

Systematic Behavior Observation: General Instructions

Overview

We will be doing 6 10-minute focal child observations, and scan samples in between the focal observations. Remember to check in at the main office before observing. Do not go into the classrooms, or ask the teachers for anything, but you may ask Danielle for help if she's in the office (main FCS office upstairs). She offered :-)

Who to observe.

Do all the observations on Bambini 2 if you can. Observe Bambini 1 (the younger children) only if you have a scheduling conflict and can't observe Bambini 2.

The list of names for both groups is in the attachments to the google groups email.

For the focal child observations, you will want to observe children in a random order. Use the number adjacent to the name together with a random number generator such as this one <https://www.random.org/sequences> to generate the list in a random sequence.

For the focal child observations, observe the children in the random sequence that is generated. (For the scan sample, you will just observe the entire group).

Please send an email to me if you have any questions.

When to observe

The other two attachments are class schedules, one for bambini 1 and the other for bambini 2. Although you made lunch and rest period sound fascinating in class today, let's avoid those times. I don't know what "group time" vs "work time" means, but ideally we want a time when their behavior is not too constrained. You may observe indoors or out.

Please send an email if you have questions, or if you know more than I do about what "work time" means.

How to do the focal person continuous observations.

Finding the child: In the random order you developed, try to find the child by his/her nametag. They also will put their names on a wood block by the space on the shelf where the toy they are using was taken, so that might also help. **Do not ask the teachers or interrupt the class** if you can't find the child, just code that child as unavailable for observation and go on to the next on your list. It is important to note that the child was unavailable for observation, because children are unlikely to be missing at random.

Record background information (see last page for guidance) for each observation first, then observe the child for ten minutes, keeping a record of what the child does and noting the time whenever there is a change of activity. **see the last page for guidance.**

What to do if a child disappears: If the child leaves in the middle of an observation but returns within a couple of minutes, note the time of the absence, and continue until you have observed for 10 minutes. If the child fails to return, count it as an observation if it is more than 5 minutes. If less than that, find another child. This is an arbitrary decision, just to keep everything consistent and so you don't spend too much time on the assignment. Note the duration of the observation if less than 10 minutes.

How to do the instantaneous scan sampling

Do one scan observation before you begin the focal person observations, one between each of the others, and one at the end. Normally you would do these every n minutes, but I don't know what an appropriate n is until we try it, and this will also save time while giving us at least some new data. **Follow the guidance on the next page for advice on how to do this.**

Reliability observation.

Checking reliability is important, and so we will quantify your reliability. Use the google group to find a time where you can do at least one focal observation and at least one scan sample with someone else. Choose the first person from one of your lists; your other 5 observations will follow your own individual lists, and you don't need to coordinate with anyone for those.

Bring your notes to class next week. Do not bother to copy them over, unless you think that you will have trouble reading them.

Tips

- Study the instructions, procedure, and variables. Then study it again. Know it well enough that you don't need to look it up.
- Develop some sort of shorthand. For the continuous recordings, there are some examples of notes in Bernard's book, Draper's fieldnotes are another example. You will probably want the time on the left by each entry, and switch to a new line every time there is an activity change.
- Have a large watch or time display

What to record: Focal observations

Record relevant background variables before you start each observation, then record the time when there is a change of any of the behavioral variables to the nearest minute, or 30 seconds if you can. Some activities may be episodic and just note them without noting a change of time. Do the best you can and don't worry if you miss something.

background variables:

child's ID number (from the list)
Bambini 1 or Bambini 2
gender
time at start
day of week
location at start (inside or outside)
observation duration (if less than 10 minutes)
if a joint observation, who you observed with

behavior variables: Record type of play or activity, and note the time when it changes. We are using "activity" very broadly, to include everything the child does. Some examples might be "playing on playground equipment" "playing with blocks" "drawing" "playing role-playing games" "group reading circle", "rough and tumble," "wandering around", "staring into space" "interacting with teacher" "conversation only, no play" etc. Also record if they change room or go outside or inside. If they are interacting with the teacher, note both whether the teacher is positive (affirmative), negative (disciplinary), or neutral, and what the child's reaction is.

What to record: Scan sampling

You won't know the names, but you will know the sex, so start at one end of the room and for each child record the child's sex, the number of children the child is with (interacting or doing an activity with), whether same-sex or mixed-sex, and whether or not they are interacting with an adult and the nature of that interaction (none, positive, negative). If you don't know (can't see, etc), then enter MV (for 'missing value'). Do not enter 0 for a missing value.

You might want to record this on something like a spreadsheet, with each row for a child, and columns for the variables, separating each scan by a row with the time of the observation. Something like this (I've used +/- to indicate positive/negative interactions, 0 for none).

sex	number in grp	same or mixed sex	adult interaction
10:05, inside			
m	3	ms	0
m	3	ms	0
f	3	ms	0
f	2	ss	+
f	2	ss	+
f	1	-	-

(and so on)