

# E-clips

Transcript for the [video](#):

## **Observing Young Children**

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**Dr. Jeffrey Trawick-Smith (Host):** You hear a lot these days about the importance of observing young children in early childhood settings. I know you may be thinking, “I’m always observing; what’s new or different about that?” Well, watch while early childhood educator Dr. Sudha Swaminathan reveals how to get some really useful results from your observations.

### **Observing Young Children (0:39)**

**Dr. Sudha Swaminathan, Professor of Early Childhood Education, Eastern Connecticut State University:** Observation is a very important part of an early childhood classroom. Teachers are constantly observing, and sometimes they’re observing just to make sure everything’s okay; children are safe and everything’s going right.

**Teacher:** Hey, Annaliese and Ty, everybody ok? Yeah? Ok.

**Patricia Gardner, Preschool Teacher, Child and Family Development Resource Center:** What I’m trying to do is make sure the children are safe in the classroom, and I am constantly paying attention to things that are going on, and make sure they’re doing activities that are furthering their learning and social development.

**Teacher:** We’re going to head to music.

**Dr. Swaminathan:** Spontaneous observations, like what Patty just did, occur in the classroom all the time. But there are other times when teachers pre-plan their observation. They take the time to decide: What is it I need to observe for each child? And they set the time and the environment, and they plan for it. The more intentional a teacher is, the more pre-planned she is, the more she focuses on what she needs to learn about each child ahead of time—and then goes to the classroom with all the necessary tools to observe the child. Then they learn much, much more about the child.

**Teacher:** You’re working hard there, Matt.

**Dr. Swaminathan:** When teachers pre-plan their observations, they usually have a specific goal in mind. They may have noticed that a certain child has some kind of trouble in the classroom. This could be trouble interacting with other children, so they want to observe and document to see how they could help that child. Or it could be a child has trouble learning a particular skill,

so they're going to focus on observing the child and tailoring their instructions to help the child. Or they could do a formal assessment of the child so that they could incorporate that assessment into the portfolio to share with the parents and administrators.

**Dr. Swaminathan:** Let's take a look at how three teachers go about planned observations with specific goals in mind.

### **Planned Observation of Child's Social Interaction (2:58)**

**Kathy Piquette, Preschool Teacher, Hartford Public Schools:** We have this one little boy this year who is 4 years old, who is very, very good at the computer, but his social interactions are a little bit delayed. He preferred to play mostly by himself.

**Narrator:** Through her thoughtful observations, Kathy realized what was needed to help improve Joey's social interactions.

**Kathy Piquette:** So what we did is we would set up situations at the computer where there was always another child with him.

**Narrator:** Kathy devised this intervention after observing Joey in a variety of situations. Once he started using the computer with other children, he became more comfortable interacting during free play and at other times as well.

### **Planned Observation for Instructional Purposes (3:48)**

**Narrator:** Sofia conducts weekly writing workshops with her preschool class and is especially interested in the progress of children who will be going to Kindergarten in the fall. Earlier she noticed that Marissa was having trouble grasping the pencil, and so today she has planned to observe Marissa and to give her extra instructions on how to hold the pencil.

**Sofia Cortez-Gomez, Preschool Teacher, Child and Family Development Resource Center:** With this specific child I am observing her at the writing workshop a little bit more, because I want to be sure she is able to do this, and she's able to grab the pencil a little bit better.

**Narrator:** Over the next few weeks Sofia continues to observe Marissa and notices that the instruction has helped Marissa improve her writing ability.

### **Observing for Assessment Purposes (4:44)**

**Dr. Swaminathan:** Our last example is a formal assessment. Teachers are expected to assess their children, to document their learning in all the different domains of development. This is expected by administrators, and this is also something they share with the parents of the children. Planned observation is the core of all formal assessments.

**Narrator:** Teacher Nancy Hines has been casually observing 4-year-old Salvatore for the past few weeks to see if he is ready to read. Today she has prepared a well planned observation to formally assess his reading ability.

**Nancy Hines, Preschool Teacher, Hartford Public Schools:** I'm looking at Salvatore, and I'm interested in how he looks at books and print. What I would do is pick a particular book that I know Sal's familiar with. I would have some props there for him to see if he can retell the story. And then Sal would read the book and then retell the story for me.

**Child:** The three little pigs...

**Nancy Hines:** I would look at the benchmarks, which is what we use for our assessments. If he follows through and does all the things that I'm hoping that he does, hopefully he'll probably be at the end of the benchmark, meaning he's ready for the beginning stages of reading.

**Narrator:** While Nancy had a sense of Salvatore's reading readiness, she knew that these informal observations needed to be backed up with concrete evidence. By planning and carrying out these observations, she can now confirm with confidence that Sal is learning to read.

**Child:** The three little pigs...

**Narrator:** Nancy is using her systematic observations of Sal's reading progress as assessment data for his portfolio. Planned observations can produce data that become part of the child's portfolio for school records and to share with parents.

**Dr. Swaminathan:** Observing children and documenting their growth is a very integral part of early childhood education. So all caregivers should focus on planning their observations and documenting children's growth, because ultimately, that's what's going to help them learn what the child is capable of doing; what the child has potential to grow into; and how they as a teacher can help that child reach their potential.