

ANECDOTAL RECORDS AND HOW THEY APPLY TO THE  
BOZEMAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

by

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## ABSTRACT

The study originated because the reports of student behavior at Bozeman Junior High School were not providing adequate accurate applicable information that teachers, counselors, and administrators could use in assisting students whose behavior indicated a need for guidance. Since anecdotal records were designed to supply a developmental picture of interests and abilities, it was hoped that a study of anecdotal records might provide a satisfactory method of reporting student behavior that could develop better understanding of the whole student.

The problem of study was designed to determine what kind of information on student behavior was being provided by the present method of reporting used at Bozeman Junior High School, to determine what had been said about using anecdotal records to report student behavior, and to determine a realistic method of reporting student behavior at Bozeman Junior High School.

The literature revealed that authorities seemed to be in agreement that: (1) any behavior that attracts attention should be reported; (2) collecting data by direct observation has inherent weaknesses but can be valuable if the reporter remains objective; (3) end-of-the-year reports are of questionable value since single reports are unable to show a significant pattern of behavior; (4) generalized observations may be reported on a rating scale; (5) anecdotal records are valuable in providing insight into behavior patterns and personality traits; and (6) more than one method to report student behavior should be employed.

The results of the study revealed that no one plan for reporting student behavior would prove effective at Bozeman Junior High School. The end-of-the-year reports proved to be negative and based on value judgments. Faculty members did not favor the anecdotal record as a method of reporting student behavior. Rating scales would furnish limited information. The study indicated that continuous study and evaluation of reporting student behavior was needed at Bozeman Junior High School.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The Bozeman Junior High School was aware that their general educational system was keeping pace with the growing and changing needs of the students and the community. However, one particular area of concern was that of reporting student behavior in anecdotal records. The anecdotal records that had previously been used to help evaluate student behavior simply were not providing adequate, accurate, applicable information that teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators at Bozeman Junior High School could use to the advantage of the students.

Since anecdotal records can supply a developmental picture of interests and abilities, they should help in developing a better understanding of the whole student. Anecdotal records were originally devised to report incidents that were indicative of student behavior (11). Such reports provided day-to-day accounts of student behavior for classroom teachers, administrative reports, and planning of school and student needs (13). Since anecdotal records at Bozeman Junior High School did not seem to be fulfilling the intended functions, it became necessary to investigate the problem.

#### General Statement of the Problem

At Bozeman Junior High School student "anecdotal" records were recorded by the homeroom teacher for each student in the homeroom at the end of the year. This was a mandatory requirement which seemed to result in inaccuracies and inadequacies. Such a procedure was not realistic and information was usually received by the guidance counselor too late to be of benefit to

the students. The problem was that information concerning student behavior was not being used to the advantage of the students and staff.

#### Purpose of Field Study

The purpose of the study was to find a realistic method of reporting student behavior so the information could be used effectively by the teachers, guidance counselors, and administrators of Bozeman Junior High School.

#### Procedures

The faculty of the Bozeman Junior High School were interviewed to determine what items they believed should be included in reporting student behavior. Several forms were available for examination and study. A trial form was compiled from the results of the interview and this was used for one year. After the year, and after additional examination and study of various forms, the staff members were again interviewed.

#### Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to the anecdotal record needs of the Bozeman Junior High School.

#### Summary

The study was made to develop procedures that could be recommended for the up-dating of anecdotal records in the modern educational system at the Bozeman Junior High School.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although they recognize the inherent weaknesses in the use of direct observations as a method of collecting student data, educators are aware of the valuable contribution teachers' observations make to the individual inventory. These observations may be expressed as a rating scale, which is a generalization of many observations, or the anecdotal record, which is a description of one significant incident of a student's overt behavior (11).

Since the 1920's schools have used anecdotal records as a device for the appraisal of personality. The term "anecdotal record" seems to have originated at the Rochesleres Athenaeum and Mechanics Institute. Such records had previously been referred to as "Personnel Methods" (12).

Among the various definitions of the anecdotal record, the following are especially significant:

Strang stated that the anecdotal record is a specialized form of incidental observation. It is a description of the child's conduct and personality in terms of frequent, brief, concrete observations of the student made and recorded by the teacher (9).

