

# Chapter 1: *Teaching with Learner Profile*

*This chapter explores the many ways Learner Profile and the practice of observational assessment may be put to use in your classroom. Both conceptual and practical ideas for designing observational assessments and using Learner Profile are discussed.*



## ***Observational Assessment for Better Teaching and Learning***

Observational assessment is a developing field with emerging methodologies. In addition to the uses outlined here in this chapter, we expect teachers will find their own uses for *Learner Profile*.

Conventional assessment puts a burden on students to prove what they learned in a setting isolated from the learning—usually, the written test. Because conventional assessment has been confined to a one-dimensional paper and pencil medium, it has little relevance to the actual cognitive challenges our students will encounter in life. Conventional assessment is most often dependent upon the child's reading level. For students who have reading difficulties, conventional assessment fails to provide an accurate reflection of learning. Better teaching and learning requires the inclusion of assessment tools beyond the written test.

Learning is a process as well as an end-state. To document learning, teachers must observe students as they learn: in a variety of settings, performing many activities, using a range of tools. *Learner Profile* can help in a great many of these activities.

Observational assessment implies many changes in the way we teach and assess—a new paradigm for viewing the learning process. One intended change is that assessment becomes a formative, integral process of teaching in which ongoing assessments guide both teacher and learner. *Learner Profile* provides a systematic record of your observations, immediately available for planning tomorrow's lessons, tracking student progress, identifying individual and group learning problems, and conferencing with students and parents.

Teaching involves more than the intellectual development of children. Teachers regularly work towards the emotional, physical, and aesthetic development of their students, as well as the development of social skills. Observational assessment is equally valid and applicable in all of these learning domains.

Observational assessment can support your teaching in a number of ways. You may focus on knowledge acquisition and application, learning outcomes, group learning skills, or individual learning styles. *Learner Profile* is a new system that can help address students' progress toward meeting standards because the observer can instantly record observations about active learning. Assessment relies on making observations that are both accurate and dependable. Though observations are subjective, there are many ways to achieve a high degree of accountability in designing your assessments.

## ***TECHNIQUES FOR BETTER OBSERVATIONAL ASSESSMENT***

Observational assessment is accurate to the extent that it represents the learning outcome. One cannot infer the mastery of a complex capacity from the successful performance of a single task. For example, the ability to fill out a multiplication table does not necessarily mean a student could use this ability to determine better buys at the grocery store. To improve the accuracy of observations, teachers can:

- Choose wording for observables that is clear to others (minimize the need to infer).
- Design multiple and varied observables to assess mastery of a single learning outcome.
- Observe both simple and complex tasks in realistic settings.
- Choose tasks that are most generalizable to the learning outcome.
- Match the observables to the outcomes as closely as possible.
- Share ideas with other colleagues involved with observational assessment.

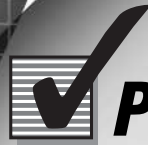
Observers of any human behavior should beware of the potential to "see what we want to see." This tendency may obscure seeing behaviors that are unexpected to the teacher, but significant for a learner. The more familiar the observer is with the subjects, the more this potential arises. It may help to practice observing students in other classrooms with whom you are less familiar. Developing some observables based on an unfamiliar group of students may help broaden your expectations of what you will see.

An assessment is dependable to the extent that it can be observed accurately by other judges (known as inter-rater reliability). Observables should be objective enough that multiple observers can make sufficiently similar judgments of the same performance. This helps ensure that assessments are fair and objective, with a minimum of personal bias. For example, Olympic diving judges give nearly the same scores (usually) for a complex performance, which lasts just a few seconds. These judges regularly exhibit a high level of consistency. Even so, individual scores do vary. To improve their judging system's reliability, the highest and lowest scores are eliminated from calculating the diver's overall score.

To improve the consistency of assessment of educational observables, teachers can:

- Consider whether or not the wording of a comment requires too much inference or a conclusion that cannot be observed; observables should be just that—observable.
- Gather sufficient data to assess a learning outcome (use many observables in order to assess each outcome, reducing the influence of any single observable).
- Periodically use multiple judges to check the efficacy of your observables (and to share ideas with your colleagues).
- Share ideas with other colleagues involved in observational assessment.

For example, students may be given a paper-and-pencil test to determine their ability to name coins and find their sums, or be asked to run a classroom store using the coins, or be given real coins to play a game involving naming and sorting coins. By observing their ability to name coins and find their sums in a number of different settings, the teacher should have sufficient data to make a valid and reliable decision about the child's mastery of this skill.



