

Week 5: Anecdotal & Running Records

I. Highlights

- A. Anecdotal records describe a specific story / event / incident with a beginning, middle, and end. They are written in the past tense.
- B. Running records are usually longer. They start and stop whenever you start and stop observing, and just record everything in between in as much detail as possible, like a video camera. They are written in the present tense.
- C. Remember to be as objective and descriptive as possible. Tell *how* things happened, how the child did things, how they looked. Use exact quotes for what people said. Leave your conclusions and interpretations for the summary.
- D. Label the behavior you see, not the whole child.
- E. The anecdotal record and running record forms are under “Forms” in ANGEL. You can use them or adapt them as you like.

II. Homework

- A. Remember to go back and answer any questions classmates leave you in their replies to your online posts.
- B. Due Wednesday 10/1 at 3 pm: At least 3 replies on the discussion forum
- C. Due Wednesday 10/1 at 3 pm: Two quizzes in ANGEL (Chapter 2, Chapter 4)
- D. Due Thursday 10/2 in class: Bring a printed copy of your anecdotal record
- E. Due Thursday 10/2 in class: Read Nilsen Chapter 11
- F. Look in ANGEL for the photo documentation assignment description. Read it and come with your questions.
- G. Optional CDTC (Child Development Training Consortium) forms are due to Leslie by October 6th. Make sure your facility license number is on there.

III. Descriptive Writing

A. Whenever you hear a conversation as part of your observation, use direct quotes.

If you can't tell what they said, write "(inaudible)" or "I think they said..."

B. Leslie likes to take quotes from our assignments and use them as thought/discussion starters for the group. It's not meant to single anyone out and doesn't mean you did it wrong. It's just to have real examples to talk about.

C. These short phrases from our class list logs would need to be much more descriptive if they were part of an anecdotal record or running record. (Brief is appropriate in a class list log.)

1. *"...and he kisses her, tells her he loves her, and wishes her a good day."*

a) Better to use direct quotes.

b) There are so many ways to tell someone you love them! Be more precise by writing exactly what you heard. "I love you sweetheart. Have a good day."

2. *"She was talking to other children about getting the doll back."*

a) That's too vague. Talking to whom? How many children? What happened? What did she say? How did she say it?

b) Better to write what she said: "I want that doll."

3. *"She thanked her."*

a) What does that look like? There are so many ways to say thanks!

b) Instead write what they said: "I'm so happy. Thank you so much."

c) Could also add facial expression description to paint a more fully accurate picture of what you observed.

4. *"She needs a towel to dry the slide."*

a) We can never truly know what a person needs unless they say it directly. We're not in their head.

- b) You may see them reaching for it or hear them ask for it, but then say that. “She needs a towel” is a conclusion you’re jumping to. Instead, write what you saw, such as “She touched the slide, pulled her hand back, walked over to the shelf and picked up a towel. She walked back to the slide and...” or what you heard, such as “It’s wet! I need a towel.”
 - c) Document the behavior that you see or words you hear that make you think she needs a towel. Your conclusion is not the same as the objective facts of what happened.
5. *“Jason chooses to read because he enjoys it.”*
- a) Again, you can’t be inside his head to know that. People choose activities for many reasons: maybe he enjoys it, maybe he feels he’s expected to do it, maybe he wants to be near (or away from) certain other children in the room, etc.
 - b) Instead, add details to enhance the picture of your story so the reader really understands what happened. For example, “Jason went straight to the reading area during choice time and began reading Frog and Toad. After a few minutes, he looked over to where Doug and Julie were building with blocks. the teacher observed for a few minutes as he watched the children playing. The teacher approached and asked, ‘Do you want to play with them?’ He shook his head and went back to reading his book.”
6. *“Brooke eats her crackers and pours her juice with concentration.”*
- a) What does concentration look like? Is she looking directly at the food, chewing her tongue, with a scrunched-up/ grimace face?
 - b) How do I know she’s concentrating? On what? Where is her eye gaze?
 - c) Does her eye gaze move from the pitcher to the cup at the right time to get the juice into the cup? This tells me a lot about her eye-hand coordination.

7. *"He played with trucks in the sand."*
- a) This could be a good note-to-self to jog your memory when you elaborate on your notes later. Make sure to leave time to fill in the details *immediately* after finishing your observation or you'll forget them.
 - b) How did he play with the truck?
 - (1) Repeatedly rolled it back and forth in front of himself with one hand?
 - (2) Poured sand into the dump truck, flipped it over, walked over and carried back a bucket of water, poured the water on the sand, covered it with rocks...?
 - (3) These are very different types of play. The details tell us about the child's hand-eye coordination, planning, etc.
8. *"He plays with a pot."*
- a) How? Is it on his head? Is it in front of his face so he can hear the echo? Is he cooking pretend food in it? Is he hitting it with a spoon like a drum? Is he collecting rocks or small items in it?
 - b) Compare that to, "Sitting with legs spread apart, he lifts the lid with his right fist and slams it down on the pot, scrunching up his face just a second before the pot and lid bang together." for example.
9. *"He sat and cried for about twenty minutes."*
- a) The quantitative (number) detail is good!
 - b) But how did he sit and cry? Was he by himself? Did a teacher sit to comfort him? Did a teacher offer comfort and he turned her away?
10. *"She was hysterical."*
- a) What does that look like? What one person describes as hysterical, another person might not. Instead, record the details of what you see.
 - b) Is she crying? sobbing? screaming? holding her breath or gasping, unable to speak? Is she collapsing on the ground and flailing her arms and legs?

