



Cap sur l'école inclusive
en Europe



Resource Sheet

Observing to know

Section of the module /D



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1 – Approached thematic

The theme addressed in this sheet concerns the question of the link between observation and knowledge. Observation is a source of knowledge, knowledge that then guides and leads our practices as professionals. But is it enough to observe to know? Should the observation be supplemented by something else to make the knowledge thus produced legitimate? And what is observing and what is the status of the knowledge related to our observation?

2 – Elements of an approach on observation

- Observing to know is a necessity that is rooted in empirical sciences, natural sciences in particular. It is in an experimental way and with their senses that human beings make their first steps in sciences: observation of the stars, plants, animals, material, etc ... But it is not enough to conform our senses (hearing, sight, smell ...) to the outline of an object to assure us we know something about it. Because observing is not a spontaneous and natural act.
- Observing indeed is not a passive and empirical act that it would be enough to allow to deploy by turning around the object to record knowledge about it. This is the meaning of the reversal of perspective made with Galileo and Copernicus according to Kant. With Copernicus, the earth revolves around the sun and not the other way around as the Greeks thought. And so, from Kant and modern science, the object (to be known) revolves around the subject (the observer) and not conversely. If we can know the object, it is because we are experiencing it and we are building an oriented observation based on hypotheses, categories, the selection of particular fields and themes, etc.
- In other words, the knowledge I will get about a child with special educational needs (SEN) will come from an elaborate, conscious observation that I would have about him / her and me within our relationship. This observation is said to be participatory and its construction will be guided by the hypotheses, themes and interests of a professional in education and teaching.
- So it can structure an observation of the child for example: in time (reception, meal time, recreation, break time, snack time, when leaving school ...), in space (in the classroom,

playground, school canteen, public spaces, ..), in the group (interactions with other children in general) etc.

3/ Limits and prospects

The limit to be taken into account here is that the observation needs to be structured by grids designed according to the assumptions and interests selected. In the course of the professional activity, it is not always easy to have the possibility and the time to keep such grids simultaneously up to date.

The other important point concerns the exploitation of the obtained material which must be able to be shared by a team or several professionals in order to guarantee a relative objectivity to the knowledge produced about the child. Because this is only a myth shared by adults according to which the accompaniment of the child is to be considered and that is ultimately founder of his / her future.