According to Raths, an anecdotal record is a report of a significant episode in the life of a student (12).

Hatch and others report that anecdotal records are firsthand reports in concise and informal language of significant behavior, both good and bad (6).

Zahn stated that the anecdotal record is a simple descriptive statement of an incident deemed by the observer to be significant with respect to a given student (12).

Tyler held that anecdotal records are descriptions of actual behavior taking place in situations noted by the instructor, in contrast with rating scales which provide records only of the summary interpretation of the behavior observed (12).

Randall seems to sum up the anecdotal record as a record of some significant item of conduct; a record of an episode in the life of the student; a word picture of the student in action; the teacher's best effort at taking a word snapshot at the moment of the incident; any narrative of events in which the student takes such part as to reveal something which may be significant about his personality (12).

Apparently, from the foregoing definitions, the anecdotal record can be expected to reveal sensitivity to and insight into problems of personal development on the part of teachers and other educational personnel (8).

As indicated, the definitions of the anecdotal record are varied and numerous; likewise, the purposes of this record are varied and numerous.

Olson believed that anecdotal records are for all students--good or bad (12). The purpose of anecdotal records should be:

1. To determine whether a behavior pattern is typical.
2. To look for trends in behavior.
3. To look for clues as to the source of the difficulty.
4. To look for unusual behavior patterns in relation to particular events or personalities.
5. To detect gradual change.
6. To become aware of the kinds of situations to which teachers respond.
7. To form a basis for some planned action to help the student (7).

Since it is not the purpose of the anecdotal record to add unnecessary bulk to the cumulative record, when data acquired has no immediate function, it is removed from the cumulative record, summarized, and the summary retained if its retention can be expected to be of benefit to the student in the future (2).

Recognizing that the anecdotal record summary may have a fruitful function throughout the student's schooling, each anecdote must be treated as a single brick in a brick wall. In isolation, the significance may be lost--added to the other information, the picture is complete (2).

Considering the purposes outlined, it becomes apparent that recording of such information must be carefully organized. Accurate observation and objective reporting of incidents are not instinctive. They must be learned. The teacher who is concerned with understanding children and helping them grow in desirable ways can build up these skills by practice and by thoughtful analysis of his own performance (2).

Teachers should be concerned with every instance of conduct which attracts attention, favorable or unfavorable, or which seems to be characteristic of the student (7).

Teachers should be aware that evaluative adjectives such as lazy, stubborn, polite, and sweet should be avoided. These terms imply a judgment and represent a conclusion by the observer. They convey the observer's attitude toward the behavior but do not describe the evidence upon which the interpretation was made (5).

Notations that indicate when fatigue is evident and amount of activity shown are helpful in supplementing health data. Notations regarding number of friends and situations that indicate the degree of security and confidence provide data for social growth. Notations as to reactions to success and failure, organization of materials, and work habits give clues to degree of achievement and possible causes of low achievement (5).

The anecdotal record should be stated objectively and in specifics. Statements should be factual and as free as possible of value judgments by the observer (7). Teachers should be provided with a short, simple form on which to report the anecdotes. Figure 1 is an example of such a form (11).

Form for Reporting Anecdotes	
Student _____	Date _____
Class _____	
(anecdotal notation)	
Observer _____	

FIGURE 1

Recognizing that systematic observation of behavior helped teachers carry out their primary task of stimulating learning, Ohlsen presented this summary of suggestions in reporting anecdotal records:

1. The observer should try to know himself, to understand how his own personal needs and biases influence what he notices and records as significant behavior.
2. He should observe the student in many different situations.
3. He should keep a running account of the events in the order in which they occur.

4. He should describe typical behavior as well as unusual behavior.
5. He should remember that a record of a single incident tells little about the student, but a collection of reports kept over a period of time reveals a significant pattern in the student's development (7).

Besides helping teachers and counselors gain insight into a student's growth, anecdotal records which are properly recorded, filed, and accurately interpreted can be devices to help students develop insight into their own strengths and weaknesses and often develop cooperation in modifying emotional or social behavior.

Anecdotal records also provide a basis for cooperative conferences with parents (5).

