

Kid Watching: A Naturalistic Assessment Technique

According to Yetta Goodman (1978), teachers should rely on "Kid Watching" rather than test scores to understand learners' strengths and needs. The purpose of this session is to explore *how* Kid Watching can be used to evaluate students' performance and behavior in real settings as they are actually performing target tasks.

Kid Watching is observing students as they think and perform in the classroom, and then documenting *where* and *how* they are growing as well as any difficulties they are having. As an assessment measure, Kid Watching can provide information about the following general areas:

- motivation
- interest
- learning style
- strengths and weaknesses
- organizational skills
- oral language development
- written language development
- peer interaction
- problem-solving techniques
- need for assistance

Kid Watching is a valid means of assessment because . . .

- a) it occurs as a natural part of the instructional lesson,
- b) children's responses are viewed in an unbiased manner as observations are structured by teacher objectives, and
- c) observations are conducted in the context of real work and play.

Kid Watching is a reliable means of assessment because . . .

- a) conclusions are based on numerous planned, purposeful observations, and
- b) these conclusions are based on observed patterns that have occurred time and time again in real situations in the context of normal classroom activities.

Kid Watching can be either incidental or focused. Incidental observation occurs when the teacher circulates among students who are engaged in classroom tasks and activities. It provides valuable information about 1) what the student can do and 2) what experiences and expectations the teacher should plan next for the student. Focused observation entails using a preplanned format, such as a checklist, diary, rating strategy, anecdotal record, or other instrument for systematically recording observational data.

Some general guidelines for Kid Watching:

1. Schedule observation times periodically during class sessions.
2. Take notes that are highly descriptive during the observation.
3. Look for positive aspects of student behavior that can form a record of what individual students or a whole class can do in a given situation.
4. Use checklists whose content parallel what will actually happen in the classroom, rather than a general checklist.
5. Determine what is an indication of growth and what kinds of behaviors will be evidence of that growth.

Three procedures for gathering observational data:

1. On the spot anecdotal recording (incidental observation)
 - a) Develop a list of kinds of observations that can be recorded anecdotally.
 - b) Have a small pocket-size spiral notebook in which one page per child has been allotted.
 - c) As occasions arise, record what has been observed on the assigned page(s) of the student(s).

2. Systematic anecdotal recording (focused observation)
 - a) Have a regular size three ring binder in which the pages have been sectioned off in boxes the size of 3"x3" post-it notes and labeled with students' names.
 - b) Prepare a list of children to be observed each day along with a specific curricular setting.
 - c) Carry a clipboard to a variety of classroom settings, and using post-it notes, record your findings as you observe. Label the note with the student's name and the date.
 - d) At day's end, transfer the post-its to the appropriate notebook space.
 - e) After several days, review the notes acquired for each student looking for patterns among the various entries.

3. Structured systematic recording (focused observation)
 - a) Using a structured format such as an observation diary, checklist, or record which has been specifically devised or selected for the content and context, systematically observe each child or group of children following the format provided.

A skilled Kid Watcher:

1. Is informed by knowledge of child growth and development.
2. Avoids jumping to conclusions.
3. Is emphatic and devoid of bias and preconceived ideas.
4. Attends to details.
5. Forms hypotheses and observes for further verification.
6. Facilitates drawing valid inferences.
7. Generates a plan for further observation.
8. Informs instruction.

From:

An inservice presentation for K- 6 teachers given by Dr. Helen Gill, Central Michigan University, obtained at www.ehhs.cmich.edu/ins/kidart.perf.

Goodman, Y.M. (1978). Kid-watching: an alternative to testing. *National Elementary School Principal*, 57 (4), 41-45.