

Checklist

Non-narrative method for observing; an inventory of characteristics or behaviors that can be checked as observed

Checklists

A **checklist** does not tell a story; therefore, it is a non-narrative form of observation. A checklist is a list of characteristics or behaviors. A teacher observes an individual child or a group of children and notes whether each child does or does not show that behavior. The teacher records a check if a child shows the behavior or leaves a blank space if a child does not show the behavior. Checklists are an efficient way to determine the presence or absence of behaviors. For example, which children wash their hands correctly? How do children react to anger-arousing interactions? What social skills does the child demonstrate most of the time?

A checklist is a shortcut method because so little detail is given and it takes so little of a teacher's time. The teacher does not need to tell or narrate a story; thus, a checklist, like rating scales, and the sampling methods described in this chapter, is a non-narrative method. For a hand-washing checklist, for example, a teacher would know only whether a child had demonstrated the skill but would not know if he had to be reminded to wash his hands. You would choose a checklist approach if you only needed to know whether a child can or cannot do something. You would choose another method if you needed more detail.

Figure 6.3 shows the format for one type of checklist. It is McClellan and Katz's (2001) Social Attributes Checklist, which assesses social development. This checklist should be used several times to get as accurate an idea as possible. The developers of this checklist believed that a child's social development is proceeding well if he *usually* shows many of the attributes in the checklist.

Checklists have several benefits or advantages. They are extremely easy and quick to use for behaviors requiring only a check to determine their presence or absence. Checklists are flexible, meaning teachers can choose when to complete the checklists and can use them to observe for the presence of specific social and emotional skills, such as using a word label for emotions.

The drawbacks for checklists include lack of information about the quality of the behavior or the *how* of the behavior. It tells an observer whether a child approaches a group, for instance, but does not indicate *how* she approached: Fearfully? Joyfully? Cautiously? Checklists give no information on how frequently a child shows a behavior. Does the child who approached a work group do this every day? Only when encouraged by the teacher? Only when specific children are in that group?