

NARRATIVE

The most popular method of recording child observations is “narrative recording,” or a written description of children’s actions.

Running Records

A detailed narrative account of behavior recorded in a sequential manner as it happens. The observer records everything seen in present tense.

Advantages

1. Rich in detail
2. Focuses on all behaviors not just one particular behavior
3. Does not require a great deal of training
4. Understand not only what behaviors occurred but also the context in which the behavior occurred.

Disadvantages

1. Time consuming
2. Works well for observing one individual, but is difficult to use when observing a group
3. Observers keep themselves apart from the children, which would be difficult for a teacher to do.

Anecdotal Records

A brief narrative account describing an incident of a child’s behavior that is of interest to the observer, written in past tense. They are often written after the incident.

Anecdotes describe:

- What happened
- How it happened
- When
- Where
- What was said and done

These are brief:

- Describe one incident
- They are cumulative, collected over the school year

Advantages

1. Focus on behavior of interest and ignore other behaviors
2. Less time consuming than running record
3. No special training needed for the observer
Observer can catch an unexpected incident no matter when it occurs, for it is usually recorded afterwards

Disadvantages

1. Does not focus on all behaviors; may overlook important behaviors
2. Depends on the memory of the observer
3. Difficult to use for research purposes

SAMPLES

Written samples of certain behaviors to discover how often, how long, or when a particular behavior occurs.

Time Sampling:

The observer records the frequency of a behavior's occurrence over time. Involves observing specified behaviors of an individual or group, and recording the presence or absence of this behavior during short intervals of uniform length. Behavior is specified, defined, and limited. Provides quantitative data or number of events.

Advantages

1. Takes less time than running record and anecdotal records
2. Can record data on many children at once
3. It provides useful information about the intervals or frequency of behavior
4. Counts of behavior can be used for research purposes

Disadvantages

1. May miss important behaviors
2. Context of behavior not noted; does not focus on the cause and consequences of the behavior
3. It is limited to behaviors that occur frequently and not rare behaviors that might also be important.

Event Sampling:

The observer waits for and records a specific preselected behavior. Used to study the conditions under which particular behaviors occur or the frequency of behaviors. A "unit of behavior" is defined and the setting in which it occurs is determined. If studying causes or results of behaviors, then an ABC analysis is used:

A= antecedent event

B= behavior

C= consequent event

If frequency of occurrence is the focus, the recorder can record by counting rather than description.

Advantages

1. Can be used to study infrequent behaviors; note them each time they occur
2. Notes the antecedents and consequences of the behavior unlike time sampling

Disadvantages

1. Focuses on only one or a few behaviors
2. Does not have as much detail as running record or anecdotal record

Rating Scales

Rating scales are observation tools that indicate the degree to which a person possesses a certain trait or behavior. Each behavior is rated on a continuum from the lowest to highest level. Rating scales work best where particular degrees of behavior are well defined, and where there is a distinct difference in the behavior.

Numerical Scales:

A rating scale that is numerical in form. Raters observe children for as long as it takes to circle a number for each item, or they can observe on a daily basis and then average the scores.

The numbers on the scale also represent words.

- 1**= Not at all like the child
- 2**= Somewhat unlike the child
- 3**= Neither like or unlike the child
- 4**= Somewhat like the child
- 5**= A lot like the child

Semantic Differential:

A rating scale using adjectives with opposite meanings at either end.

Advantages

1. Easy to use
2. Takes relatively little time to complete
3. It is a convenient way to observe many traits at once
4. Degrees of behavior / characteristic can be noted, rather than did the behavior occur or did it not occur
5. Easy to score for research purposes

Disadvantages

1. They examine only specific behaviors / traits and may overlook other important behaviors
2. Ratings are subjective and raters may give biased responses
3. Not as much detail about the behavior as other methods (e.g., context of the behavior.)
4. The response categories may be subject to personal interpretations;; one person who views the behavior of the child may believe the behavior occurs "often" and another observer may believe that it occurs "sometimes."

Checklists

Checklists are lists of specific traits or behaviors arranged in logical order. Checklists are especially useful for types of behavior or traits that can be easily and clearly specified. Information from anecdotal and running records can be transferred to checklists to make interpretation easier.

Media Technique:

Capture moments on film and then write notes about what happened.

Photographs:

Useful for discussion with other staff members who may not have witnessed the incident you observed. Photos should be dated and placed with the recorded notes.

Videotapes:

Record live actions of children for later observations and discussions. Staff may observe with a checklist. A group discussion of the tape can be recorded and added to the observational data.

Audio-recording:

An auto-recording can add depth to a written observation by recording a child's spoken language and / or verbal interactions with another child(ren). Some observers speak into the auto-recorder instead of writing their observations.

Before placing the recorder on a table or counter. Speak:

- The child's name
- Current date
- Classroom location

Advantages

1. They are easy and quick to use
2. Little training required
3. They can be used in the presence of the child or recorded later
4. Helps to focus observations on many behaviors at once
5. Can be used for curriculum planning; activities can be planned to encourage certain behaviors that have not yet been observed
6. Can be used to condense information from running record or anecdotal records.

Disadvantages

1. Not very detailed
2. Little information about the context or sequence of events
3. May miss important information not included on the checklist
4. Notes if a behavior occurred but not how often it occurs or the duration of the behavior. Something that happens once may not be very meaningful.