Child Development II

Unit 3: Observing Children

Instructional Strategy 4 – Observations Instructions

**Objectives:**

***#3 -- Apply knowledge of developmental stages to observation and/or interaction with individual children.***

***#4 -- Use appropriate techniques for observing and documenting behavior.***

**The above two objectives requires the Child Development II student to observe children in person using various methods. The teacher may need to obtain permission for students to observe elementary school-age children or preschool children in a classroom setting. Below is information the teacher can give to students prior to these observations.**

**Developmental Checklist:**

The **developmental checklist** is *a list that identifies a series of specific skills or behaviors that a child of a certain age range should be mastering*. To use the developmental checklist as an observation record, you can check off the specific skills or behaviors you observe in a particular child. Occasionally, an observer using a developmental checklist must set up certain circumstances in the environment or must interact with the child in some way to ensure that certain behavior occurs. For example, in the sequence of motor development that leads to walking, one skill is pulling up on furniture to a standing position. This behavior would not be observed if furniture were not provided for the infant to use. Another skill is learning to walk while holding an adult's hand. In some cases, the observer may need to be available to provide this support.  
  
Instruction for Student: For your assignment you select a child that is either 3 or 4 years old. If you do not have any children in your class in that age group you should talk to your teacher about moving to another classroom for a day or two so that you can do this assignment.

**Frequency count**

The **frequency** **count** *is a tally of how often a certain behavior occurs*. To keep this kind of record, you focus on a specific child and use a tally mark on a record sheet to note how often that child takes a particular action. A frequency count is especially useful when you are trying to change a child's undesirable behavior. For example, you might notice that a particular child seems to hit other children quite often. To be objective, you should make an actual count of how often the child hits in a given period of time. You can begin by taking a **baseline**, *a frequency count taken before efforts are made to correct a particular undesirable behavior*. As you work with the child to change the behavior, you can make periodic frequency counts when you see whether the child's behavior is beginning to change.  
  
Instructions for Student: For this assignment you will select a child from your classroom and then decide upon an activity to count. Sometimes it is hard to decide on something to count when there are no problems with the child at this time so here are a few possible suggestions for you below. You may use one of them or select something of your own as you know the child better.

**Suggested Activities for Frequency Count**  
For a 3-4 year old child you might count how many times does the child change activities during a 15 minutes time span of free play or group activity.  
For a 3-4 year old child you could count how often does the child initiate conversation with either another child or an adult in the room?  
Any age- How often does the child do something that could spread germs and disease? (put toys in their mouth, sneeze, handle items after they have had their hands in their mouth, etc)  
Other- you can create a different activity to count if you desire.

**Running Record**

The running record is an observation recording method that involves recording for a set period of time everything observed about a particular child, group, or teacher. This recording technique is useful if you are just getting to know a child or just learning about what goes on in a group child care setting. A running record can also be used for analyzing a certain area of development, such as social interaction or motor skills.  
  
Instructions for Student: You must complete a running record while at your child care facility. For this observation, print the running record assignment sheet from this page, then select one child in your classroom to observe. You will only observe them for 15 minutes. Then you can go on with your normal activities.  
  
  
  
**Anecdotal Records**

This is the simplest form of direct observation and is a contrast to running records. They are a short written description that concentrates on specific events or behaviors written down soon after they occur. They can be written as notes immediately after the occurrence and then written up more completely later. Out of seemingly unconnected notes can emerge patterns and answer to questions about a child. Some teachers keep index cards in a pocket always handy to quickly jot down anecdotes when they occur. They do not require charts or special settings. It is like a short story in that is has a beginning, middle, and the end.

Instructions for Student: During this observation process, it is important to record only objective statements. So, your statements do not include any: causes, motives, desires, purposes, needs, or wishes. Once the narrative data is recorded, a second process begins. This process involves the interpretation of the data. An attempt is made to explain the observed behavior and to give it meaning.