The purposes of the anecdotal record are sound and a plan for recording such records is feasible, but we must realistically recognize that any tool or device used to evaluate is not without limitations. The anecdotal record is no exception. In theory, the anecdotal record is excellent; in practice too few observations are recorded and most of these emphasize negative behavior. Only usually observant and guidance-conscious teachers can successfully use this technique.

Additional limitations of the anecdotal record are:

1. They are only as valid as the objectivity of the reporter.
2. Inexperienced writers may use them to point up undesirable behavior.
3. They take time.
4. Some types of behavior do not lend themselves to observation (6).

Understanding the purposes and uses of the anecdotal record and recognizing its limitations, it becomes apparent that through planned observations the teacher or counselor learns much about the student which will benefit the student in terms of his own progress and adjustment, while the teacher's or counselor's reward will be in terms of increased understanding of cause and effects (10).

### CHAPTER III

#### PROBLEM AND PROCEDURES

Several members of the 1967-68 faculty of the Bozeman Junior High School expressed a need to develop a method of reporting student behavior that would be more valuable to students as well as teachers, counselors, and administrators. At that time the only behavior report for Bozeman Junior High School students was an end-of-the-year report (see Appendix A). The report was referred to by staff members as an "anecdotal record", but by definition and use it was not. The report was merely a comment sheet written each May by the homeroom teacher for each student in her homeroom. This method often produced reports that were "empty" (author identified an "empty" report as a report that had little pertinent information) because the homeroom teacher did not always have her own homeroom for academic instruction and had little opportunity to observe the behavior of the students for which she was writing the reports. Since the reporting was mandatory, rather than spontaneous, the reported information was often superficial, emotionally shaded, or filled with meaningless adjectives. Little real information was reported. Many reports were reports that students had to "live down". Reports tended to be based on value judgments rather than facts. Reports contained more negative statements than positive statements. As indicated in Table 1, page 10, 215 end-of-the-year reports from the 1966-67 school year revealed that sixty-three percent were reports based on value judgments, twenty-one percent could be classified as "empty" reports, and sixteen percent proved to be based on facts.

TABLE I. BASIS OF COMMENTS RECORDED ON 215 BOZEMAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL END-OF-THE-YEAR REPORTS FOR 1966-67

Basis of comment	Percent of comments
Value judgments	63
"Empty"	21
Facts	16

As indicated in Table II, of the 215 end-of-the-year reports examined, seventy-four percent had negative comments, seventeen percent had positive comments, and nine percent were of a neutral nature.

TABLE II. POSITIVE-NEGATIVE COMMENTS RECORDED ON 215 BOZEMAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL END-OF-THE-YEAR REPORTS FOR 1966-67

Type of comment	Percent of comments
Negative	74
Positive	17
Neutral	9

The end-of-the-year report was added to the cumulative folder just prior to the closing of school so little or no follow-up of any reports that noted significant behavior was possible and any counseling had to wait until the next year.

The system of reporting student behavior should furnish information to teachers, counselors, and administrators which they could use in helping students to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and in working out a plan to change any undesirable behavior to more desirable behavior. However, it became evident that many teachers, counselors, and administrators were dissatisfied with the existing system for reporting behavior in these respects. Therefore, a study was conducted to find out what faculty members considered their immediate needs and what suggestions they could make to change the reporting system so that the method of reporting student behavior would better fulfill the above criteria. Sixty-three percent of the 1967-68 faculty members of Bozeman Junior High School were interviewed.

As revealed in Table III, eighty percent of the number interviewed wanted a form that would make the recording of student behavior more efficient. Of the remaining twenty percent, about one-half wanted no change.

TABLE III. TYPES OF FORMS DESIRED BY THE BOZEMAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL FACULTY MEMBERS FOR RECORDING STUDENT BEHAVIOR FOR 1967-68

Form desired	Percent of faculty members
Form designed for efficient recording	80
1966-67 form	11
No form	9

As indicated by Table IV, fifty-five percent of the faculty interviewed favored a form that incorporated a rating scale and an anecdotal record. Twenty-six percent preferred having only the rating scale, while nineteen percent wanted a simple comment sheet, or anecdotal record.

