

The Brief:

Observation report instructions: carry out three observations of the same child, one must be timed, one written and the other your own choice.

In all the observations you must look at the child's physical, language, and social skills and ultimately their overall cognitive development. The report must be written up in the format: abstract, introduction, method, results, discussion and analysis. In the discussion and analysis you must tie together what you have observed with the theory of what would be expected of a child of the appropriate age.

The report must contain the following:

Abstract: where you outline briefly what you did and why, what you found and the recommendations,

Introduction: include information about the child observed, discuss the reasons for observing, assessing young children, ethical considerations, the use of norms, cultural bias etc.

Methods: where you explain the methods used, reasons for choice, limitations, strengths and weaknesses.

Results: evaluate the child's holistic development, list the three areas of development, physical, social and language, discuss the links between these areas,

refer to the stages of development and child development theory in making your judgments.

Discussion: summarize your findings, make recommendations for the child's learning and development.

Bibliography

Overall: mention why is it important to observe young children, what might the information be used for? What rights does the child have when being observed.

Abstract

Observation is a popular research tool that is used to study the behaviour of children; renowned theorists such as Vygotsky, Piaget, and many more child physiologists have used this tool for their research, allowing them to come up with significant insights, resulting in theories that continue to influence psychology and education today. Observation has been one of the best tools for research. Observation is very effective as a means to perform initial exploration of an area which can then be further studied using more focused methods. It is also useful in the end stages of a study as a means of checking information collected in a different way.

In this study, the researcher employed three observation methods on a six-year old male. The observations used were timed, controlled and participant observation. The observation was conducted in the hopes of detecting any

developmental delays in the child, and come up with possible solutions in the event that some delays are noted. In particular, the study focused on three domains: cognitive, affective, and physical. But aside from these domains, other important details such as the child's interests were discovered through observation, and thus were able to assist the researcher in developing teaching strategies that can help the subject overcome his delays.

Introduction

In the United Kingdom, children enter early childhood programs at a much younger age than children in other countries. As such, standard forms of assessments have not been normally used for this age level. (Blenkin & Kelly 1992, p. 24) Things changed in the late 1980's when the Education Reform Act was ratified. Under this act, assessment became mandatory for children finishing ending pre-school or early childhood grades before they formally enter elementary. This posed a challenge to early childhood teachers because the rate and breadth of development at this developmental stage makes it difficult to design an appropriate standardized assessment instrument that would address all these variables. In so far as early childhood education is concerned, there are two things that must be taken into consideration: the how and what of assessment; how the assessment will be conducted and what should be actually assessed in the young learner? (Teale 1988, p. 175)

In early childhood education programs, observation has been one of the most preferred means of assessment. Observation provides an unobtrusive method to check for student learning, and by extension, assess whether the instructional strategies that were used have been effective or not. Observation has been very effective because it provides an assessment tool that is developmentally-appropriate, particularly for very young learners. (Pahl 1999, p. 112) At their developmental stage, young learners do not respond well to standard written or even examinations and to force it upon them to comply with requirements will only result in mis-testing and subsequent misdiagnosis (Pahl 1999, p. 123), which defeats the purpose of assessment. In young children, observation as a formative assessment tool is very effective regardless of the time of administration. It can be used to perform initial exploration of an area which can then be further studied using more focused methods. It is also useful in the end stages of a study as a means of checking information collected in a different way (Sapsford & Jupp 2006, p. 58)

Observations can provide information on the behaviour of young learners as they go about their daily tasks inside the classroom. Teachers should pay special attention to details and note any unconscious behaviour which may indicate learning or signs that point towards readiness for learning or lack thereof. (Fisher 1999, p. 5) Given the advantages of observation in assessing young learners, this paper will conduct an actual observation of a young learner, detect any problems, and log all the insights and realizations that the observation has made resulted in.

Method

The subject is a six-year boy studying at a private-owned nursery school in the heart of North London. The subject is from Iraq and has two older brothers, aged 8 and 10. For this observation portfolio, three observation methods were chosen: the controlled observation where the researcher creates a scenario to induce or stimulate the behaviour to be observed; the participant observation where the researcher is involved in the scenario whilst the observation is taking place; and timed observation where the observation is done over a course of time. The last method of observation is ideal because it gives a picture of the child's behaviour in the context of a bigger picture. This timed observation functions like a journal that will capture not just the behaviour, but the circumstances surrounding the behaviour concerned like where the child was, what the child was doing, who the child was with, and other important details that contributes to a more thorough analysis of the observation logs.

The methods were chosen because given the situation, they were the most appropriate to the study at hand, especially in forming an initial assessment of the child and creating a baseline profile of the subject. These observations will be limited only to behaviours manifested at school, and thus cannot capture the child's actuations at home and in other areas aside from the school setting.

To ensure the validity and reliability of results, care must be taken so that observation will take place in the most natural setting, and the subjects are unaware that their behaviours are being monitored. In controlled settings, this means that while the observer sets up the scene, the scenario is realistic and as close to what the child encounters in his normal activities at school. This research will treat all data

with utmost confidentiality and respect. Data gathered will only be used for the specific purpose of the research and the researcher will not disclose any information that is not pertinent to the subject at hand. Observations will be strictly conducted only on areas, activities, and behaviours that are related to the study at hand.

