Comments from JABA Readers

AN INEXPENSIVE EVENT RECORDER

One common problem in applied work is the difficulty of obtaining reliable data in natural environments, even when simple frequency counts are recorded. When working with parents, for example, cost and immediate availability of event recorders are major considerations. In the past, behaviorists have recommended units such as golf counters, grocery counters, sports counters, and industrial units. None has been entirely satisfactory because the inexpensive units are often unreliable and may break easily, and the more reliable units can be relatively expensive and may take weeks to obtain on order.

One solution is to use an inexpensive pocket calculator as an event recorder, as indicated in the following two examples.

Procedure for Canon®, Radio Shack®, Sharp®, Texas Instruments®, Unisonic®, and Similar Calculators:

1. Press number 1
2. Press + key
3. Press = key
4. Press = key to record each subsequent event

After performing Steps 1, 2, and 3, every subsequent depression of the equal key will add an increment of one to the previous total on the LED display. By depressing the equal key after each event, the calculator will provide a cumulative total for the number of events occurring during an observation period. Because the process of setting up the event recording function puts the number 1 on the LED display, it is necessary to subtract one from the total to obtain an exact total for the observation period. In essence this operation temporarily converts the calculator to an event recorder.

Procedure for Casio® and Similar Calculators

1. Press number 1
2. Press + key
3. Press + key again (this produces 1 as a constant)
4. Press = key
5. Press = key to record each subsequent event

The advantages of using a calculator as an event recorder are numerous. First, the cost savings to parents or students can be substantial. A mechanical counter may cost \$15 compared to \$4 or \$5 for a pocket calculator. Moreover, parents and students may not hesitate to purchase an inexpensive calculator having multiple uses, whereas they may hesitate to invest in a counter having very limited uses. For programs requiring multiple-unit counters, the savings can be substantial: \$130 for a six-place mechanical counter versus \$30 for six calculators. Second, the units are conveniently located for immediate purchase in any drugstore or discount store. Third, the units are highly reliable and easy to use. Finally, if a rate measure is required, the same unit can be used to calculate rate by dividing the total by session time.

Note

Because some pocket calculators (e.g., Digi-tech®) may not have this function, it is important to check the specific calculator before purchase.

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