



# Observation as a decision-making tool for educators

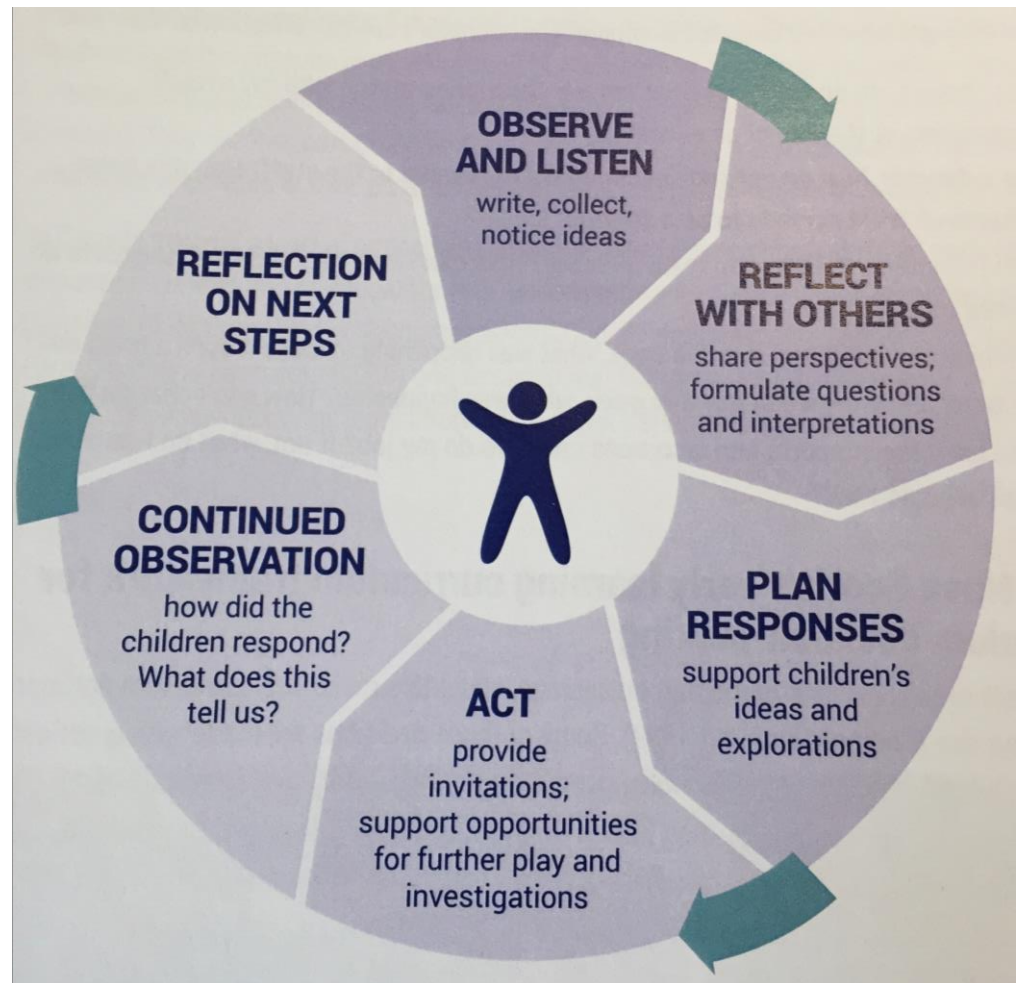
Susan Stacey 2019

From the  
framework (p26):  
a Circular Process

- Begin with observations
- Think about what we've seen....what does this tell us?
- Helpful to think with someone...
- Make a decision about how to respond
- Observe again



A daily  
reminder?



Some items to  
remember...from the  
educators'  
guide:

‘Nova Scotia’s Early  
Learning Curriculum  
Framework supports the  
educator in a reflective  
planning cycle that allows  
for **collaboration** between  
children and educators’  
(p25)

- What is our program's policy regarding behaviour guidance? When was this developed? Have we discussed this with parents? Does it truly reflect our Image of the Child? Do we follow this policy?
- How do staff, as a team, work together to design and create indoor and outdoor learning environments? Do the learning environments reflect our Image of the Child?
- Do the indoor and outdoor learning environments support the Learning Goals in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework?
- Do we have a process in place to support the elements of the planning cycle for our program?
- How can we involve families in our planning cycle?
- How can we make our documentation meaningful for parents?
- How do we balance human resource challenges, especially regarding to time, with our approach to documentation?