TABLE IV. SPECIFIC FORMS CONSIDERED BY BOZEMAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL FACULTY MEMBERS TO BE INCORPORATED IN A FORM FOR REPORTING STUDENT BEHAVIOR FOR 1967-68

Type of form	Percent of faculty members
Rating scale and anecdotal record	55
Rating scale	26
Anecdotal record	19

The faculty members that preferred the rating scale provided a list of traits they would like rated. Some of those traits were: grooming, industry, comprehension, health, achievement, emotional stability, reliability, sociability, creativity, and leadership. Other teachers felt that traits more closely linked with behavior should be included. Some of those suggested were: temperamental, easy going, pleasant and agreeable, boisterous, shy and quiet, works well with others, careless, and needs prodding.

A form using the teachers' suggestions was distributed to the teachers for their evaluations (see Appendix B). Some of the terms were thought to be stated too negatively and the arrangement of the terms was felt to be too haphazard. Some of the behavior-linked terms were rephrased and the rated

terms were listed alphabetically. Figure 2 shows the final form distributed to the teachers to use for the remainder of the 1967-68 school year.

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Student Reporting Form

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ HOMEROOM \_\_\_\_\_

1 - Poor    2 - Fair    3 - Average    4 - Good    5 - Superior

Please use scale above to describe this student:

_____ achievement	_____ emotional stability	_____ industry
_____ comprehension	_____ health	_____ leadership
_____ creativity	_____ grooming	_____ self-confidence
_____ dependability	_____ honesty	_____ sociability

Please check spaces that best describe this student:

_____ boisterous	_____ needs encouragement	_____ temperamental
_____ careless	_____ pleasant and agreeable	_____ easy going
_____ works independently	_____ shy and quiet	_____

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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FIGURE 2

A record was kept as to the frequency with which the teachers' reports were turned in to the Guidance Department. The first two weeks after distribution twelve forms were turned in to the Guidance Department. Before

Christmas vacation twenty-two more forms were processed by the Guidance Department. This number represented reports for twenty-eight students. In the three months following, fifty-one reports were processed and an additional forty-three students were counseled. By the end of May one hundred ninety-four reports from thirty-four percent of the faculty were turned in to the Guidance Department and one hundred twenty-seven students were counseled.

As the figures indicate, behavior reports or "anecdotal" were written on fewer than twenty percent of the total student body. However, one hundred twenty-seven more students received counseling when they needed counseling than had previously been the case.

Of the teachers reporting, sixty-nine percent were experienced teachers while the remaining thirty-one percent were first-year faculty members. Women teachers reported eighty-one percent more often than men.

The reports were objectively evaluated and filed. During the summer of 1968 significant behavior patterns as determined from the reports were recorded on the cumulative folders. No report forms were filed in the folders.

Early in the fall of 1968 the faculty members of Bozeman Junior High School were asked to evaluate the form used during the 1967-68 school term. Less than ten percent responded. This was an insufficient number for a valid evaluation so sixty-eight percent of the faculty members that had been on the staff the previous year were selected and interviewed. Of those interviewed, thirty-one percent favored using the same form again, twenty-six suggested using basically the same form but with some modification in

the area indicating behavior-linked traits, twenty-two percent preferred a simple form for jotting down comments or incidents (an anecdotal record form), and twenty-one percent indicated that no form was necessary (see Table V).

TABLE V. EVALUATION OF FORM USED TO REPORT STUDENT BEHAVIOR IN THE BOZEMAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL FOR 1967-68

Evaluation of 1967-68 form	Percent of 1967-68 Faculty Members
Satisfactory in present form	31
Behavior-linked traits should be deleted	26
Comment portion would satisfy need	22
No form necessary	21

No forms were distributed to the faculty of the Bozeman Junior High School in the fall of 1968. Orientation at an early faculty meeting stimulated some faculty members to record observed student behavior for a few weeks. Although anecdotal reports were written and filed for only a short time, progress had been made because teachers were verbally reporting incidents of student behavior to the Guidance Department soon after they occurred. These were noted by guidance personnel and filed as anecdotal records. Counseling followed when reports indicated this to be advisable. During the first two months of the 1968-69 school term, thirty-eight verbal reports of observed behavior had been reported to the author's office. The reported

observations involved twenty-six students. This represented about a twenty-five percent increase of reported student behavior as compared to the same period in the previous year. An undetermined number of verbal reports were received by other guidance personnel.

