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UNIT TEN

Methods of Child study

10.1 Introduction

There are two principal methods to the investigation of children's development – a cross-sectional method and a longitudinal method.

10.2. The Cross-sectional Approach

In this approach, different children at different ages are selected and studied. In the case of the longitudinal approach, the investigation studies the same children at a variety of ages as they develop. These approaches represent designs for gathering information about children of different developmental levels. In addition to the approach, the investigator will have to decide on the type of method to be used. Two of the methodological approaches are correlational and experimental strategies. The correlational approach involves the examination of the relationship between two events. In this strategy, it is impossible to determine if there is a cause-effect relationship. An alternative approach which permits the establishment of causal links is the experiment. In this approach, children receive a particular treatment or experience and their behaviour is assessed.

10.2.1. Observation: The fundamental method of child study is unbiased observation. The observations may be in naturalistic or "real life" settings or under standardized, controlled conditions. The approaches used could also be idiographic or nomothetic.

10.2.2. Interview: Parents can also be interviewed regarding their child-rearing practices, the nature and extent of their interactions with the child, their expressions of affection toward them. Methods of punishment and the amount of time spent doing things together.

10.2.3. Home-visit: Parent-child relationships may also be assessed by means of another naturalistic method – the home-visit. The observation in the home may be structured or unstructured. In the former, the parent and child may be brought together in a standard situation that evokes interaction; for example, they may be

presented with complicated play equipment and told to use it as they like.

10.2.4. Anecdotal Records: Recorded observations are called anecdotes or anecdotal records. A good anecdote gives the date, place and the situation in which the action occurred. It describes the actions of the child and it gives cues to how the child felt.

10.2.5. Rating Scales: A list of descriptive words or phrases are presented, and are later checked by the rater. The child could be rated on characteristics like honesty, cooperativeness, attentiveness and the like.

10.2.6. Pupil Data-Questionnaires: The questionnaires consist of items relating to the child's home, family, health, educational and vocational plans. Open-ended items may be used such as:

My hobbies are
My greatest weakness is
I enjoy writing about
I enjoy reading about
My health is
My father is

10.2.7. Autobiography: This is the child's own written report of his life. Writing a good autobiography may be difficult for the pre-school child. Making it structured could be helpful.

10.2.8. Keeping Records on the Child: All societies keep records of individuals for a number of reasons. Someone, somewhere is recording and storing information about another. According to Ware (undated) we are nations of record-keepers and we are nations of individuals about whom records are kept.

Data on age, trends in development, etc. are important for several reasons. The information may be useful in formulating generalizations about the sequence or rate of development of psychological functions of the child, which may be perceptual, intellectual or emotional. More-over the records of these data may provide norms that can be used in evaluating children's developmental status and in diagnosing problems of physical or psychological development. Records on the development of the child could also help us understand individual differences and their determinants.

The procedures in recording are many and varied. The record kept on the child may be in the area of cognitive or affective development. Informations from instructional objectives may be summarized as marks:

- (1) *Letter grades* A, B, C, D, or E may be assigned.
- (2) *Numbers*: e.g. 60 or 70 may also be assigned to indicate the performance of the child.
- (3) The "Satisfactory", "Unsatisfactory", "Pass" or "Fail" summaries may be used.
- (4) A progress report of the child may be employed.
- (5) The information on the child may also be in the form of psychological reports.
- (6) The record kept may be cumulative in approach.
- (7) Technological advancement has made it possible for computers to keep records in more advanced countries.

The cumulative records seem to be more preferred compared with other approaches utilized in record-keeping, because the cumulative record is progressive, and it shows trends and growth patterns of the child when the entries in the record are dated. It represents a store-house of information on the child. A typical cumulative record consists of the following informations:

- (1) Name of the child in full;
- (2) Date and Place of Birth, Sex,
- (3) Name, Address, Occupation of Parents/Father/Mother/Guardian.
- (4) Test Results if administered, e.g. Intelligence Test.
- (5) Medical and Health Information, such as hospital records, physical abnormalities, emotional and social adjustment, important factors in health history with dates.
- (6) Personality traits and level of interaction with peers.
- (7) Reading, writing and any other ability demonstrated by the child.

Like any other record, the pre-school teacher must make sure that the record collected on the child is accurate, must not be carelessly used or abused and the confidentiality of the record has to be ensured.