

Running Record

A narrative written in sequence within an extended time period, taking on the spot records of behaviour as it is occurring

Purpose

- To record the situation in a manner that lets someone else read the description later and visualize the scene or events as it is recorded. Try to capture the most important elements of a behaviour event in as much detail as possible

Advantages

- Anyone can use the record for later analysis
- Written in every day language
- Can be reviewed, added to, cross referenced as other data becomes available
- Done with a minimum of equipment
- Permanent record of an event, allowing reanalysis at a future date
- Preserves the sequence of behaviour, the environmental information, and the responses of others in the setting
- Requires no pre-planning or extensive training

Disadvantages

- Takes time to record, transcribe and code
- Difficulty to use where more than one child is being observed

Event Sampling

“Samples” behaviour. Unit of measure is the behaviour itself rather than the time interval imposed on the behaviour being studied. Observer waits for the selected behaviour to occur and then records it.

Purpose

- Focus is on the behaviour itself and the time is a product of the events normal duration.

Advantages

- Economy of observer time spent collecting data
- Observer uses pre-coded categories both to help focus the observations and to help organize and reduce the data
- Behaviour being observed is neither isolated or interrupted
- Can be used to study a wide range of behaviours / events
- Preserves the context into which the event fits which make it possible to analyse causal relationships and get at the ‘WHY’ as well as the ‘WHAT’ of behaviour
- Allows observer to sample a large number of subjects in a greater variety of situations within a reasonable time frame

Disadvantages

- Data may not be as readily quantified as time sampling data
- Separate episode being observed from conditions / situations in the past that may have lead up to the event

Checklists

List of behaviours with check marks, recorded before / during / after the behaviour occurs

Purpose

- To provide quantitative judgments about the presence or absence of specified behaviours
- Look for the presence of behaviours that we think are important

Advantages

- Efficient way of determining whether a behaviour is present or absent
- Easy to use
- Allows for observers to record the presence or absence of behaviours
- Minimum amount of observer energy
- Observer can note behaviour as soon as it occurs or can sit down afterwards and review the checklist to see what behaviours can be checked off

Disadvantages

- Tells nothing about frequency, duration or intensity of behaviour
- Gives no description of behaviour
- Provides little / no information about the quality of the behaviour

Anecdotal Records

A narrative of descriptive paragraphs, recorded after behaviour occurs

Purpose

- To gather information, to test out ideas and to measure and evaluate progress

Advantages

- To test out hunches about reasons for children's behaviours
- Identify what conditions maybe contributing to an increase or decrease of behaviour
- Gain feedback about what children have learned from a particular concept
- Written in every day language
- Can be reviewed, added to, cross referenced with other data
- Permanent record of event, allowing reanalysis at a future date
- Preserve the sequence of behaviour
- Open ended
- Rich in detail

Disadvantages

- Difficult to code
- Can be taken out of context
- Reliant on memory of observer

Time Sampling

Children are observed for definite time periods and the behaviour observed is regarded as a 'sample' of usual behaviour

Purpose

- The observer 'samples' behaviour within definite short time periods rather than attempts to describe the behaviour. Observer tallies behaviours, noting how frequently the behaviours occur, or to measure the length or duration of the behaviour

Advantages

- All behaviour categories that occur in any one time interval are recorded and measures of frequency and duration are approximate and relative
- Allows for greater control of what is to be observed by focusing on specific behaviours to be observed
- Useful in determining the frequency of occurrences of behaviours / events
- Information gained from frequency counts can be used to develop some measures like checklists and rating scales
- Allow observers to collect a large number of observations in short time periods
- Allows observer to sample a large number of subjects in a greater variety of situations within a reasonable time frame
- Efficient means of observations taking less time than narrative methods
- Use a variety of tabulation techniques
- Code the behaviour rather than describe it

Disadvantages

- Difficult to identify the interrelations across a number of behaviours since the observations focuses only on specific behaviours
- Time interval rather than the behaviour dictates the framework
- Unless specifically coded into the recording system, the data from time sampling gives little information of the 'HOW' or the 'QUALITY' of actions
- Lack of continuity, lack of content
- Seldom reveals cause and effect
- Do not provide a permanent record of actions and events
- Best suited to overt behaviours
- Limited to behaviours that occur with high frequency (at least every 15 minutes)

Rating Scales

Measures designed to quantify impressions gained from observation. Calls for quantitative judgment about the degree to which a behaviour is present or how it is exhibited. Validity of ratings will depend upon the amount of time the rater has observed and the number of settings and situations that have been observed

Purpose

- Measure traits or behavioural characteristics that are not easily measured by other means.

Advantages

- Ease of both developing the scale and using it
- Easy means of summarizing impressions gleaned from observations
- Easy to score and quantify information
- Requires a minimum of training
- Provides a quick check on match between reality and a person's perceptions
- Efficient for observing more than one child at a time for many traits or behavioural characteristics
- Useful for several observers rating the same child
- Range of rating scales including numerical / graphic / standard / cumulated points / forced choice

Disadvantages

- Highly subjective
- Subject to rater error and bias
- Ambiguity of the terms used in the rating scales
- Unconscious attitudes can influence ratings in ways that make them less a reflection of objective than of subjective reality
- Provides little information about the cause of the behaviour