CHAPTER 11

Observation profile

Introduction

The purpose of the observation profile is to enhance the teacher's ability to assess the young child's progress in developing skills and understanding in those areas which are typically impaired in autism. In the authors' experience of training groups of support assistants and teachers from mainstream nursery and special schools, there is a reported dearth of readily accessible material examining the earliest stages of skill acquisition in these areas (although the P-level targets represent a recent attempt to redress this situation across the curriculum).

On the one hand, the profile should help to establish a baseline for skill acquisition and on the other, to demonstrate progress where intervention programmes have been introduced. The elements of the profile are thus organised in a broadly developmental sequence and are intended to indicate a sequential organisation of skill acquisition in developing goals. However, this is not to say that the young child on the autism spectrum will progress in each area in an organised fashion! Skills in turn-taking may be more easily developed than those of imitation, for example. In developing imitation skills it may be that imitation of an action on an object – for example, dropping a brick into a cup – is more easily acquired than the social imitation of a gesture such as waving.

Use of the observation profile may assist practitioners in differentiating Early Learning Goals and in setting appropriate targets within the Individual Education Plan (IEP). Should more comprehensive analysis of skills be necessary, for example, in the area of communication, the use of assessment tools such as the Pragmatic Profile of Communication and the Pre-verbal Communication Schedule (see Chapter 2) may be helpful. Here, in best practice, the early years practitioner will be collaborating with the Speech and Language Therapist. In terms of more detailed analysis of early cognitive and play skills, use of the Uzgiris and Hunt-based schedules for assessment and intervention would be complementary.

Use of the profile

Part 1: word picture

One class teacher summarised a five-year-old girl in a mainstream class of 30 children as:

- an able child;
- she demands her own way;
- she can be noisy and disruptive;
- there are occasional violent outbursts;
- she does beautiful drawings of dinosaurs and insects.

This summary gives an overview of an able child with autism. However, it is necessary to fill out the details of the profile in order to find starting points for intervention.

Part 2: observed behaviours

Children with autism share the same core difficulties, but each child displays them in an individual way.

The profile follows a broadly developmental sequence, but different children will make progress in different areas at different speeds. Each profile will be unique to that individual child, and will offer a snapshot of the child's skills.

For example (see observation profile that follows for key for N, E, D, A):

	N	E	D	A
Looks at adult who is talking to him			✓	
Follows adult gaze when adult is looking at something		✓		
Looks at object, then back at adult, when indicating, pointing to or requesting something	✓			

In this example, the developing use of gaze directed at the adult who is talking to him shows an awareness of the adult. The infrequent use of gaze to share the focus of attention suggests that the child is not yet aware of joint focus. Intervention that encourages the development of joint focus is indicated, e.g. Musical/Intensive Interaction activities (see Chapter 7).

Intervention planning

Once the goals have been identified in each skill area, they should be recorded on an IEP, alongside suggested intervention strategies. These strategies should then inform curriculum differentiation across all areas of learning.

For example:

Target	**Strategies**
The child will look at an adult who is talking to him	• identify attractive, eye-catching, noise-producing items • introduce an item to the child, then hide it briefly, while looking towards where it is hidden • if necessary use the noise to attract the child's attention • wait until the child gives eye contact to reintroduce the toy with great gusto!

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The observation profile is not intended to be a diagnostic checklist; it is designed to give early years practitioners:

- information about the skills a child has already developed;
- starting points for intervention.

Observation profile		
Part 1 Give a brief word picture of the child in the early years setting, noting positives as well as concerns.		
Part 2 Observed behaviours		
Rate Sections A, B and C, using the following key:	**N** = Not present	**E** = Emerging (seen once)
	D = Developing (seen a few times)	**A** = Achieved (seen often)
Rate Section D using this key: (adding comments or giving examples)	**Present**	**Absent**

