

Behavior Observations (rev. 9/88)

Procedural Rules:

Each child will be observed for a total of 60 minutes. This will be broken up into twelve 5-minute observation intervals. What follows are some rules for how these observations should be done.

1. The 12 observations should take place over a minimum of 6 days; i.e., no more than 2 observations should be done per day. There is one exception to this rule – when there is only one TC at a school, 3 observations per day may be done.
2. Observations done on a single child on the same day should be separated by at least 5 minutes.
3. Observations on a single child must be done by at least 2 but not more than four observers.
4. No one observer may do more than 30 minutes (6 observations) on a single child. Each observer must do at least 2 observations on a single child.
5. At least 50% of the observations (6 observations) must be done during minimally or unsupervised free play. However, the goal is to do observations during unsupervised play as much as is possible. This unsupervised play can be inside or outside, but outside play is preferable. The goal should be to do as many outside play observations as possible and a minimum of supervised play observations.
6. The first time that an observer goes to a classroom he or she should spend at least 15 minutes letting the class get used to his or her being there. During this time the observer should not engage the children's attention in any way. Sometimes 15 minutes may not be enough; the observer has to judge for him or herself when the children have gotten used to his or her presence. It is also possible that the first few times you visit a classroom, you will have to give the children another opportunity to get used to you, so don't just plunge into observations. Take a few minutes to assess the children's reactions to you.
7. If children approach the observer and try to engage his or her attention, the observer should avoid eye contact and turn or walk away. It is important not to respond to these overtures. We want to avoid rewarding approach in any way. Before beginning coding the target child, take a few minutes to fill out the top of the sheet and locate the child on the playground. This will give an opportunity to not respond to overtures so that the children will be discouraged from engaging the observer.
8. Enlist the teacher's help by explaining to him/her exactly what you need to do. Explain to the teacher that you cannot talk to the children when you are observing. The teacher can tell the class that "the ladies &/or men can't talk to you when they are wearing the funny headphones because they are busy working then."

9. Observers should not do sociometrics and observations at the same time in a particular classroom. Do sociometrics in one class and behavior observations in a different class.

OBSERVATION CODING SHEET

Session Information:

1. Subject #: the child's ID number in the study.
2. Date: day of the week and calendar date of observation.
3. Time: exact time of day when observation conducted.
4. Observer: the observer's initials.
5. Location: circle one (outside, inside class, inside other).
6. Context: circle unsupervised if children are free to pick their own activities. The teacher may be present, but he/she does not direct the children's activities. Circle supervised if the teacher structures the children's activity (e.g., plays a game or directs arts and crafts).

Note: this information must be filled out for every observation.

Instructions for Coding Behavior:

Each numbered block (within the double lines) represents 10 seconds of observation. The blocks are numbered in the order in which you should do them. A tape recorder will prompt you at the end of an interval with the number of that interval. At that time you will record the play code for that interval. Each 10 second block is divided into two kinds of coding. The top block contains codes which characterize the overall quality of the child's play for that 10 second period. One code should be circled at the end of the interval when the tape recorder prompts with the interval number. The bottom block is used for tallying the number of times the child performs an aggressive act or is the object of aggression. These should be tallied as they occur. In addition, the bottom block is used for coding contact with the teacher; in this case the type of contact is circled. Each of these codes is defined below.

PLAY CATEGORIES

Circle the category that best describes the child's activity for most of the 10 second period. However, some categories are recorded if they occur at all (see below*).

1. SF – Solitary Focused Play: The child plays alone; the play is constructive and does not disrupt the activity of peers. The child appears to be actively engaged by what he

or she is doing. The play does not mirror the play of other children (see parallel play below).

Examples: Child makes a sand castle.
Child plays on the swings or monkey bars by self.

2. SU – Solitary Unfocused Play: The child plays alone, but the behavior does not have a clear focus on any one object or person. The child may be quite quiet or the child may wander around aimlessly, changing focus frequently.

Examples: Child stares into space.
Child wanders around playground.
Child aimlessly plays in dirt while looking away.

3. PP – Parallel Play: Child engages in activity which mirrors or mimics that of a peer. There is no conversation or exchange of objects even though the child may play side by side.

Examples: 2 children dig in the dirt side by side without talking or working on the same task.
2 or more children attend to the teacher.

4. *PI – Positive Interaction: This category includes prosocial, competent social interaction and play, including social conversation, fantasy play, and cooperative play. The child interacts with one or more peers either in a game, sharing toys, or in conversation. The play is more organized than rough play and is prosocial and positive or neutral in tone (see below). Included in PI is spirited discussion or negotiation that has a successful resolution with continued interaction.

Example: Two children play on the see-saw.
Children play a game like Simon Says.
Children talk about their pets.
Two children help each other without conversation, e.g., one pushes the other on the swing.

