Through the lens of equity: The observation and assessment cycle

Equitable and effective observation and assessment help educators to understand children’s strengths, how children learn and develop, areas for growth, possible delays, and how data can inform and strengthen teaching practices.

The continuous cycle of observation and assessment, surrounded by a lens of equity, includes:

- purposeful observation
- documentation
- reflection to guide goal-setting
- use of the data to guide change
- observation to check in and monitor progress

Purposeful observation

Purposeful observation is done informally, for example, through anecdotal note-taking throughout the day. It is also done using a formal assessment tool like Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS®) or the Assessing Classroom Sociocultural Equity Scale (ACSES). Both formal and informal assessments are important to capture a picture of the whole child.

Using a lens of equity means educators observe children in many different contexts throughout the day. They use assessment tools and resources in purposeful ways that meet the needs of the children culturally, linguistically, and with attention to ability diversity. Observation and assessment should be done in a way that affords all children the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge.

Documentation and data

Documentation and data, the information that an educator observes and collects, are integral to the observation and assessment cycle. Documentation and data help drive and support decision-making about children’s learning and teaching practices. Documentation and data should be collected by observing children in different situations throughout the day and across time. Families’ observations and perceptions about their children are part of this broader data-gathering process. Equitable data collection in observation and assessment means educators collect information about a child grounded in asset-based practices.

Documentation and data provide the ECE professional with information about what children know and can do, areas for growth, and improvement in teaching practice.
Reflection/goal-setting

The documentation and data in both types of observation and assessment, formal and informal, are used to support reflection in practice and to support positive and equitable outcomes for children.

Use the data

Change in practice happens after the data is collected. The educator needs time to reflect and set goals related to practice. Then the educator uses the data to change teaching practices that support children’s continued learning and development.

Observe again

It is essential to the observational process to check in with the goal. For example:

- Was the goal met, and the change observed? If not, what can the educator do differently to impact a child’s equitable educational experience positively?
- Was the data used to support the positive change? If not, why? Was teacher bias a factor in using the data in an inequitable manner?

Each component of the observation and assessment cycle is important. Together, the components provide information to support children’s learning and development.