A. Social interaction

1 Spontaneous use of gaze	*N*	*E*	*D*	*A*
Looks at adult who is talking to him				
Follows adult gaze when adult turns head to look at something				
Looks at adult's face when trying to get his/her attention				
Looks at object, then back at adult, when indicating, pointing to or requesting something				
Looks back at adult when (s)he is playing chase with him				
Looks at adult to prompt the repeat of an action game or song				
2 Spontaneous maintenance of proximity				
Allows family members to kiss and hug him				
When upset, goes to family members for comfort				
Allows adult to physically interact in games of chase or 'rough and tumble'				
Allows physical interaction during action games or songs				
Allows adult to play alongside when engaged in an activity				
Allows adult to intervene/share in play				
Tolerates other children sitting nearby				
Allows other children to physically interact in games of chase				
Tolerates other children intervening in his play				
Tolerates other children playing alongside				
Watches other children playing				

3 Imitation	*N*	*E*	*D*	*A*
Imitates actions with objects on cue, e.g. placing brick in cup, hitting drum with stick				
Imitates more complex actions, e.g. building brick tower				
Notices adult imitating him in action games and interactive play				
Responds to imitation of his actions with further repetition				
Imitates simple gestures on cue, e.g. waving, clapping				
Imitates simple facial expressions, e.g. smile, grimace				
4 Turn-taking				
Take turns, physically prompted, in simple ball game, e.g. rolling ball to and from adult				
Takes turns in simple 'prompt' games, e.g. 'Ready Steady Go'				
Takes turns in simple ball games with adult/child				
Takes turns in table-top activity 1:1 with adult, e.g. building with bricks, placing pegs, matching pictures				
Takes turns in table-top activity with one other child				
Takes turns in table-top activity with more than one other child, e.g. Lotto game				
Takes turns in gross motor games, e.g. obstacle course				
Takes turns in circle-time-type activities				
Takes turns in more informally structured play, e.g. riding bikes, chasing games				
5 Initiating				
Will take adult to object				
Will take adult's hand to object				
Will spontaneously approach adult when in need of help				
Will initiate a simple game with adult, e.g. pat-a-cake				
Will initiate a simple game with a child, e.g. chase				
Uses sounds and gestures to attract adult attention				
Will approach adult to obtain food, toy, etc.				
Shows/offers object/activity to adult				
Shows/offers object/activity to another child				
Waves 'bye-bye' spontaneously				
Greets familiar adults				
Points to show interest in something				
Indicates need for help by use of sound/gesture/picture				
Will seek affection or comfort from adult other than family				
Will try to share interest or excitement with adult				

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6 Emotional expression and understanding	*N*	*E*	*D*	*A*
Recognises a smile and can imitate adult's exaggerated demonstration of a smile				
Recognises a sad face and can imitate this				
Recognises an angry face and can imitate this				
Can discriminate these expressions on an adult face and can produce these expressions on demand				
Can recognise and match expressions in photographs and drawings				
Can match these simple expressions to contexts, e.g. matching 'smiling face' to picture of birthday presents				
Uses sad expression if upset				
Uses angry face if cross				
Developing understanding of other expressions, e.g. fear, surprise				
Can respond to a smile with a smile				
7 Development of self				
Shows preferences – for objects				
Identifies/defends own possessions				
Knows own name – looks when called				
Knows own name – comes when called				
Shows preferences – for people				
Requests toys/activities/food he wants				
Recognises mirror image/picture of self				
Makes choices when offered				

B. Communication

1 Understanding simple verbal and non-verbal approaches	*N*	*E*	*D*	*A*
Responds when his name is called				
Follows simple instructions given 1:1, e.g. 'come here', 'sit down'				
Follows a close point, e.g. at a picture in a book				
Follows your gaze to an object				
Follows a distance point, e.g. at object across the room				
Follows simple instructions in small groups				
Follows simple instructions in large group/class setting, e.g. 'jump', 'run', 'stand still'				
Could bring something on request from another room				

