

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF OBSERVING CHILDREN'S PLAY AND OF SHARED REFLECTION (in abbreviated form - see chapters two and three)

Benefits	Challenges	Some questions
Children quite quickly come to understand that they should leave the observers alone.	Effects on children of being observed may depend on how the adult describes their behaviour. Sometimes children have to be reminded not to approach adults.	What strategies have you used/seen used in preparing children to 'leave the observer alone'?
The children may be aware of being observed but it does not seem to affect their play	It's sometimes difficult, as an adult with responsibility, not to be distracted by unrelated activity.	What kinds of events/happenings tend to distract observers from observing?
You learn that, left alone, children often solve their own altercations	You sometimes want to intervene in the ongoing play or with play elsewhere	Why might it be more helpful to let play continue than to stop it, and when?
Watching for long periods gives much useful information about the nature of play.	Watching for long periods may not be possible when alone in the classroom.	Where more than one adult is present, how might they work together?
Specific information is gained about individual children and this can be surprising.	You need a sufficient period of observation to learn how momentum grows and is sustained. This gives confidence in moving to higher domains on the Continuum when recording.	Discuss a 'positive' occasion when children have surprised you. For how long do you typically observe children playing?
Information is gained about how Areas of Provision and resources can be used by imaginative/creative individuals who may be natural leaders of play.	Watching for long periods requires considerable concentration; sometimes it gets a bit boring.	Which Areas of Provision do you offer/hope to offer to support children's learning through play? Are some 'better' than others?
The research has encouraged a focus on the range of types of provision being made available on a regular basis.	The play can break into smaller groups and it is difficult deciding which one to watch.	Do you ever watch pairs or groups of children play or tend to focus only on individuals?
Insights are gained into how different Areas of Provision and different resources are productive in helping children extend and develop their play	Hearing the dialogue is crucial but sometimes difficult.	How close do you think you can get when observing children's play? Is hearing dialogue a 'bonus' or an 'essential'?
Ideas emerge about the location of Areas of Provision.	Sometimes the room layout seems to inhibit fruitful developments in the play and then I feel a bit guilty for not seeing this before.	What informs your decisions to locate play areas in the places that they are; what else might inform the decision?
Post-observation discussions help in developing Areas of Provision, in recognising children's expertise and in supporting children become cooperative.	Solitary observations could not accommodate post-observation discussions.	On what occasions might practitioners get together to discuss their ongoing observations? How regular could this be?
Ideas emerge about extending the provision of resources.	Budgets may not be available to support the extension of materials for Areas of Provision.	Could you use observations to make a case for budget allocation?
The Continuum becomes easier to use with regular use	At first, the Continuum seems complex to use.	How regularly might the Continuum to be used?
Using numbers rather than ticks helps to recognise the ebb and flow of play - we began to record the individual categories in sequence, numerically.	You sometimes forget which number you're on and use it twice.	See the next activity for illustration.