels the child, while the second record is a true factual observation. To help prevent judgment statements from being reported, ask, "Is it an observable behaviour?"

Factors Affecting Observation Records

Three important factors provide the context in which observations take place:

- the neighbourhood in which the school is located;
- the school environment; and

Measurement and Capacity

The students are learning about capacity and the students and educator are discussing how many small scoops it will take to fill a specific container. Before actually measuring, the students are asked to guess how many scoops will be required to fill the cylinder. They write their guesses on sticky notes. After all the students make their guesses the educator and the class discuss the concepts of greater/more than, few/less than and the same/equal. The educator then has students gather around the stand table to take the actual measurement of how many scoops are needed. After measuring, the students' guesses are placed in the appropriate more/less/same column on a chart. The students are invited to continue exploring the activity further at the sand table, as well as the water table where there are many different size containers and scoops to experiment with. Students record their guesses as to how many small scoops it will take to fill a cylinder container.



- the classroom environment, including the physical set-up, the program goals, and the daily schedule.²⁵

Although naturalistic observation of children provides educators with a rich source of information, many factors can affect observations.

These include, but are not limited to:

- Educator bias. The educator might be affected by their own philosophy or interests, cultural background, experiences, and professional development.
- Time of day. Are observations made right before lunch or at the very end of the day when children might be hungry or tired?
- Weather. Are the children overly excited due to the first snowfall of the season? Have the children been indoors all day without any physical activity?
- Special events such as birthdays, holidays, special presentations or assemblies, guest speakers.

- Program structure and goals. Is the daily schedule inconsistent? Is it too rigid? Is the program more educator-directed or child-centred?
- Personalities of educator and learner. Does a personality conflict exist? Is there favouritism?
- Classroom environment. Consider the type, novelty, and availability of toys or materials, use of resources, room arrangement, traffic patterns, routines, number and variety of learning centres open, number of children at each learning centre, noise level, visual stimulation.
- Illness or health issues. Is the child feeling unwell that day?

Reflection is the key to effective observation - thinking about whether what is being observed fits a pattern of behaviour or why it might be different. When there are discrepancies, educators



Observations	Thoughts	Next Steps
Jimmy uses the coloured cubes to make a large circle. He places one teddy bear counter on each block, then gets the small zoo animals and sorts them into groups in the circle. Tidies up quickly at signal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • made an enclosed shape - circle; • matches one to one; • sorts animals according to kind; • sustained interest for 25 minutes. <p><i>What would he say?</i></p>	
During song <i>This is What I Can Do</i> , Oleg follows the pattern of keeping the beat. Puts up his hand to take a turn at being the leader, makes his own two-action pattern, and sings the words.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • responds to the music by keeping the beat; • made a variation of own with two new actions; • has learned the repetitive words; • knows when to start and stop; • volunteered to be the leader. <p><i>What other patterns can he replicate?</i></p>	

As the above samples illustrate, the children were able to demonstrate abilities, understandings, and interests without using language. These demonstrations show what the children knew and could do at particular times. Missing from these examples is the educator’s dialogue to scaffold language, to support and extend their learning to gain further information.

Educators who are aware of the stages of language acquisition recognize the children’s needs and how to support their learning. They take these stages into account when planning, assessing, and reporting on progress. As well, they supply and model vocabulary to help children clarify their ideas and to extend their thoughts.

Assessing Children with Special Needs

A rich learning environment based on children’s strengths and observed needs enables all to reach their potential. Observing children engaged in learning experiences is critical to understanding their development. The kindergarten educator may be the first to document a child’s progress and signal the presence of atypical behaviours that need further investigation. There has to be ongoing assessment that identifies the child’s

progress over time, recognizing that some developmental milestones may take longer for some than others.

Alternately, some children enter kindergarten with identified needs and strategies for support. This is where plans for transition to school are important. Knowing the child’s needs and discussing adaptations to program plans with parents and professionals before the child enters saves time and stress for all. Assessment of the child will be in relation to the individual education plan.

Getting to know each child and their unique qualities and style enables educators to plan a suitable program. There may need to be changes to the following:

Instructional Accommodations

Educators match the skill level to the child’s development. For Ruben, who was unable to sign in, the educator had him use his name card and place the plastic letters over top of each letter. In some cases, educators model (e.g., how to throw and catch a bean bag) and have the child repeat. If the tasks are more complicated, breaking them down helps, (e.g., having an order for dressing to

go outside; trying to fit one puzzle piece at a time instead of all the pieces).

Environmental Accommodations

Depending on the child's needs, the educator changes the size of materials, (large brushes and surfaces for painting, pouring utensils that have handles to help with control, larger balls for throwing and catching). Pathways may be widened to accommodate larger movements or wheelchairs.

Assessment Accommodations

Educators may change tasks to gather information, (supporting Rena with retelling by using books and props; using assistive devices for drawing or writing). Educators may observe more closely, wait longer, and give children more time to answer and respond. As with any child, feedback must be focused on what the child was able to do.

In all areas, educators find ways to include children rather than exclude them. It may mean inviting the child to participate with one other child, or modeling social conversation and skills for a group. Expectations may be modified for some children.

As part of regular instruction, assessment is critical to helping all children, and particularly those with special needs, in meeting the designated education or developmental outcomes.

Other Methods of Assessment

*There is agreement in the education field that teachers need to gather data about their students from “multiple measures” – meaning that information should be gathered from different sources, at different times, in different settings or contexts, using different recording methods.*²⁶



The following graphic illustrates some assessment tools and strategies that may be used in kindergarten to assess specific knowledge or skills. (For more detailed descriptions of some of these, see Appendix 1.)

Although observation is the major assessment tool in kindergarten, it is important to have a range of strategies from which to choose. In other words, educators select the tool or strategy that best meets their needs for gathering specific information.

Educators often feel they don't know enough about a particular child, have concerns, or notice behaviours that may not be typical. They may need to gather evidence to support their perceptions, or to provide evidence for follow-up. Some useful strategies for gathering information are:

Case Study

A case study is an in-depth analysis of an individual child over time. Very often, a case study is conducted with a child who may be at risk for learning difficulties or has specific special needs. Important data can be gathered through careful observations, interviews with the child, his or her parents, and any additional support staff. Based on the information collected, a written summary of the child's strengths and weaknesses is provided, including a plan for next steps and suggested strategies. (See Appendix 6: Case Study of Writing.)

Mapping

This is a simple technique in which the movement of a particular child is tracked during an established

What I need to find out	Tool/Strategy
strategies the child is using when reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • running records • observation of reading behaviours • questioning (How did you figure out that word?)
stage of picture making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • painting or drawing sample • observation
oral language development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation • language sample • developmental continuum • stages of language acquisition • first language assessment if needed
inquiry skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation/anecdotal notes of conversation • child's representations/recordings • questioning and talking with child • annotated photographs or videotaping
relationships with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation/anecdotal notes • developmental continuum
gross motor development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • observation/anecdotal notes • developmental continuums
strengths and needs of class as a whole in particular areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • check-bric or rating scale