

## Ways to Make Anecdotal Records Effective and Useful

Felicia Rudolph

**Anecdotal records are written documentation of what a teacher sees and hears children do while alone, with other children, or with a teacher or other adult.** A record includes the *who, what, where, when, and how* of what occurred. The observer watches or interacts with a child and documents the situation as things happen or as soon after the incident as possible. Teachers include direct quotes and descriptions of facial expressions and gestures.

**Anecdotal records are factual.** They do not include judgments or interpretations of what took place. The observation period can last from a few seconds to many minutes. Here are 10 tips to help you prepare for and optimize your observations and anecdotal records.

**Get to know your assessment tool and system.** This will help you keep in mind which skills or behaviors you are looking for so you don't waste time writing notes about behaviors that are not relevant.

**Create a list of commonly used abbreviations.** With your colleagues, agree on shorthand terms for time, people, and places in the classroom. For example, SW = sand and water; AA = art area; AC = another child; CT = center time; SG = small group. This saves time and allows you to include details during a brief observation period.

**Practice writing anecdotal records.** Once you become a skilled and factual observer, you are more likely to feel comfortable and confident about your observations and recordings/

**Plan which children to observe.** It is good practice to conduct regular observations of all children. Work as a team to assign 3 to 5 children to each teacher. Each teacher will make sure to observe those children throughout the week. Of course, teachers can observe and write anecdotal records for any child as relevant situations and behaviors arise.

**Include documentation materials in several places in the classroom.** Make sure whatever you use to take notes is easily accessible to you and your teaching team. Examples are clipboards and pens in each learning center and outdoors, notepads and pens in your apron pocket, and a small camera in a waist pouch.

**Choose a specific focus.** Each week, talk with your colleagues and agree to focus on a few indicators, such as the children's problem-solving and gross motor skills. This helps you think about when children might use these skills, and in what settings. After several weeks, you will have information on both indicators for all of the children and can choose new indicators to focus on.

**Write anecdotal records about small group activities.** Start with a generic note describing the activity. When the activity is over, add a short anecdotal record for each of the four to six children who participated in the small group activity.

**Stock the learning centers intentionally.** Include items in learning centers that children are likely to use as you observe the focus indicators. For example, if the focus is emerging writing skills, be sure there are markers, crayons, pencils, paper, and poster board available in all learning centers. This makes it possible to observe children writing in any center.

**Keep several indicators in mind.** Even if you are observing for a specific indicator, there is almost always overlap with other indicators. Include information in the anecdotal record that can be used for another indicator. For example, you observe a child telling another child about a book she has read. In this one observation you can address indicators related to social skills, literacy, and oral language.

**Schedule a regular time to review, discuss, and use anecdotal records.** Organize your notes daily, if possible, but weekly at least. When you follow a schedule, you are less likely to end up with too much information related to one indicator and not enough for others. Meet with your colleagues to discuss and share information about individual children. Use all this information to determine what else you need to plan and observe for each child and what to share with families.