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ANALYZING OBSERVATIONS

What is analysis?

The analysis phase is the step in the observation cycle when educators **interpret** what they have recorded. In this analysis phase, educators move beyond an objective recording of facts and introduce a more subjective element. In a way, analysis is a form of transformation, or translation, of the observational data. Educators seek to identify underlying factors that they think could explain what they have observed. By assigning meaning to what they have seen and heard, educators translate the raw observational data into a form that they can use for the next step in the cycle: planning responses. In combination with the raw data, analysis can also be useful for other partners (parents, co-workers, specialists).

How do I analyze my observations?

Analyzing your observations will involve coming up with theories that could explain the behaviours, interactions, skills, etc. that you have observed. These theories could be based on internal factors, like maturation or temperament, or on external factors, like environment and experience. It's often a good idea to have multiple theories in mind.

Remember that any analysis is provisional; that is to say, any theory is based on your observations to date. If new evidence were to present itself, you might have to adjust your interpretation. Often, educators use phrases like “it would seem” or “perhaps” to reflect the provisional nature of their analysis.

Educators generally use three types of analysis: inferences, summaries and assessments.

When educators make **inferences**, they are attempting to answer these questions: Why did I see what I saw? What can explain what I saw?

When educators **summarize**, they are attempting to answer these questions: What is the big picture? Is there any data that could be grouped together under one idea or topic? Are there any overall patterns or unifying elements? What is the most essential information that I have observed?

When educators **assess**, they are addressing these questions: How is this (child, educator, environment) progressing? What are the strengths and areas that need strengthening?

When do I analyze my observations?

This question of timing represents one of the big differences between doing observation and analysis as a professional educator and engaging in the same processes as a “civilian.” In your regular life, you probably observe and analyze simultaneously. For example, you might say to yourself about a person you have just passed on the street: “She’s really happy!” What you likely have not realized is that your analysis that she’s happy is based on an observation, a broad smile on her face, perhaps. The observation and the analysis occur so close together in your mind that they are practically indistinguishable.

Educators have to approach the tasks of observation and analysis differently, in order to avoid [bias](#). Educators must be very careful to keep their subjective analysis separate from their objective observations; this separation reduces the chances of bias creeping in.

To do this, educators usually record their observations first, and analyze second. To further reinforce this separation, educators often present the two types of information separately on the page as well, by using headings or columns.

How often should I analyze my observations?

This is a great question! In general, you will want to do regular analysis – but what does this mean in practice? Sometimes, one anecdote contains enough data to start analyzing. In the case of a single anecdote, educators often choose inferences as the preferred form of analysis.

Other times, you will need to collect multiple observations before you can begin your analysis. In this case, maybe a summary would be useful.

Thinking about what you want to do with the information can help. Do you want to share your analysis with a co-worker? Do you want to use it to help you decide what toys you will take out tomorrow? Each situation will probably require a unique “schedule” of observation and analysis.

Sample Anecdotal Record and Analysis (Inferences)

Observation

Litsa was holding Lexie in her arms outside the door of the classroom. Lexie's mom stood next to them, holding a baby carrier with her newborn in it. Lexie wailed loudly and reached out first one arm, then both arms, towards her mother. Lexie cried out, "Mummyyyy!" When Lexie's mom turned to leave, Lexie began crying even more loudly, and sobbed, "Nooooo! Mummyyyy!"

Inferences

Lexie seems to be experiencing separation anxiety.

The birth of the new baby may be a contributing factor.

Lexie may have been upset that Theresa was not there and there was a sub instead.

Perhaps Lexie was not feeling well. There are already two children with bad colds in the group.

[Click here](#) for exercises that help to analyze observations.

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