



Manager's Briefcase index

Manager's Briefcase is SLT's unique online collection of proformas, model documents and policy guides to assist school leaders.

Observation and evaluation in the early years

For practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), a very important aspect of their job is ascertaining the impact existing provision is having on their young students.

Since formal assessments are generally unsuited to the EYFS classroom, teacher observations inevitably play a substantial role in evaluating provision and relaying findings to parents and carers. You will often find EYFS teachers taking photographs of the children during lessons and annotating them to show parents which activities their young child favours at school.

However, although useful, this not enough. As Sue Lyle argued in the previous article, EYFS teachers must take a methodical approach to their observations to find out if their provision meets the needs of their young students.

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This month's issue

A set of pro formas to guide early years practitioners through Sue Lyle's proposed observation and evaluation process. It can be implemented over a half term period and will involve all members of the EYFS team.

This four-stage model is based on Action Research approaches to professional development, where the results of the observations and evaluations provide an agenda for improvement of provision.

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What do I need to look for?

Physical presence and gesture

Observe the child in motion, physically engaged, both outdoors and indoors:

- What do they like to do outdoors and what do they choose to do indoors?
- Observe the child when doing activities like drawing or construction, jig-saws or looking at books.
- Where does the child seem most absorbed or at ease?
- Where does s/he seem least comfortable or constrained?

Disposition and temperament

- Over the course of the observation, consider how the child expresses her feelings – pay attention to voice, ways of speaking, bodily expression – they reveal a lot about a child's emotional engagement and their temperament.
- Do they seem outward going and gregarious or more inward looking?
- What do they care about and what stirs their feelings? How do they express their feelings?

Connections with others

- How does the child relate to other children?
- Who do they play with?
- How does the child cope when difficulties arise?
- When does the child prefer to be alone?
- How does the child relate to familiar adults?
- Does the child seek out particular adults or children? What do you think draws them to these people?
- Does the child ignore or avoid some children or adults? Why do you think that is?
- How do other children/adults respond to the child?

Strong interests and preferences

- What does the child really like? Include food, colours, people, animals, places.
- What doesn't the child like?
- How does the child express her likes or dislikes?

Modes of thinking and learning

- What questions does the child ask? (record them)
- What does the child wonder about? (write down what the child says)
- What is the child curious about?
- What are the child's favourite stories? Play activities? Games? What absorbs her?
- What does the child choose to do regularly?
- What kind of 'props' does the child like to use? (dressing up? Small world play? Wheeled vehicles?)
- What themes feature in the child's play? Superheroes? TV characters? Knights? Princesses? Dinosaurs? Fairy tale characters? Others?
- What makes play 'go right' and what spoils it?
- Does the child have a 'feel' for something, e.g. for story or song, for throwing a ball, for animals or drama, for building things, etc? What is the evidence for this?
- Does the child observe and remember?
- Does the child like to take things apart and put them back together?
- Does the child like to dramatise and enact things?
- Does the child like to look at things?
- Does the child like to talk about things?
- Does the child like problem-solving?
- Does the child have an interest in causal relations?

This list is by no means exhaustive!



Observation record sheet

Record and organise your observation notes using this form			
Child's name:			
Class:		Teacher's name:	
Observer's name:			
Physical presence and gesture			
Indoors		Outdoors	
Notes			
Disposition and temperament			



Connections with others

Adults	Other children

Notes

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Strong interests and preferences

Likes	Dislikes

Notes

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Modes of thinking and learning

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ADDITIONAL NOTES



Interrogating our data

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Name:	
Date:	
Movement and development of bodily skills	
How do we provide opportunities for this?	
How might we improve?	
Engaging and challenging aspects of the world outside the school	
How do we bring children close to these?	



How might we improve?

Encouraging make-believe and imaginative play

How do we do this?

How might we improve?

Our recommendations are:



Preparation for literacy

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Name:	
Date:	
Talk, play and representation	
What opportunities do children have for this?	
How might we improve?	
Rhyme, rhythm and language patterns	
What opportunities do children have to experience this?	



How might we improve?

Stories and narratives

What opportunities do children have to listen and engage with these?

How might we improve?



Environmental print and messages

What opportunities do children have to engage with this?

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How might we improve?

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Are any aspects of literacy over-privileged or under-prioritised at the expense of others?

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Our recommendations are:

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The balance of experience

Name:	
Date:	
How much time do children spend in first-hand experiences?	
Across a day?	Across a week?
How might we improve?	
How much time do children spend experiencing sustained purposeful talk?	
Across a day?	Across a week?



How might we improve?

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How much time do children spend in sustained complex play?

Across a day?

Across a week?

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How might we improve?

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Our recommendations are:

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