## Learning Goals, Objectives, and Strategies

Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework outlines four learning goals which are intended to be an integrated approach to early learning that recognizes in children's early years, learning is not isolated to specific categories. Early childhood education programs may use a single activity to teach several skills or concepts, such as language, social development, mathematical concepts, music, and fine and gross motor development. The *British Columbia Early Learning Framework* (British Columbia Ministry of Education n.d., 17) notes that

*This framework recognizes that there are no pre-set ways to promote the four areas of early learning. Many factors, including the children's setting, caregivers, language, culture, heritage, religion, temperament, and abilities, shape the experiences that support early learning. It is important to note that the areas of early learning are all inter-related: learning in one area is likely to support learning in all three other areas. As such, the learning goals outlined in each section, and the questions to consider in designing environments to support them, overlap and strengthen one another.*

The values, principles, and broad goals, while presented separately in the early learning curriculum framework, are interdependent and not intended for use in isolation. In practice they are in constant interplay, brought to life by communities of adults and children to constitute the curriculum as an organic whole in which early learning and care are inextricably connected.

As well, the learning goals presented in Nova Scotia's early learning curriculum framework are not intended to be discrete skills. It is not the intent of the document to have programs assess whether children have achieved well-being, discovery and invention, language and communication, or personal and social responsibility. Rather, the learning goals are intended to guide the design of learning environments, and inform the development of program activities and experiences for children.

• 'The learning goals are intended to guide the design of learning environments and inform the development of program activities and experiences for children (p27)

• That is; the goals are not intended to be discrete skills

Frequent questions that arise around observation:  
what are yours?

What am I looking for?

There are so many things happening....how do I know what to pay attention to?

What is the difference between observation for curriculum decisions, and observation for assessment?

So much to  
see....a five-  
minute scan  
of a classroom

In the construction area...

Nancy, Ali and Hailey, all toddlers, have moved several long hollow blocks to the centre of the room and have arranged them to form a square enclosure. Nancy lies on the floor inside the square, on a shaggy white rug. The other children drape long chiffon scarves over both the blocks and Nancy, to make a kind of see-through covering

WHAT INTRIGUES YOU ABOUT THESE SCENARIOS?

WHAT QUESTIONS ARISE FOR YOU?

WHAT DO YOU WONDER?



1

Aaron, (5 years) has made a list on a clipboard of all the children in the room (11 at the moment) and is approaching each child to ask 'Are you here?' He then makes a mark next to their name and moves on.

2

Alison (2 yrs) works alone at the easel. She slowly dips her brush into green paint, presses it onto the top of the paper, and watches the paint trickle down to the bottom. She repeats this action nine times before moving to the other side of the easel, where she repeats the action with red paint

## Around the room...

Aaron, (5 years) has made a list on a clipboard of all the children in the room (11 at the moment) and is approaching each child to ask 'Are you here?' He then makes a mark next to their name and moves on.

## In the art space:

Alison (2 yrs) works alone at the easel. She slowly dips her brush into green paint, presses it onto the top of the paper, and watches the paint trickle down to the bottom. She repeats this action nine times before moving to the other side of the easel, where she repeats the action with red paint.

What to  
consider when  
observing in  
your setting :

What are the children  
playing at? What is  
their idea?

Do they have a  
repetitive idea that  
they keep coming back  
to?

What might be their  
underlying agenda?

What are their  
strategies?



Be aware  
that....

When observing, we tend to  
'see the familiar' or 'what we  
expect to see.'

The most useful observations  
are when we do not assume  
anything

Disequilibrium can occur when  
we are looking for something  
and we don't know what it is!

Importantly....

What are they saying?

Listen carefully to their conversations with other children, their questions, arguments. Write these down, verbatim!





Watch for how children use materials. Are they sticking with one approach?

Do they experiment?  
Combine materials in unexpected ways?



Watch for  
changes in play:  
changes in  
playmates,  
materials, levels  
of complexity,  
length of play,  
and so on....





Tease out....What is significant?

Is this new for the child?  
Or 'old hat'?

Is this interesting for you  
as a teacher to think  
about? Puzzling in some  
way?