Because the subject is a minor, express permission to conduct the observation will be asked from the parents or guardians. Of course, the subject was also informed that such an observation will be conducted on his person and the researcher will provide all the necessary information needed to help decide whether to participate in the study or not. In order to keep the observations as natural and honest, the actual people need not be informed that they will be observed on this specific day or time. In these cases, ethical considerations may affect the patency and honesty of the subjects, so ethical considerations should be weighed carefully against the importance of the data being collected.

Observation, by nature is deceptive (Musante, 2002, p. 198) because if it were known beforehand, then the data will be “faked” or unnatural, and this defeats the purpose of the observation. However this is not to say that observation must be unethical. The subjects must have informed consent. All the participants in this research will be informed of observations, but the exact nature and specific details will not be given to them. However, this is not a big problem with children because they are naturally candid, but care must always be taken that observation be done as inconspicuously as possible. However it must be said that this is not a big problem with children because they are naturally candid; but care must always be taken that

observation be done as inconspicuously as possible.

Results

The subject was chosen as subject for observation because reports say that he has been lagging behind his other classmates. This researcher then started making an observation plan, wherein an investigation can be made about the subject's learning problems without interfering in his normal behaviour. The observations were focused on developmental domains, namely the cognitive, social, and physical aspects of the young learner.

The following are some of the observations made:

COGNITIVE

Through a combination of controlled observation and timed observation, the student shows some developmental delays in the cognitive domain, specifically in the following skills:

➤ CLASSIFICATION SKILLS

- The student is not able to discriminate the characteristics of color and shape.

OBJECTIVES: Demonstrate recognition by classifying and grouping objects according to the specific criteria. Recognize and distinguish various physical characteristics of objects.

The timed observations were held over a course of one month, with two sessions held every week, without any pattern or schedule. The random set-up was chosen so that the child will not be able to detect any pattern to the observation. These timed observation sessions were held for thirty minutes.

AFFECTIVE

Using free and descriptive method of observation, it was noticed that the child is showing some problems with socialization.

➤ SOCIAL SKILLS

- The student has some problems with peer socialization. He exhibits impatience and is unable to delay satisfaction, especially in terms of having his own way. These traits are more acceptable in younger children, but should be more controlled given his age of six years old.
- Most of the time, as shown by the subject prefers to be alone than mingle with his classmates. However, during the times that he chooses to socialize, he seems to be well-liked by his peers. But generally, the subject is very shy and is an introvert.
- In most cases during the observation, the subject seems to be distracted, especially during the lessons. His thoughts seem to be somewhere else.

PHYSICAL

- The subject does not show any physical disabilities or weaknesses. He engages in physical activities with gusto and often has high levels of energy characteristic of children his age.
- The child's fine and gross motor skills, based on the observation reports, show that the subject is on track as far as his physical development is concerned.

Further observation has shown that the child seems very keen on animals and seems to respond to anything that has something to do with living creatures. This presented me with the opportunity to design a fun learning activity wherein I incorporated animals in all aspects of the lesson, from phonics, to counting, to encouraging play and socialization. The subject quickly responded and was able to pay attention to the lessons in class. He was able to keep pace from there on. Since then, all the lessons always involved some animals in some form or the other. One

day, the subject approached me and told me that he loves our classes and is learning so much in the few hours that we spend together. Little does he know that I designed my instruction around his interest; something that I would not have been able to do if I did not conduct any observation about the child.

In my own experiences, I have found that observation as a type of formative classroom assessment is one of the most effective ones to use, especially where young learners are concerned. Observation is unobtrusive and provides a more holistic view on the student, and not just focusing on one particular skill or domain alone as some tests tend to do. The discreet nature of observation addresses the young child's need to have a deep sense of safety inside the classroom. Because children do not know that they are being assessed, then they will not feel threatened (Smidt 1998, p. 2). Moreover, observation provides a more integrative and comprehensive type of formative assessment, as the student is assessed in terms of the bigger picture. It is also more authentic because children are assessed within the context of their normal, day-to-day activities.

Discussion

As an educator, I firmly believe that observation must be a standard practice in early childhood programs, especially as a tool for formative assessment. No other assessment technique can provide instantaneous feedback and response. Upon observation, teachers can make instant instructional revisions depending on what has been observed right then and there. Fawcett said that observation is an “essential skill for anyone working with children. (2003, p. 5) Observation provides

fundamental and crucial data that helps decide further action as far as the child is concerned. This further action may simply involve the refinement of instructional strategies, or may call for intervention measures and the involvement of specialists (Fawcett 2003, p. 5). Observation allows teacher to make early intervention procedures that can make a significant difference in the child's life.

