

A Guide to Different Observation Methods

By Kathy Brodie, author of *Observation, Assessment and Planning in the Early Years*

Observation Method	Time	Advantages	Disadvantages
Magic Moments	★	Easy to write up Capture fleeting moments of development	Practitioners need to be very aware of child development so they can spot a magic moment
Learning stories and learning journeys	★★★★★	Descriptive, detailed with written and pictorial evidence	Takes time to assemble the photos, written work. Key person
Narrative	★★★	Detailed. Can be planned in. Can be focused on one area of development	Needs practitioner sole attention for short time. Key person
Time sample	★★	Better idea of child's interests throughout nursery	Need to remember to do it. May need practitioners in several rooms if free flow play
Tracking	★	Can identify which parts of the setting are being used	May need practitioners in several rooms if free flow play
Sociogram	★★	Identifying friendship groups	May need full attention of the practitioner to spot fleeting conversations
Antecedent, Behaviour Consequence, Decision	★★	Rounded picture of behaviour Clear targets	Practitioner needs to witness antecedent Context needs to be understood
Video	★★★	Record everything and can review at leisure later. Children enjoy reviewing.	Children may play to the camera if they know they are being recorded. Some skill needed to capture right things.
Focus child	★	Ensure that every child is observed in setting Different views from different practitioners	Child may not 'perform' that day May get several observations the same
Parent partnership	★★★	Different perspective for example, playing with siblings	Reliability and can take time to get parents onboard
Research	★★★★★	Highly structured and focused observations	Usually has a narrow research question, so may not get an holistic view
Schema	★★	Very powerful, deep level learning. Reasonably common	Practitioners need to understand and be able to spot schematic play