## **Planning for Learning and Observing**

*Learner Profile* can help you plan for any time frame, from a single lesson to an entire course. You have the option to enter your lesson plans within the **LESSON PLAN** tab. You may enter text under the heading of objectives, materials, activities, and notes for each lesson. Observable sets and gradebook assignments can also be associated with lesson plans. You may edit and print these lesson plans at any time.

With *Learner Profile*, you can plan tomorrow's lessons based on a systematic assessment of students' progress today. Use the Report features to obtain feedback on a variety of measures, e.g., to analyze individual or group progress.

### **PLANNING OBSERVATIONS**

Planning observables and making observations are inextricably linked together. Teachers both "plan to observe" and "observe in order to plan." This is an integrated, simultaneous process.

When "planning to observe," teachers determine what skills or performances they wish to observe in their classroom. Some teachers use a few simple phrases, others make a detailed list of observables itemizing the specific skills on which they are focusing. In either case, qualifiers can help keep your phrasing concise, while also categorizing or describing some quality of the skill being observed. For example, the qualifiers "Developing," "Mastered," and "Integrated" help identify at what stage a student is when a skill is being acquired and applied. Consider the following ideas prior to creating observables and qualifiers:

- **Plan who and what to observe.** Time is often a factor in using observational assessment. If time should become an issue, consider observing smaller groups of students and/or selecting fewer items to observe.
- **Plan to observe specific actions of the learner.** Design your observables to record when students have demonstrated learning. Observables that are recorded should be notable for day-to-day learning as opposed to bits and pieces of learning. Observables should be about significant learning and should also provide the observer with an idea of what to do next. In the early stages of using observational assessment, it is easy to collect voluminous information and lose sight of purposeful learning.
- **Plan to use a consistent qualifier set.** Select qualifiers that will enable the student to see growth in learning. One of the advantages of using observational assessment and *Learner Profile* is the ability to go beyond mastery and document application of skills and concepts outside of predetermined events. Consistent qualifier sets can help ensure that

observational assessment is fair and objective and that inter-rater reliability can be discerned. Qualifiers are entered by the administrator under the Setup Menu.

- **Plan to be flexible in observing.** A lesson may involve unexpected directions. It sometimes may be necessary to create a new observable to record unanticipated learning.
- **Plan to share your observables.** Sharing observables with the learner, colleagues, and parents allows opportunities to talk about success and areas for continued development.
- **Plan to check observables against standards.** It is important to be cognizant that observables being used should reflect developmentally appropriate standards as established within your educational community.

## **Observing**

Making observations is fundamental to both learning and teaching. Observing learning using *Learner Profile* enables the observer to record observables immediately. Immediate documentation of learning provides more accurate information about learning and prevents later actions or events from influencing observations about learning. The observer should always be aware that any observable is based upon the observer's interpretation of the world. It is important to be mindful of prejudices and continuously strive to maintain an open mind. Consider the following ideas when using *Learner Profile* for observations:

- Openly discuss observational assessment. If a personal digital assistant (PDA) is used, show it to your students. It will soon become a common part of the classroom and attract little attention.
- Let your students know what your learning objectives are for a given activity.
- Download your information to the portable device at least the day before you intend to use it.
- Sometimes, it is necessary to ask learners questions, engage them in conversation, or provide additional activities that allow them to demonstrate knowledge.

### **REPORTING AND CONFERENCING TECHNIQUES**

*Learner Profile* facilitates a wide variety of conferencing techniques, since it enables teachers to share directly the information collected and analyzed on an on-going basis with parents and students. This information can be as detailed as a list of specific time- and date-coded observables. Alternatively, the big picture can be quickly and clearly communicated with a variety of summary reports or graphs. The program facilitates conferencing with students and with parents.

Parents and students find it very informative to see the information the teacher has gathered about the student's learning. The report features of *Learner Profile* enable you to show the patterns and growth in a student's learning.

The reports generated with *Learner Profile* offer an opportunity to deepen our thought about children and classrooms. It allows educators to go beyond easy but unimportant labels. By sharing reports through conferencing with parents and students, *Learner Profile* can help establish ongoing collaboration between home and school based on a mutual effort to identify and support children's interests and strengths.

# Chapter 2: Introduction to Learner Profile 3.0

*This section describes the main features of Learner Profile and gives a sample scenario of the way it works.*



## **Program Overview**

*Learner Profile* is an assessment tool that enables you to plan, organize, and review observations about students' progress and the work they produce. The package consists of powerful planning, analysis, and recording software. Using a PDA such as the Palm™ handheld and a list of user-created observables, you can instantly record your observations. *Learner Profile* helps to make observational assessment practical for all educators.