5. *NI – Negative Interaction: This category includes social interaction that is not prosocial and is negative in tone. It would include verbal aggression such as teasing, threatening, or arguing. Negotiation that deteriorates into arguing with no conflict resolution and/or cessation of play is coded here. It also includes physical aggression that is not part of rough play.

Example: One child tells another child that he is a sissy.
One child tells another child that she can't play.
Two children argue and one child kicks the other child.

6. *RP – Rough Play: Includes both active and tough play: running and playing on playground equipment in a group, rough-housing, good natured jostling or wrestling. Physical aggression also occurs during tough play, but rough play should be scored only when that physical aggression occurs in the context of rough play. Any other instances of physical aggression would get the NI code.

Example: Children play together on the slide and are in physical contact.

Two children wrestle, both are laughing.

*PI, NI, and RP should be circled if they occur at all in the interval. This means that they are scored even if they occur for only 1 sec of the interval. If more than one of these two occur together in an interval (e.g., both RP and PI), the following hierarchy should be observed:

1. If any NI occurs, score that over any other category.
 2. The second priority would be RP; if RP (but no NI) occurs, score that over other categories.
 3. The third priority would be PI; if PI (but no RP or NI) occurs, score that over the other categories.
7. O – Other: Used when no other play code fits—usually for when the child is engaging or trying to engage the teacher or when the child is in “time out.” Another use is when TC is the silent and passive victim of NI. “o” is used in conjunction with the appropriate teacher contact or aggression code below the dashed line when appropriate.

Example: Child tries to get teacher’s attention.
 Child in time out.
 Another child calls TC a name; TC does not respond.

TEACHER CONTACT

These codes are located below the dotted line on the coding sheet.

1. T+ - Teacher Positive: Any positive or neutral contact with the teacher, including comfort seeking. Teacher must respond to child. Code is used in conjunction with a play code above the line.

Example: Child talks to the teacher.
 Child hangs around the teacher.
 Teacher praises child.

2. T- - Teacher Negative: Any negative contact with the teacher such as reprimands, scolding, or “time out.” Also includes redirection by the teacher. Code is used in conjunction with a play code above the line.

Example: Teacher reprimands child.
 Teacher tells child to share a toy.

Circle these if they occur at all in the coding interval.

AGGRESSION CATEGORIES

These codes are located below the dotted line on the coding sheet.

1. R – Reactive Aggression: child displays aggression in response to a stimulus provided by peer (i.e., is retaliatory). The aggression is often coupled with angry or hostile verbalization. Aggression can be physical or verbal.
 Example: Child hits peer after being shoved.
 Child responds to an insult by insulting the peer.

2. I – Instrumental Aggression: Aggressive behavior that is in service of some other goal (e.g., obtaining an object or getting down the slide). Anger/hostility is not evident. Aggression can be physical or verbal.
 Example: Child grabs toy.
 Child pushes peer away to reach toy or get on the swing.

3. B – Bullying: Aggressive behavior with hostile or domineering intent, intended to inflict pain. Includes verbal and/or physical intimidation, taunting/teasing, and physical abuse.
 Example: Child calls a peer a sissy.
 Child threatens another child.
 Child hits another child without any reason (no goal).

Aggression Codes:

r: target child displays reactive aggression.

i: target child displays instrumental aggression.

b: target child bullies another child.

or: target child is the object of another child's reactive aggression.

oi: target child is the recipient of another child's instrumental aggression.

ob: target child is the object of another child's bullying.

Make a mark (a line, check or x) FOR EACH OCCURRENCE of the aggressive behaviors. An occurrence is defined as a discrete turn. For example child A punches child B 3 times in rapid succession; then child B kicks child A. If child A is the target child, one bully (b) and one object of reactive aggression (or) would be coded.

Example: Target pushes peer out of the way. Peer hits back. Target hits back.

r	x	or	x
i	x	oi	
b		ob	

AGGRESSION AND TEACHER CONTACT SUMMARIES

These are located at the bottom of the coding sheet. The frequency of each aggression and teacher code for the 5 minute observation period is entered here. If a particular type did not occur, enter a zero.

MISSING DATA: LET'S MINIMIZE IT!

One kind of missing data that will happen is the occasional missing or skipping of a ten second coding interval. When this happens, the observer should mark a large "X" through that interval.

The other kind of missing data that we want to avoid involves partial observations. Observers should make sure that they have enough time to complete the 5 minute observation; checking with the teacher helps here. Also, if the bell rings and the class has to line up to go back into the building, **KEEP ON CODING!** Follow them into the school if necessary. Aggressive behavior is often observed in this situation and we don't want to systematically exclude it. Another thing that occasionally comes up is when the child goes to the bathroom. In this case, it would be OK to stop the tape and restart when he/she comes back out. That is preferable to large blocks of missing data. Observation with more than 3 consecutive missing blocks of data should be redone.