In the subject's particular case, the insights that came from observation led to the discovery of the child's interest. By leveraging his love and interest for animals, we were able to design lessons that will attract and sustain his interest in the lessons. This created a cascade of changes in the child. As he began paying attention to the lessons the child was able to participate more in class activities. This newfound sense of self-confidence also carried over to his affective or social skills. He shows a marked improvement in being able to socialize and relate with his peers. While he still keeps to himself at times, he shows more interest in his peers and is more comfortable with people of other ages. His shyness may be an innate characteristic of his personality, and is something that may just be a function of his racial and cultural background. What is more important is that his confidence is being developed and strengthened. It may be said that the delays in some cognitive and affective domains are a result of the child's shyness. Once his passion was discovered, it was easy to develop lessons that will cater to his interests, and by doing so, cater to his cognitive and socialization needs as well. The improvements in the domains where he once exhibited some delays mean that the observation insights were on target, and the resulting solutions were effective. It is hoped that as the subjects grows older, these domains would have developed enough so that he will no longer need any adoptive

strategies and that his renewed interest in learning will stay with him for the rest of his life.

Analysis

Observation has constantly provided a fuller, richer picture of each and every young learner inside the classroom. Proper analysis of my observation logs has provided insights that would not have been available otherwise or through conventional testing. As a result of these regular observations, instructional strategies can be adopted in order to make it more responsive to each of learner's needs and specific capabilities (Bee & Boyd 1999). Through observation, teachers are able to know their students more in so far as their educational profile is concerned, and as a result, are able to create lessons and choose materials that are more engaging and interesting for them. In my case, this creates a cycle wherein my observations help me create a classroom full of busy and engaged students, which in turn provides me with more opportunities for observation.

Aside from instant feedback and intervention, another advantage of the observation method is that teachers are able to create profiles in several developmental and cognitive domains at the same time. For this to be possible, it is important that pre-school or early childhood teachers be well-grounded on developmental milestones such as cognitive, social, physical, and emotional domains. (Shonkoff & Meisels 2000, p. 72) If observations show that a student is exhibiting marked and persistent developmental delays, then proper diagnosis and early intervention can be given. Similarly, observation provides teacher with the

basis for planning a curriculum that is more responsive to the student's individual. A child may have advanced physical skills but have weak cognitive skills, then some measures can be taken so that the child becomes a balanced individual. The weaknesses will be attended to without neglecting other aspects of development.

Of course while observation is very valuable in this regard, care must be taken in using it. Observation without discernment and interpretation is empty and useless. Only when these observations are carefully analyzed can they have any real value for both the teacher and the student. From your observations, you should be able to make informed inferences which can then help you make decisions about your teaching principles. How and what the students learn is a reflection of how you teach, and by interpreting your observations, you can then adjust how you teach to better facilitate student learning. In this regard, teachers must always have a heightened sense of awareness and perception about their students because this sensitivity will allow the teachers to make appropriate responses and feedback to their students.

Indeed, the ability to make keen and insightful observations is a skill that every teacher should have. Because students, especially the very young learn through experience, actual observation of their behaviour is the best way to gather information about your students. Observation is non-threatening because the students are not aware that you are taking note of their behaviour. More importantly, observation is very accurate because students act in their most natural environment, without any affect or pretensions. (Berk 2002, p. 14) Perhaps one of the best times to undertake an observation assessment is during playtime when children have full 'ownership' of their

time and learning experiences. (Smidt 1998, p. 22) Research leans towards observation and profiling of early learners rather than using graded tests for assessment. (Blenkin & Kelly 1992)

Of course it is not as simple as it seems. A lot of the work that goes into observation goes to the actual task of observing. As a teacher, how would you ensure that every child is properly observed at the most appropriate time? How do we make sure that we are objective in our observations? How do we choose which data is important and how do we eliminate unnecessary information and focus on the most salient data? All of those things should be taken into consideration when doing observation. During the actual observation, all our senses must be engaged, we do not stop at looking, we listen and feel as well, even as we are constantly aware of our own thoughts and feelings about what we are observing, consciously ensuring that our observations are not colored by personal biases. One of the best ways to go about an observation task is to have specific guidelines like focusing on particular skills and competencies or observing only during certain times or activities. After that has been determined, the next step is to design the documentation form, whether they will be in the form of anecdotal reports, checklists, rating scales, or portfolios, or a combination of some of these types of observation logs. The choice of which type to use depends on the skill being observed and for what purpose. How your observations are recorded is important especially because these records can be used a few years after to check for progress or as basis for profiling. Once the documentation has been designed, the last factor to be considered is the actual analysis of the observation and what will be done about these findings. This is the

most important part because any observation, objective and accurate as they may be is useless if it is not used to improve the existing situation. After all, that is the reason why observation was done in the first place, to provide a feedback mechanism where teachers can base their instructional decisions on a regular basis, taking adoptive measures whenever necessary.

Once we become used to observing our students, we refine our sensitivity, and observation becomes second nature to us. Observation becomes like second instinct and we can easily note details without being conscious about it. However which way the observation is done, what is important is that it is done with a specific purpose and strategy. Indeed, it can be more complicated and time-consuming than any other form of assessment, but the insights that teachers get and the resulting benefits that it gives the child makes it more rewarding and worth it in the end.

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