Method: Creating an observation guide

This document describes how to create a bespoke observation guide, which will enable you to perform evaluations based on making rigorous observations of how young people develop over time. Example observation guides are also included.

1. Age range
All, including SEN children.

2. Method
a) Decide the outcome(s) you wish to observe.
b) Create a general list of behaviours which indicate that someone is demonstrating a low or high level of the outcome. This research can be performed online, and by asking staff and participants for input.
c) Using the indicators, create an observation guide which can be used at the beginning and end of a programme. Example observation guides are below, including some which have been validated for use to measure well-being.
d) Plan how frequently the observations will be performed. 1 – 2 observation slots during the middle of the session will capture the key elements of the session’s activity. Around 3 - 5 minutes per observation is reasonable. Alternatively, you may find it easier to observe a whole session and record your responses at the end.

Observations can be at the individual level or group level. High level, group level ‘scans’ can be used to log to what extent a group is demonstrating a simple set of behaviours. This can be combined with more detailed observation of a small number of individuals chosen at random.

For ease of use, observations can be taken from video recordings of a session. Observers should watch a short section of the film (i.e. 3 - 5 minutes) to make their observation.

3. Staff resource requirements
It is acceptable to ask programme staff to perform observations. To maximise robustness, this should be administered by an independent individual, who is not a member of the programme staff team. Young people or school teaching staff could be briefly trained to perform the observation.

4. Creating an observation guide
A good guide can include:

- A list of the specific behaviours being observed. These can include verbal and physical behaviours which indicate the outcome.
- Examples of what a mild and a strong version of the behaviours look like.
- A place to log how often the behaviour is observed, with space to make qualitative notes describing how the behaviour was exhibited.
- No more than five things to observe at group level.
- Indication of when the observation should be performed.
- The duration of the observation.
5. **Improving the robustness of observations**
   - Pilot the observation guide to ensure that it is workable.
   - Use two or more observers. During the pilot phrase, train the observers so that their recorded observations are very similar. During live observations, take an average of their scores.
   - Use alongside a validated tool.

6. **Example observation guides**

7. **Sources**
   - *Collecting Evaluation Data: Direct Observation*. Ellen Taylor-Powell and Sara Steele.
   - *Consulting with children with disabilities as service users*. Trinity College Dublin.
   - *Identifying expressions of pleasure and displeasure by persons with profound and multiple disabilities*. Petry and Maes.

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