Observation

Direct and Indirect Observation

DIRECT OBSERVATION IS THE BEST WAY TO COLLECT DATA

I. Naturalistic (use in FBA)

Naturalistic observations are used to provide normative information about behavior. Observation times should be selected that are the most representative to the behavior to be observed. You are looking for "typical" performance or natural rates of behavior.

II. Conservative (hand picked)

Conservative observation periods are those scheduled according to when the behavior is most likely to occur or periods of time that are likely to provide the best information for the purpose of evaluating an intervention.

Activity

Develop a brief scenario in which naturalistic observation is the correct choice.

Develop a brief scenario in which conservative observation is the correct choice.

III. How long should observations occur?

Generally, 20 to 30 minutes is enough for one period of observation. If a specific behavior is being observed, one should observe 2-3 times during times when the behaviors are mostly likely to occur to collect data to make accurate hypothesis about antecedents, consequences and functions of behaviors. Do not draw too much information from limited data. Longer observation can often result in boredom, stress or observer drift.

IV. Anecdotal Recording

1. Describe the setting; include descriptions of the individuals and their relationships, and the activities and skills you are observing. Include the number of students and adults present, as well as transitions of people coming/leaving the environment that impact the target student.
2. Include everything the target student says and does, as well as to whom or to what.
3. Include in your description everything said and done to the target student and by whom.
4. As you write, clearly differentiate fact from your impressions or interpretations of cause or reaction. (What did you actually see?)
5. Provide some temporal indications so as to be able to judge the duration of particular responses or interactions.

Your task is to identify, describe and analyze, in this order. Do not jump to analysis to quickly. Look for patterns that support or refute your interpretations or hypothesis about what you are observing.

V. Interval Recording (Information obtained from Artesani, 2005)

**Partial interval recording**

The observer records whether a behavior of interest occurred at any time during a specified observational period. This assessment is often used when it is important to know if an identified behavior, though brief, occurred for even part of the observed interval. This method is also used when long episodes of behaviors occur (e.g. self-injury) but it is not possible to count each instance. In the situation of self-injury, the observer is interested in determining within how many intervals self-injury occurred for at least part of the interval.

**Whole interval recording**

The observer records whether the behavior occurred during the entirety of specified observational period. This method is often used when an observer is interested in behaviors that occur for a specific duration (length of time). For example, a common behavior that is targeted in classrooms is off task behavior. It is common for children to look or walk around the classroom or talk to classmates. These behaviors would be appropriate for whole interval recording because they would likely persist for some time. However, when brief episodes (2-3 seconds) of off task behavior do occur, they would not be recorded within this system. Instead, the off-task behavior would need to occur for the entire interval of each observation for an instance to be recorded.

**Momentary time sampling**

The observer records whether a behavior of interest occurred at a particular predetermined point during a predetermined observational period. For example, the observer may observe a child for 10 seconds every 15 minutes throughout a day and record whether or not a specific behavior or behaviors occurred. This method could be used for ongoing behaviors that are not discrete, such as stimulatory
behaviors (hand flapping, object spinning, body rocking) (Kazdin, 1982). Behaviors that have a variable duration or with indeterminate beginning or end points also work well with this type of data collection. The behavior should also occur frequently, as there is limited observation time (only at specified points in time).

VI. Frequency recording

The observer records the number of times the behavior occurs. Frequency recording is used to record the occurrence of discrete behaviors that do not occur often. At times, frequency records provide an underestimate of continuous behaviors (examples: time off task, tantrum behavior) and inaccurate representation of high-rate behaviors. (Steege & Watson, 2009).

VII. Duration recording

The observer records the total amount of time a behavior occurs. It is often used to record continuous behaviors (ex. on task behavior). The observer uses a stopwatch to record the total amount of time for each occurrence of the behavior and expresses this as a percentage of time. (Steege & Watson, 2009)

VIII. Permanent product recording

The observer records the number of products (specific tangible outcomes such as number of math problems completed, number of garbage cans emptied, etc.) An advantage of this type of recording is that the observer does not need to be present. A disadvantage is that the “...evaluator can not always determine who exhibited the behaviors that created the product recorded” (Steege and Watson, 2009 p. 92)

***When observing and collecting data on behaviors, it is important to operationally define the behavior into observable and measurable terms. Once the behavior has been defined, then the observer can match the recording procedure to the dimensions of the behavior to provide a more accurate estimate of the behaviors to create positive behavior support plans and instruction. This information is the foundation for collecting reliable data for a Functional Behavioral Assessment that we will discuss later in this course.***