Is she stamping her feet on the ground? Is she running back and forth across the classroom? Say so!

11. *"Rachel was a little uneasy for a few minutes."*

a) What does that look like? "Uneasy" is too vague.

b) Was she fidgeting as she sat? Did she flit from activity to activity, unable to settle into one area? Did she stand in the corner? Were her eyes looking down at the floor, tears in her eyes, shoulders hunched... details matter!

D. If you don't know the names of the other children in your case study child's room, or to preserve confidentiality even if you do know the names, you can choose to write "Child 1" and "Child 2" or "Teacher L." and "Teacher M." when you're describing others. Just be consistent about what you've called the other people because their interactions with your case study child can be important over time.

E. When you see a child participate in a routine, try to note what provokes the participation. Did a teacher ask them to do it? Did they observe other children and then join in? Did they do it independently? Did their parent ask them to do it or make a comment about it? Sometimes you know this, sometimes not, but it's helpful to record whatever you see or know to give context.

F. Think about any questions that your observation raises for you about this child. Examples: Why does this child do this? What in the environment is contributing to this behavior? Can be questions about the environment, teaching strategies, curriculum, relationships, etc.

G. Just because a child is observing an activity doesn't necessarily mean that they do not want to participate. (It also doesn't mean that they do.)

1. We can't know either way unless the child tells us.

2. Children take in a lot of information and learn a lot when they observe each other.

IV. Anecdotal Records

- A. One printed copy of your first anecdotal record is due next week in class.
- B. What is an anecdotal record?
 1. A prompt, accurate, and specific account of an event with a beginning, middle, and end.
 2. Includes the context of the behavior/event.
 3. Written in the past tense because you write it after you observe it.
 4. Your interpretations of the incident are recorded separately from the incident.
(This is also true in running records and class list logs.)
- C. Routines/skills/self-care activities are good opportunities for anecdotal records, but you can do almost any part of the day.
- D. Usually you have to spend some time just sitting and observing the child first to get a sense of what would be a good story/event to write about. This is different from a running record, where you record everything. In an anecdotal record, you may observe several events in a row before deciding which one to use for your anecdotal record. For example, in 15 minutes, you may see a child have morning snack, then go join a group of children playing a game, then leave that group and join a storytelling area with a teacher. Any one of those could be what you write about. Choose one and document it.
- E. Over several anecdotal records combined, you want to try to capture the whole child — physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development. It usually takes several anecdotal records to capture the big picture.
- F. These are very short stories/vignettes that have a clear beginning, middle, and end. For example, if you're writing about snack, it would begin with washing hands and picking up a napkin, then the child would eat and talk with friends at the table, then it would end with cleaning up.

G. Context and the physical environment matter. Context is what happened right before or after to help us understand the story better. The physical environment is where it happened. If you're in your own room, you'll know more context, such as the fact that one of those teachers is a substitute. Record anything you know that can help make the story more meaningful.

H. Form on ANGEL

1. As always, you can change/adapt this form to suit you. If you don't like typing in the text box, delete it. If you'd rather make it a two-column text box like the class list log, you can write your anecdotal record in the left column and record your personal notes/comments/questions/interpretations/feelings in the right column next to the parts that relate to them. Do what works for you.
2. If you do the two-column method, you don't also have to write those personal notes/feelings/questions in a summary paragraph. That's repetitive. If you want to put a concluding statement or overall comments that don't fit next to one particular part of the observation, you can put that at the end.
3. The summary should be one paragraph.
 - a) What did you learn about your case study child from this anecdotal record?
 - b) Or what did you learn about the other children/teachers in the classroom that may help you understand future observations better?
 - c) What do you feel about what you saw? If you felt the teacher's tone of voice or word choice wasn't appropriate, write that here (or in the right-hand column if you're doing the two-column style).
4. The summary paragraph also includes anything else that helps the reader understand what occurred. This is very similar to the context, so you can move the context to the bottom if you prefer it there instead of the header.

5. Your summary could also include things like you wonder whether this child is feeling well or something is different at home right now, based on the behavior you observed.

