Observation
Booklet 7a

Checklists
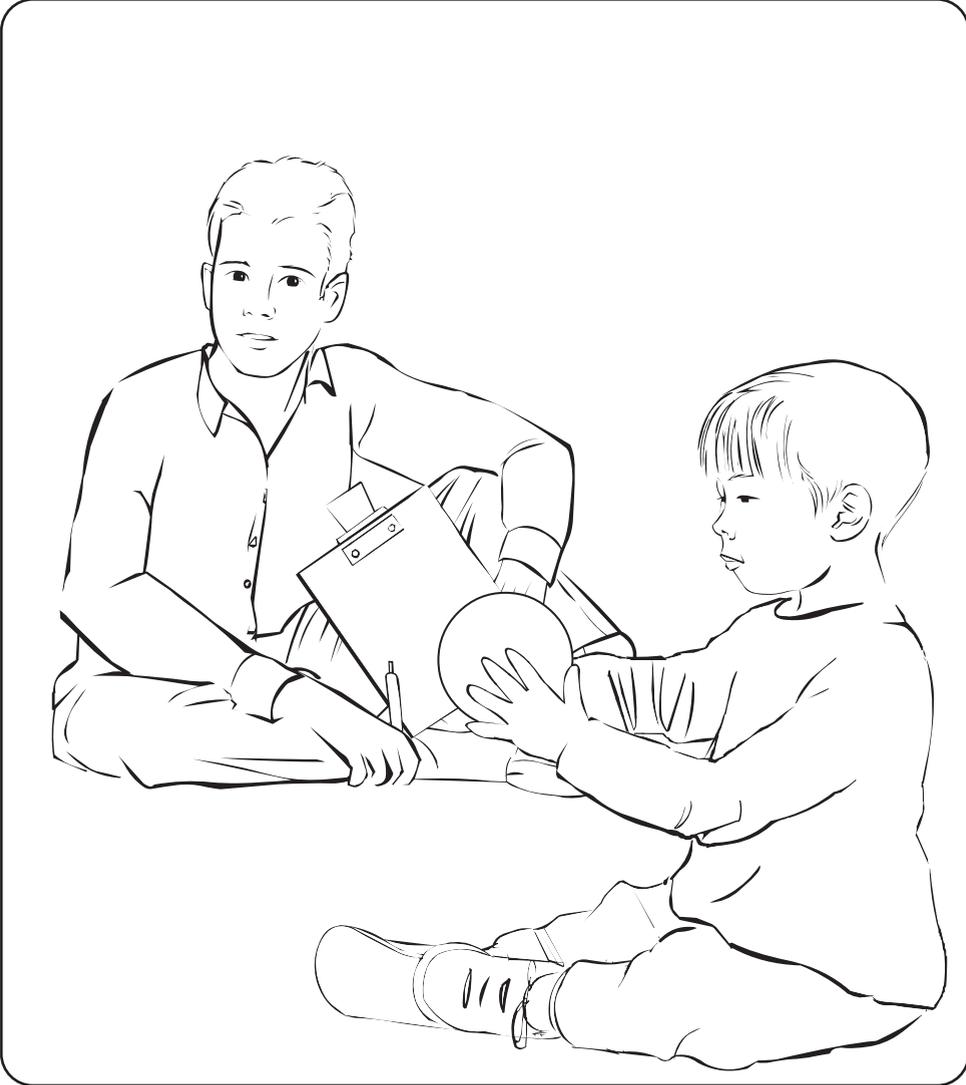
This is Booklet 7a in a series of seven booklets.

Introduction – Booklet 7a

In this booklet you will find:

- sections to read;
- activities to complete.

As you work through the booklet, you should discuss with your teacher or trainer:

- your thoughts about the activities;
- new words and terms for your glossary;
- your self-assessment in the **How did I do?** section.

By completing this booklet, you will learn:

- how to draw up a checklist;
- how to compare development to milestones and norms;
- the advantages and disadvantages of using a checklist.

Checklist Observation

Using a checklist for recording your observation is particularly useful when you need to record stages of development. With a narrative observation you start by describing what the child is doing or saying and later match it to developmental milestones. With a checklist observation you do the opposite. You decide in advance what you will focus on by starting with the checklist and observing whether the child's activities match specific statements.

Some checklists only use a tick or a cross to show whether the milestone was achieved or not. That means they only give minimum information about what the child can do. Therefore it is good practice to adopt the habit of writing a few notes to describe **how** the child achieved any task on the checklist alongside the statements. Checklists cannot take the place of other observations and are best thought of as a summary of the child's progress in any area of development at a particular point in time.

How to use checklists with rating scales

Some checklists include a rating scale, for example from 1 to 4. That is, a child demonstrating few skills is graded 1. A child demonstrating a number of skills equivalent to milestones is graded 4. This gives a little more insight into how well or how often the child performed each task. The Standard Attainment Tasks (SATS) used in schools for seven year olds use a rating scale. Teachers have to judge whether a child has reached level 1, 2 or 3 for each task.