*Learner Profile* in conjunction with the companion software, *Learner Profile to Go*\*, contains a full-featured gradebook to help you track attendance, manage assignments, and calculate grades.

Use *Learner Profile* to record your observations on your desktop computer in the classroom or lab. Use *Learner Profile to Go* in conjunction with *Learner Profile* to record your observations in the classroom, in the lab, out on the track, on field trips—anywhere you go.

### **Here's a brief scenario of how it can work:**

**10:32 am** Louisa is helping James construct a bar graph. You talk to them and verify her choice of a baseline.

**10:33 am** On your Palm™ handheld with *Learner Profile to Go* software installed, you tap or scan Louisa's name and two observation items.

You continue throughout the day working with students and non-intrusively making observations on your Palm™ handheld.

Later:

**3:22 pm** The day's over. You HotSync® your Palm™ handheld with your computer. The two observations about Louisa are transferred to the computer along with all the other observations you made during the day.

**3:23 pm** Tomorrow you want to look at students' organizational skills. You print out a report describing each student's level of learning related to the organizational skills observations.

**3:30 pm** Using the student report, you plan your lesson for tomorrow's work.

\* *Learner Profile to Go* may be purchased separately. Consult the *Learner Profile to Go* user guide for detailed information about using the software.

## **PROGRAM FEATURES**

This version of the *Learner Profile* program runs in a stand-alone environment. The database resides on a single computer. If the student and observation information database is entered once and used on multiple machines, the database must be copied to a disk and then copied to another computer.

This version of *Learner Profile* may be used on a single computer by one user or multiple users (each with a user name and password). If multiple users work on a single computer, a single person should be designated as the administrator of the database to manage the student information that will be used by all teachers on that machine. Using an account structure enables multiple users to share equipment and select information, while allowing each user to maintain separate records.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE FOR OBSERVABLES**

Organizing observable actions of the learners referred to as "observables" should be given careful consideration before use. *Learner Profile* enables you to create sets and subsets of observables. Observable sets may be thought of in varied ways. Some schools might use course titles as observable sets; others might want to categorize observables into domains of development such as intellectual, social, aesthetic, physical, etc.; while still others might use a combination of areas of study and domains. Observable sets can be sub-grouped into lesson observables or smaller sets. Examples of sub-grouped observable sets for use with a mathematics observable set are problem solving, number concepts, or measurement. In a language arts observable set, subgrouped observable sets might be writing, listening, speaking, etc. Observable sets need not contain observables; you can create and use them as "folders" to contain other sets.

Some educators may find it easier to organize observables and observable sets according to the lessons they teach. If you are working from a "master" directory of observables, such as state or national standards, you may find it beneficial to use the "paste as link" feature of *Learner Profile 3.0*. This allows you to include the same observable in different observable sets. When you have collected data on that observable and wish to run a report on your observations, you may choose to report only on observations made within that observable set, or you may run a comprehensive report on the observations made on that particular observable in all of the observable sets in which it exists.

Another way of grouping observables is for use with lesson plans. You may create an observable set (or several observable sets) specifically to accompany a lesson plan. Using the lesson planning feature to select observable sets can enable the observer to analyze relationships between learning activities and learning.

## ***LESSON PLANNING***

*Learner Profile* includes a feature designed to improve the creation and planning of lessons using observables. Objectives, materials, activities, observable sets, assignments, and notes can be incorporated into lessons. The entire lesson plan or portions of the lesson may be printed.

Once you familiarize yourself with the program, you may find that it is easiest to create assignments and organize observable sets based on the lessons you associate with them.



## ***Student Growth and the Learning Process***

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*Learner Profile* enables the observer to collect information that reflects student development and learning over time. As learning is observed, the observer describes the level of achievement by using a word or scale called a qualifier. Documenting levels of student achievement can demonstrate a student's success and can assist teachers in planning future lessons and study concentration areas for students.

Although educators speak of the learning process, seldom are we able to help students understand that learning *is* a process. More often, students are amazed as teachers work extensive algebra problems on the board and seldom see the hours a teacher spends the night before struggling to solve the problem. Frequently, students wait for the magical moment to occur when they will be able to work the algebra problem, never understanding that learning is a process over time. By using qualifiers such as developing, mastered, and integrated, the student and teacher may visually track when learning began and the time the skill was learned and applied. By analyzing the information over a time period, the teacher can graphically demonstrate the learning process to students.