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The anecdotal record appears to be valuable in predicting personalities and attitudes and in setting up guidelines for effective counseling of students for teachers, counselors, and administrators.

#### Summary

The behavior record at Bozeman Junior High School was not an anecdotal record in the defined sense, and benefits from such reports appeared to be meeting the needs of only a small percentage of the students in the Bozeman Junior High School. A change in the method of reporting student behavior seemed to be indicated.

Faculty members of Bozeman Junior High School were interviewed and most of them indicated that they would like a definite form for reporting student behavior. The majority of faculty members further indicated that a form that would make reporting more efficient would be desirable. The reporting of student behavior as anecdotal records was not the method preferred by most faculty members at Bozeman Junior High School, since anecdotal records ideally report all significant behavior, favorable or unfavorable, and are recognized to require more time.

#### Conclusions

The end-of-the-year reports revealed that most of the recorded comments were negative. Most faculty members seemed to indicate that reports were of little significance if behavior was favorable. Reports at the end of the

year tended to be stated as value judgments rather than objective notations of significant behavior.

The investigation of anecdotal records at Bozeman Junior High School indicated that the reporting of student behavior as an anecdotal record would not be accepted or adopted by the majority of faculty members. Rating scales were recognized to be of some value for objective comments, particularly on the cumulative folders, if more than one faculty member rated the student.

#### Recommendations

The following recommendations seemed appropriate in the light of the information revealed from the study:

1. A well-planned orientation session should be presented to faculty members at the beginning of each school year and at any other time that clarification or information was needed.
2. During the orientation or sharing sessions faculty members should be reminded of the value of frequent reporting of observed behavior--not of every student, but of any student whose behavior attracts attention, favorable or unfavorable. Teachers should also be reminded that reports should include observed behavior of students in or out of class, since behavior out of class can often be more indicative of true behavior.
3. Teachers should be informed that frequent reporting facilitates evaluating, recording, and follow-up of specific student behavior.

4. The following form should be used to report student behavior:

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STUDENT BEHAVIOR REPORTING FORM

STUDENT \_\_\_\_\_ GRADE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Record of Incident:

  
  
  

Please use the scale below to describe this student:

5--Superior 4--Good 3--Average 2--Fair 1--Poor

achievement	emotional stability	industry
comprehension	grooming	leadership
creativity	health	sociability
dependability	honesty	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teacher's Signature

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5. Student behavior reporting forms should be filled out either completely or partially, as the incident may dictate, but frequently.
6. The student behavior reporting form should be evaluated by the faculty members after they have used it for a year.

7. Student behavior report forms should be filed in the Guidance Department and evaluations and recommendations made with regard to behavior reported on the forms should be recorded on the cumulative folder by the guidance personnel.

8. Faculty members should receive information revealed by new studies and research, particularly information that indicates effective reporting procedures.

No one plan for reporting student behavior would fulfill the needs of the Bozeman Junior High School faculty for any specific period of time. Various methods would need to be studied, tried, evaluated, and revised as requirements and needs change, especially the requirements and needs of the students.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

END-OF-THE-YEAR REPORT FORM

BOZEMAN CITY SCHOOLS  
Notation for the Student Folder

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

Homeroom \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Teacher's Signature)

Place this note in the Guidance  
Counselor's distribution box  
for filing in student's folder.

APPENDIX B

STUDENT REPORTING FORM

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Homeroom \_\_\_\_\_

Poor 1 Fair 2 Average 3 Good 4 Superior 5

Please use scale above to describe this student:

_____grooming	_____reliability
_____industry	_____sociability
_____comprehension	_____creativity
_____achievement	_____leadership
_____emotional stability	_____health

Please check spaces that best describe this student:

_____temperamental	_____boisterous	_____careless
_____easy going	_____shy and quiet	_____needs prodding
_____pleasant and agreeable	_____works well with others	_____

Additional Comments:

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