Does the event  
demonstrate the child's  
thinking or ideas or  
struggles in some way?

Does it show prior  
knowledge or a  
misunderstanding?









Same age,  
different  
heights,  
following up  
on a  
conversation







ON A PATH  
A WAGON  
WAS  
DOWN  
THE  
STREET



# Observing children's responses to literature

We can respond to  
*their* responses by:

Providing opportunities  
within the environment

Not as an 'activity' but  
as an invitation

# After reading 'Harry the dirty dog'

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Black and white paint at the easel provokes a response....



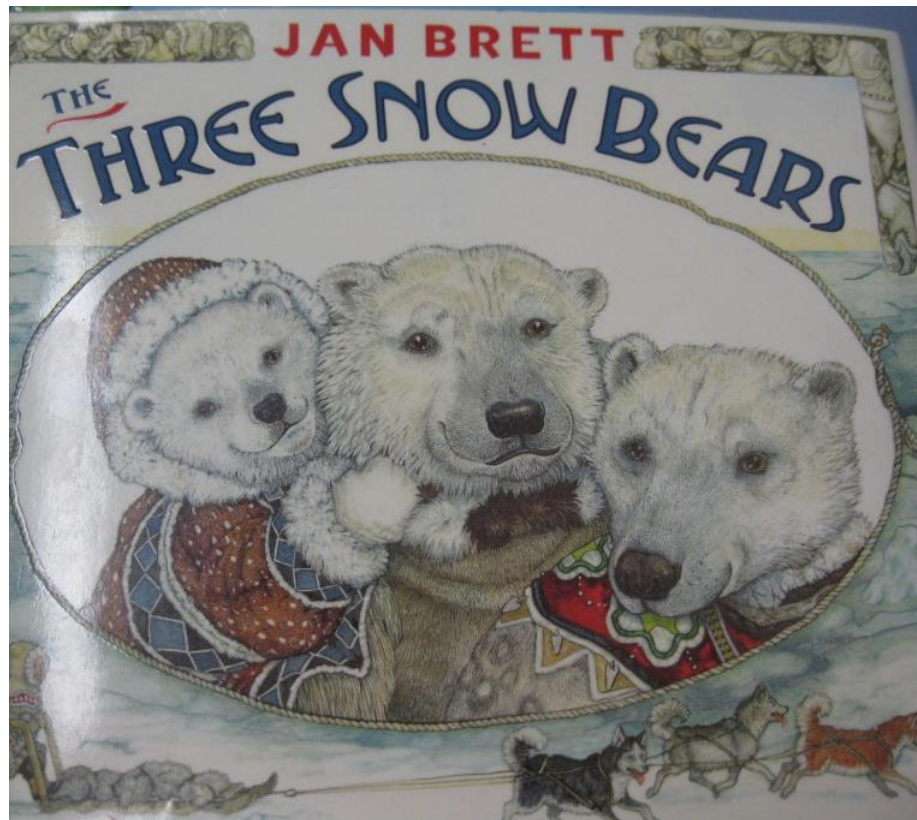








Following up on discussion...





## Anecdotal recordings....

- short, fast notes – usually done ‘on the fly’ as we work
- holds the moment in your mind until you can think more about it
- all teachers contribute a few each day to think about during a team meeting or perhaps while children are resting, or at the end of the day

e.g. ‘Jessica cut up paper into small rectangles and printed a numeral on each one. She handed them out to children, telling them it was ‘time for the movie.’

How to write  
it down....

## Narratives

A longer piece, usually a complete picture of what transpired, with all the details.

If an anecdote is like a snapshot, then a narrative is a similar to a movie

Use this when you need more information....but....it is hard to find time to do this!



# Photography as a form of observation

- Photos should be natural and candid, never posed
- Take many, keep on memory card, then edit at the end of day
- Get up close!
- Show facial expressions or hands in action









# Photographs

What do you see?  
(No  
interpretations)

What is happening  
in the photo?

What thoughts  
and questions  
arise for you?



# Video

- Gives us detailed information that we may not normally notice; the 'big picture.'
- If working alone, video can be your observer, for viewing later



# Observing outdoors

Works exactly the same way as indoors...

Providing we have materials with us: in pockets, backpacks etc

Eg small notepads, small clipboards, a camera

We can be considering how children are connecting to the land and learning from it.