V. Running Records

- A. Running records are just as detail-descriptive as anecdotal records (give lots of objective factual details to help the reader paint a mental picture of what happened), but are different in how you do them. Instead of a single story with a beginning/middle/end (which would be an anecdotal record), a running record is equivalent to turning on a video camera and letting it run until you choose to stop it. Write everything that happens during that time.
- B. For this assignment (due in 3 weeks), you should record everything you observe for at least 20 minutes. Bring lots of paper! (It's also okay to type directly into a laptop if you can touch-type fast enough. That way you don't have to look down at your paper.) We don't have to turn in our rough notes, only the finished product.
- C. Record everything as events are happening, so write it in the present tense. (This is another difference from anecdotal records, which are past tense.)
- D. All behavior gets recorded in sequence. If you miss a detail, just keep going. Write everything that happens in the order you see it.
- E. Things to remember:
 1. Describe *how* the child does something, including how the child looks.
 2. Include the responses and behavior of other people.
 3. Describe the behavior in terms of what was done, rather than what was not done. Think of the glass as half full, not half empty. (For example, write "She smiled" instead of "She didn't cry.")

F. Format of running records should follow the form she posted on ANGEL. You can change the form to something you like better as long as it has all the same information.

1. Observation #: (This is your title, such as Anecdotal Record #1 or Running Record A. Just be consistent across all your observations this semester.)
2. Date: (Include month, day, and year.)
3. Start time: (include AM or PM)
4. End time:
5. Weather: (describe outside weather even if you're indoors the whole time because children behave differently when it's 110° outside vs. winter storms)
6. Mode of attire: (What is the child wearing?)
7. Description of physical area: (Where is this happening?)
 - a) The child may start in one place and then move. You may be in several areas during your 20-minute observation. Describe them all in order.
 - b) This can be in the heading (as it is on the form on ANGEL) or embed it in your running record or write it separately at the end. She wants the running record to be done in the way that is most meaningful and useful to you.
8. You can do the same two-column method described for anecdotal records if you like that. The left column is for the factual, objective record of what happened. The right column is for your personal comments, questions, interpretations, etc., matched up line-by-line to what happened.
9. Don't feel limited to the questions she put in the summary part. Those are there to stimulate your thinking as you write your conclusion.

VI. Video clip as practice anecdotal record

A. Watch the video clip, write an anecdotal record about what you saw.

B. Watch the video clip again and notice what you missed the first time.

1. We disagree about the child's gender. It's hard to tell at this distance and we assume differently. This difference can be important. If you don't know something, don't assume it! Write that it's unclear.
2. Noticed the child's eye gaze toward the puddle as soon as they approached, pulling the dog toward the puddle but the dog resisted, so set the leash down and went back alone.
3. Initially missed details such as "squatted and placed the leash on the ground" instead of "dropped the leash."
4. Obviously when writing about a real event, you can't go watch it again because there's no "rewind" on life. This is a lesson in paying attention to as many details as possible the first time, and realizing that you're human and will never catch 100% of it.

C. Be aware of possible distractions when you're doing observations.

1. In this video, it could have been the background music, watching the dog instead of the child, or the fact that the child and puddle were in shadow.
2. When you're observing, ask yourself, "Was I distracted by anything? Was part of me not fully present?" It could be another child crying in a really distressing way or something else going on. This is something to put in the personal notes in the summary section because it is part of the overall context of the observation.

D. By the end of the semester, we will have to turn in 10 anecdotal records and 3 running records. As with photos, you may need to do more than the required number to capture the ones most useful to you. (Just as some photos are blurry or your thumb is over the lens, some records turn out better than others.) Plan to do more than the required number so you can show your best ones.

VII. Cohen Chapter 3: Recording a Child's Use of Materials

- A. Page 40 has a list of "What to Observe." It gives you guiding questions/prompts to help you add more descriptive detail to your writing as you're observing children using different materials.
- B. Page 34: "Symbolization refers to the human capacity to make one thing represent something else."
 - 1. This is a critical cognitive milestone for young children. They are exercising higher-order critical thinking skills as they use their memory and knowledge of the world to imagine things to be different than what they really are.
 - 2. Example: using a block as a pretend phone
 - 3. Example: putting playdough lumps on a cookie sheet in the pretend oven
- C. Page 35: "Nonverbal symbolization is an important way of communicating, even if it is not the most common, because many experiences, feelings, and thoughts either cannot be or are too difficult to be put into words."
 - 1. Painting, dance, etc. is often less valued in our society than spoken/written language, but it is very important communication.
 - 2. These forms are especially meaningful for young children who don't yet have the vocabulary to express complex emotions with words.
- D. Page 38: "Children will take any materials, shapes, or form and breathe a bit of themselves into it."
 - 1. This can only really happen with unstructured (open-ended) materials
 - 2. Adults do it too
 - 3. What people create with open-ended materials can give us a window of understanding into that person
- E. Page 44: "There is a difference between subjective interpretation that labels the child... and the interpretation of one small piece of the total behavior."
 - 1. This is super important!

2. Describing an “anxious smile” is very different from saying this is an anxious child. Giving me a “hostile look” does not mean this is a hostile child.
3. Describe the behavior you see in the moment; do not label the whole child.

VIII. Physical Description of our Case Study Child

- A. Look at a classmate’s description and circle any subjective words/ phrases, note any incomplete sentences or paragraphs, note any details that are missing to help clarify the image.
- B. The physical description should be about a paragraph or two.
- C. This will become part of the background information in the final case study child package at the end of the semester. (We turned it in tonight as a first draft and will probably be revising it after feedback.)