Assignment 3a

Overcoming Observation Challenges

Most everyone agrees, in theory at least, that observing and recording children's behavior are important parts of quality early childhood education programs. Yet, accurate and objective observing and recording are an ongoing challenge for two main reasons:

* Preconceived notions
* Logistical issues

**Preconceived Notions**

Preconceived notions are stereotypical opinions that people hold about one another. They are attempts to categorize people in particular ways. Like most stereotypes, they are often rooted in fact and experience. The problem with preconceived notions is that they tend to blur a person's vision. If you believe that people will behave in a certain way, you are more inclined to observe those behaviors even if it is not necessarily the case. People tend to see what they want to see.

Having preconceived notions is part of human nature. More of the time it is not intentional however, an observer's preconceived notions can interfere with the collection of objective data. By typecasting children, child care providers may miss observing subtleties in behaviors and abilities.

There are several strategies that can help eliminate these biases. First, child care providers can become aware that the problem exists. Knowing one has a problem is the first step in overcoming it. Second, child care providers can be watchful for ways in which preconceived notions influence their interactions and observations. This will keep them on guard against acting on these notions. Third, child care providers can also ask others to observe along with them to make sure the recorded observations are objective. By understanding how preconceived notions work, child care providers can be sure that their preconceptions do not influence accuracy and objectivity.
Logistical Challenges

Effective observation has logistical challenges. This primarily relates to making time in the daily schedule for observing and recording. Taking the time to observe and record information often competes unsuccessfully with other teaching and administrative responsibilities. Often it is observing that is left behind. As with preconceived notions, the best way for child care providers to overcome logistical challenges is to face them directly. Rather than getting caught up in what cannot be done, the best approach is to brainstorm solutions. The following strategies can be used to overcome logistical challenges:

* Schedule observation time for observations regularly into the program day and include it on the weekly and monthly schedules.

* Arrange with others to have substitutes, parent volunteers, or supervisory staff present during scheduled observation periods so that you are free to observe without having to worry about the children.

* Establish a schedule for observing children in individual interest areas so that all interest areas are evaluated on a rotating basis. Ensure that it is not just the children encountering problems who are observed regularly. Developmental observations must be scheduled no sooner than one month after children are enrolled.

* Assemble observational materials and put them at predetermined observation stations to encourage their use. For example, prepare a prop box or kit containing observational materials.

* Wear clothing or aprons with pockets containing index cards or Post-Its so they can quickly record observations.

* Put check lists on a clipboard so that they will be easy to carry around and jot down notes throughout the day.

* Enlist parent volunteers and even children to assist in some types of observation. For example, parents can complete time or event sampling checklists of their children. Children can track how often they use activity areas by putting clothespins in a bottle every time they enter the block or art area.

* Observation schedules should be periodically reviewed and updated to be sure that they are realistic for your program.