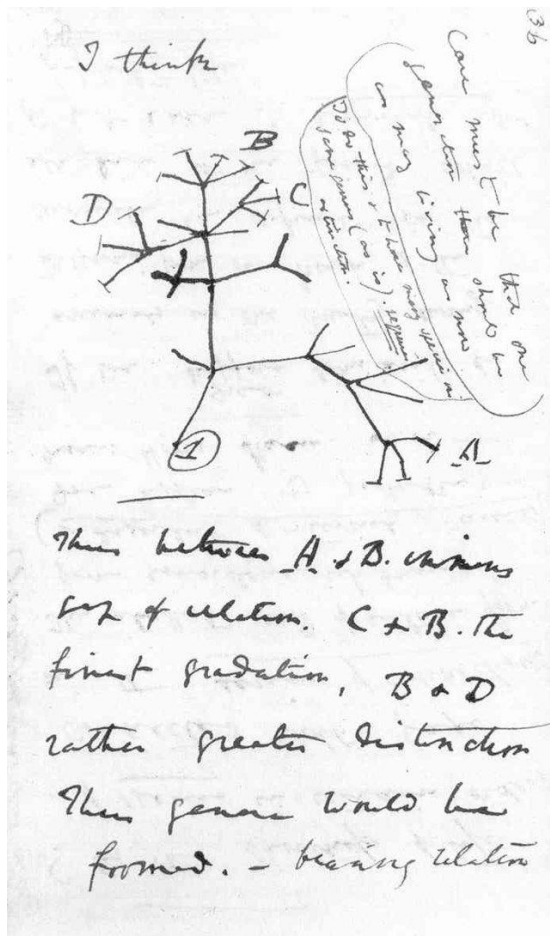
# Organizing for observation

- Sticky notes, and....baskets to put them in
- Holding files; one for each child
- Clipboard for each area, with a staff person to be responsible for that area



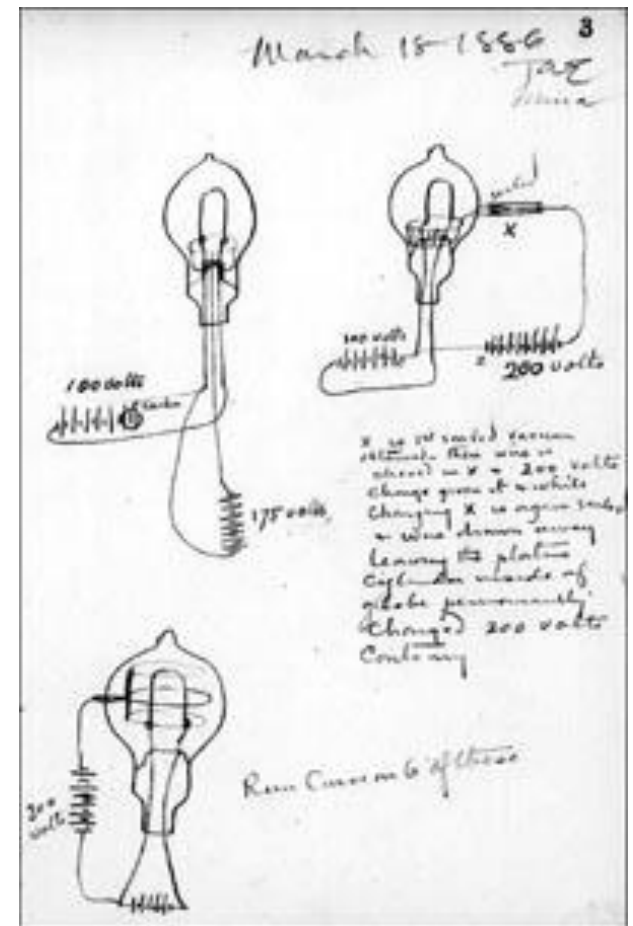
Sketch  
Notebooks;  
an informal  
observation  
and thinking  
tool





**Charles Darwin**

Tree of Life, 1837



**Thomas Edison**

Light Bulb 1886



# Student examples

DAY 01 eRawasmi child care centre - Infant room January 24, 2019  
Shift: 8:30am - 4:30pm

Stepped on one on to the floor then to the next  
↳ could he step from leg to leg.

