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DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

What are the developmental domains?

Each of the different developmental domains consists of a somewhat arbitrary grouping of related skills and behaviours. Each grouping or **domain** represents one specific aspect of a child's overall development.

It is important to keep in mind that there is often considerable overlap between the different domains. Most behaviours and skills could easily be classified under more than one domain. However, using the domains can help educators organize their thoughts and observations.

Although many different systems exist for dividing development into different domains, for the purposes of this website, we will refer to six domains. They are:

- **Physical Domain**
    - Behaviours involving the body
    - Can be grouped into gross-motor (large muscles) and fine-motor (small muscles) behaviours, as well as sensory skills (hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, touching)
- **Language Domain**

- - Behaviours involving communication
  - Listening, talking, literacy skills (reading, writing, comprehension, expression), as well as non-verbal communication skills
- **Aesthetic Domain**
  - Skills and behaviours used to perceive and evaluate beauty, both in the natural world and man-made objects
  - How individuals respond to beauty and express their own inspirations through drawing, painting, dance, song, poetry, sculpture, movement, stories, etc.
- **Cognitive Domain**
  - Skills used to know, learn and understand
- **Emotional Domain**
  - The inner life of the child: feelings and emotions, fears, joys, etc.
  - Important elements of the emotional domain include self-concept, self-esteem and autonomy
- **Social Domain**
  - Behaviours and skills used to establish and maintain relationships with others

Why do early childhood educators use the developmental domains?

Early childhood educators use the developmental domains as a kind of shorthand when considering the different aspects of each child's overall development.

By grouping related behaviours and skills into domains, educators can more easily zero in on a specific area of a child's growth and learning.

By organizing and tracking their observations using the developmental domains, educators can ensure that they are gathering data from each of these domains, thus creating a sampling of observations that represents the **whole child**.

How do early childhood educators use the developmental domains?

There are many different ways that educators can use the domains in their observations. For example, many checklists are organized using the domains. These developmental checklists are divided into different sections where specific skills from each domain are grouped together.

Click here to see more information about checklists. Once the checklist is complete, the educator can be sure that she has gathered data that represents each significant aspect of a child's overall development.

Educators may also use the developmental domains when recording their observations using more qualitative methods, like running records and anecdotal records. For example, many educators indicate which domain(s) they think are most relevant to the "story" being recorded at the top or on the side of each record. Educators then use this information to track which domains they have "covered" for each child.

Example of an anecdotal record with domains at the top

In this example, the observer has identified the cognitive and language domains as being most relevant to the particular anecdote being recorded. This information is clearly indicated under a separate heading at the top of the anecdote.

Date: October 10, 2011

Domain(s): Cognitive, Language

Anecdote: Caitlyn sat on the big white chair looking at a board book. She pointed to a picture of a train, and chirped, "Choo choo!"

Example of a running record with domains on the side

In this example, the observer has added a quick note about which domain and specific skill is being observed at certain points in the observation.

Observation	Domain
Annette kneels down next to Maya and begins wiping her face with a wet cloth. *As Annette starts to wipe Maya's right hand, Maya grabs the cloth with her left hand and yanks it away from Annette.*	Emotional Domain (autonomy)
Annette asks, "You wanna do it?" Maya starts wiping her mouth and tongue, clutching the cloth tightly in both hands.	Language domain (comprehension) Physical domain (hand-eye coordination)
Annette smiles, claps her hands together and exclaims, "OK! Good job!"	
Annette reaches out and begins to lift Maya's bib over her head. Maya transfers the wet cloth to her right hand, then, as the bib is lifted up and over her head, grabs it with both hands again. She wipes the cloth across her cheek and mouth, then vigorously swipes at her tongue four times.	Physical domain (fine-motor control)

[Click here](#) for exercises to help explore the different developmental domains.

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