2 Strategies for meeting his needs	*N*	*E*	*D*	*A*
Meets his needs independently – e.g. gets chair, climbs up to cupboard – rather than seeking help				
Stands near object and cries/screams until adult comes to reach it				
Requests object by taking adult to it or taking adult hand to it				
Requests object by pointing to it				
Requests object by pointing and looking back to adult				
Requests object by use of symbol/picture or photo				
Requests action by use of gesture				
Requests action by use of symbol/picture/photo				
Requests object/action using words				
Protests by crying/anger				
Protests by using sign/symbol/gesture or word				
3 Engaging in social interaction				
Can nod for 'yes'				
Can shake head for 'no'				
Uses greeting/gesture/sounds or words				
Waves and says 'bye-bye'				
Calls for attention				
Uses names to get attention, e.g. 'Mummy'				
Will take turns in familiar verbal routines, e.g. rhymes				
Will indicate desire for 'more' in familiar verbal routines				
Will fill in gaps in familiar verbal routines				
Will initiate familiar verbal routines with sounds/gestures/words				
4 Joint attention strategies				
Expresses interest in something, using sound/gesture				
Expresses interest in something using words				
Will point at something to express interest and shares this by looking back at you				
Uses expressive gesture, e.g. clapping				

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C. Play and imagination

1 Manipulative/exploratory	*N*	*E*	*D*	*A*
Plays with object using non-specific action on all objects, e.g. mouthing, waving, banging, shaking				
Examines novel toy/object				
Plays with objects using appropriate actions, e.g. bangs with hammer, shakes bell, throws ball, crumples paper				
2 Organising				
Relates toys/objects non-specifically, e.g. banging together, piling up				
Systematically combines objects, e.g. dumps out of/puts into containers, nests/stacks cups, stacks rings, strings beads				
3 Structured/constructional				
Fitting items together by trial and error, e.g. Duplo bricks				
Completes simple formboards/puzzles/pegboard patterns				
Evidence of planning in problem solving				
4 'Cause and effect'/'Means to an end' play				
Makes a toy work, e.g. presses button to make clown pop up, operates wind-up toy				
Uses object to obtain item, e.g. a stick to pull a toy within reach				
Climbs to reach toy				
Rolls ball to knock skittles down				
Searches for and finds objects during play				
5 Interactive				
Participates in rough-and-tumble play				
Allows adult to imitate his actions in play, e.g. in musical interaction				
Responds to play routines with enjoyment, e.g. peek-a-boo				
Responds with anticipation in play routines, e.g. 'I'm coming to get you!', and action rhymes, e.g. round the garden				
Indicates for game/routine to continue using gaze, gesture or word				
Initiates games/routines				
Will tolerate 'teasing' element in games/routines				
Will introduce 'teasing' element in games/routines				
Will take turns in games/play				

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6 Pretend play – functional	*N*	*E*	*D*	*A*
Uses objects out of context and without situational cues, e.g. takes empty cup to mouth; holds brush to hair				
Will play functionally with objects, e.g. gives doll a 'drink' (in imitation), pushes car into garage (on instruction), builds network of blocks (on request/spontaneously)				
Will use miniature representational toys, e.g. Playmobile				
7 Pretend play – symbolic				
Uses toy/material as if it were something else, e.g. a stick for a spoon; a brush for a microphone				
Pretends to play with an absent object, e.g. feeds toys imaginary food				
In imitation, engages in linked sequence of actions, e.g. takes doll for a walk to park, goes on swings/slide/home to bed				
Does the above spontaneously				
Will make toy be something else, e.g. Mum/policeman				
Will make toy feel something, e.g. crying/angry				
Will make toy act upon imaginary objects				
8 Pretend play – fantasy				
Child will be someone/something else, e.g. dog/Dad/nurse/Superman				
Does something to or with an imaginary object, e.g. strokes 'cat'				
Adopts and acts out a role, e.g. bus-driver/pilot/shop customer				
9 Pretend play – social				
Little contact with peers				
Watches peers playing				
Some parallel play				
Idiosyncratic approaches				
Brief exchanges				
Joint focus in play				
Role enactment				
Role play sustained				

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D. Sensory sensitivity

	Present	Absent
1. Unusual reactions to sound		
Comments/examples:		
2. Unusual reactions to touch		
Comments/examples:		
3. Unusual reactions to light		
Comments/examples:		
4. Unusual reactions to pain or discomfort		
Comments/examples:		
5. Unusual reactions to smells or tastes		
Comments/examples:		
6. Unusual sensation seeking in movement		
Comments/examples:		

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