Nathan is stepping on wooden stepping stones. → Joy climbed on to the stepping stones.  
↳ Is he learning how to balance? → Natalie did too.  
→ Roroline.

Winston tried climbing in to a exersaucer.  
He wait in with his big legs.  
his feet were too big!  
Teacher took off his shoes  
he still needed help.

We came in from outside and Winston tried again... He got in by himself!

\*Contact teacher told me Bently is ~~trying to stand up~~ and will be trying to walk soon...  
↳ ~~was using the exersaucer~~ (watched him try!)  
↳ ~~put him up in a position~~

Went and walk around outside and inside of the school.  
Some children liked gang fast.  
Can I plan an activity around this?

Nathan was playing with a toy and I was making the string come out. I stopped doing it and he grabbed my hand to put it back so I could pull the string again. I didn't expect him to realize it was me controlling the string. So amazed by his thinking!

↳ Joy brings a doll in to this area with a bottle.  
She has a blanket, puts it on her lap.

Natalie likes me to read her books.

↳ Joy seems to really enjoy house play (with babies).

↳ Quiet area in a corner of the room.

↳ I learned that Joy really loved dolls.

↳ What is Nathan learning?  
- Object permanence  
- Discovered that I was the one controlling when the string popped up

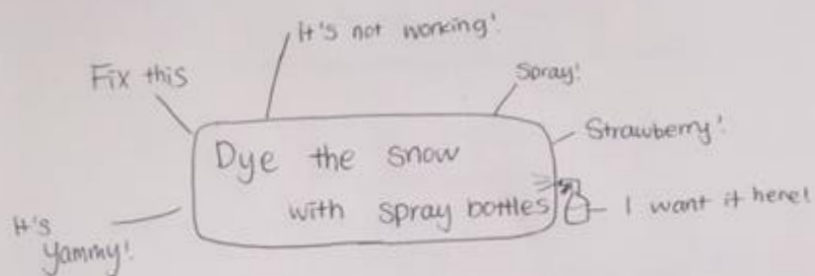
↳ Is it interesting to watch some dapper and reapper?

Baby gym

Morgan Hill

2019/ Feb / 15 8th day

Just 8 children today...!  $\Rightarrow$  Due to the long weekend?



• Finlay & Bran bread ... He didn't eat it before...

Teacher put one small piece (faking it) one day



He started to like it.

He does not want to try any "cooked" food...

Why??? Why?? Not like the temp? texture?

is there any flavor...?? Just sensitive?

How can I help other than faking it?

↓ cooking together?

Cry automatically when we

Start getting ready for outside...

No matter how nice the teacher is being.

} Scared of going out?

} doesn't understand the routine?

New pencil crayons

Toddlers needed help to use the pencils!

Interesting... Why? It is similar with markers!

Feb 2, 2019

Activity Classroom

Children hiding 26 small plastic bears around the classroom.

I thought they were hiding them for peers to find,

instead they then would search for them on their own.

Is that a challenge to find your own hidden items?

Are they testing their own memory skills.

I had them count out loud with me how many bears there were, that way they could all be found and accounted for.



The children later after finding the bears, hid them under 3 different coloured cups.

They made the cups around to be a game, but did they realize because the cups were different colours, that it was obvious which cup to watch for the bear?

Feb. 27, 2019

Children were playing with 9 mitten cut outs, a round white piece of paper. They hid the round paper (snowball) under a mitten and had their peer guess where the snowball was.

The next day I brought in a version of this game, but with Caves and bears.



Where's the Bear?



What techniques can we use to help us organize data, our thoughts, our questions?



# Would these people call themselves artists?





## How to write your observation

- Write only what you see, briefly
- Don't interpret what you are seeing – yet! Take time afterwards to think and to share with others
- Be descriptive

Let's try.....**watch videotape**, write as many brief anecdotes as you can.

Now...how to  
respond?  
Making decisions  
based on  
observations

Some choices:

1. Provide an  
invitation to see  
what happens or to  
gather more  
information...









## 2. Change the environment

....to support what you think is going on. This could be a minor change (e.g adding materials) or a larger one (changing a whole shelf, or area)











3. Invite an  
'expert' to  
come visit and  
share  
expertise

A parent with  
a talent

Artisan

Skilled  
tradesperson

Another  
teacher



## 4. Venture out

Take the children out into the community to respond to their curiosity and gather more knowledge...this is research!