Here is a rating scale with four developmental points. Point 1 shows early development while point 4 shows more advanced skills.

1. Stretches out both hands to pick up an object.
2. Grasps object with one hand.
3. Transfers object back and forth from one hand to the other.
4. Turns over object studying it carefully while passing it from hand to hand.

In child development textbooks you will see that for each age group there are sections on:

- physical development;
- intellectual or cognitive;
- cultural and religious development;
- language development;
- emotional development;
- social development.

Depending on which textbook you use, the headings for areas of development will be slightly different. Under each heading there are lists showing what the child should be able to do at a certain age. When carrying out your observation you should note down **examples** of the skills that you observe next to each statement in the checklist.

Activity 1

Try to assess which statement is nearest to the child's development in the case study below.

Case study

Hans is holding a brush which has a long handle (about 30cm long and the diameter of a sweeping brush handle). He is swapping it over from one hand to the other, waving it back and forth and holding onto the short brush end with one hand and then swapping over and holding on to the long wooden pole end with the other. He keeps changing it back and forth from one hand to the other; he is really trying to feel the ends of the brush.

He continues to lie on his back. He is holding the brush up above his body with his arms outstretched, pushing it up and down, swapping it back and forth from one hand to the other, practising constantly. Every now and again he looks at and feels the brush end of it. He is trying to feel it and catch hold of it.

Which statement on the checklist on the previous page would you say was nearest to Hans' observed behaviour?

> **REMEMBER**
>
> The case study is just a snapshot of a moment in time. You would have to get to know the baby's abilities on several occasions before making a final assessment.

Activity 2

Here is an example of part of a checklist which an EYP has completed:

Developmental milestones	Actual behaviour observed
Demonstrate increasing skill and control in the use of mark-making implements.	Andrew picked up the black felt tip pen in his right hand using a tripod grip. He drew a circle then carefully went round the edges to colour it in without going over the line.
Taken from *QCA (2000) Curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage*.	

Look in the curriculum guidance and find out:

To which area of development does this statement refer?

_____

_____

_____

What developmental age would you expect this child to be?

_____

_____

_____

Cultural perspectives

What do we mean by 'culture'?

When making assessments of your observations it is best to think of culture as a pattern of ideas, beliefs, values, customs and ways of communicating which are shared by a group in society and passed down from one generation to the next.

Developmental checklists can have a tendency to show cultural bias because they have mostly been based on Caucasian (white) children. It is important to recognise this bias when assessing children from different cultural backgrounds and using them as 'norms' for reference. If you are comparing statements on a checklist about social or emotional development it is important to remember that children may have been raised in a variety of ways.

Here are a few examples:
- In some cultures babies and toddlers spend more time in the presence of their mothers or in constant bodily contact both asleep at night and during the day and therefore separating from them might be more difficult.
- Some cultural groups expect eye contact while for others this is considered disrespectful beyond a certain age.
- The amount of personal space varies with different cultural groups; some are comfortable with closeness and others prefer more space.

It is important when considering cultural differences that you do not stereotype and are able to recognise your own views, attitudes and values. Again remember that although cultural norms encourage shared beliefs and common behaviour patterns, all children and families are individual.

> **REMEMBER**
>
> To discuss cultural differences when interpreting your observations using checklists but also avoid making generalisations. The statements below have been taken from cards in the pack: Sure Start (2002) *Birth to three matters*.

"Valuing children's race, cultural identity and gender by choosing appropriate resources, activities and experiences, increases their sense of belonging and contributes positively to their emotional well-being."   *(A Healthy Child - Emotional Well-being)*

"An inclusive environment is one which involves parents and the local community in ensuring that resources and activities are respectful of and reflect diversity."
                    (A Strong Child - Being Acknowledged and Affirmed)

Making sense of your observations

After you have completed a record of the observation you can follow steps 1 to 4 in Booklets 4 and 5 to complete the observation process. In step 2, you have already compared the child's behaviour with the 'norm' by using a developmental checklist. So here you must comment on any aspect that was either not achieved or was achieved exceptionally well and why you think this was the case, for instance:

- Perhaps the child did not have an opportunity to demonstrate one of the statements.
- Is the child able to do these things usually?

You must say whether the child met all, some, or none of the expected milestones for the age group and suggest reasons why any of the milestones were not reached.

Remember to refer to Booklets 4 and 5 to complete fully your observation interpretation, assessment, conclusions and recommendations.

Activity 3

Glossary (words and terms to remember)

Continue building your own glossary of terms that are new to you or that you have come to understand in a new way.

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Activity 4

Learner Evaluation

How did I do?

Well done! You have now completed Booklet 7a.

Now spend a few minutes thinking about how you did and fill in the boxes below. Try to give examples when you make a comment. Then discuss your responses with your teacher or trainer.

What have I learnt so far?

What areas do I need to concentrate on?

What help do I need? Where will I get this help?

When will I take action on this?

What skills do I need to practise and develop in the workplace?