Systematic Behavior Observation: General Instructions

Your sample. You have in your email a numbered list, corresponding to the preschool class (let me know if you didn’t receive it). Use a random number generator such as this one [https://www.random.org/sequences](https://www.random.org/sequences) to generate the list in a random sequence. You want to observe 6 different children.

Observe them in the random sequence that is generated.

Reliability observation. Check out the doodle poll at [http://doodle.com/poll/hxgqmmvufazw529](http://doodle.com/poll/hxgqmmvufazw529) and enter the times you are available to observe. Then find someone who can observe at the same time, and arrange to meet there for at least one observation. Choose a child from one of your randomly-chosen lists. You should both observe the same child for the same 10-minute period, so that you can compare your responses later. We do this to check reliability. Your other 5 observations will follow your own individual lists, and you don’t need to coordinate with anyone.

Finding the children. Begin by finding the first child on your list. If you have trouble and it’s not intrusive, you can ask a teacher for help. If you still can’t find the child, move on to the next child on the list. Make a note of the child who was missing, because people are usually not missing at random.

Doing the observation. Observe the child for ten minutes, keeping a record of what the child does according to the code on the last page. 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.

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 list of variables. Then study it again. Really know those variables.

- Develop some sort of shorthand. You might want to divide the page into a column on the left for time, a middle section for text variables, and a few columns on the right for 'count' variables you can check.

- Have a large watch or time display
Systematic Behavior Observation: Behavior Code

The code is below. I am leaving out many great suggestions to keep it manageable. Interactions are hard to code, so are conversations in this context, so I left those out.

Record the background variables before you start, then record the time when there is a change of any of the behavioral variables, for duration measures, or each occurrence, for episode measures. You might want to develop some shorthand codes for activities you anticipate seeing. Do the best you can and don’t worry about it.

**background variables:**
- child’s ID number (from the list)
- child’s name
- 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: Duration**

NUMBER AND GENDER IN GROUP: Subject child is (a) alone, (b) engaged in parallel play, (c) in a mixed-sex group, or (d) in a same-sex group. Child is in a “group” if they are engaged in a shared activity, or interaction. If they are playing near each other but separately, record it as 'parallel play'. Record status at beginning of observation, and all changes and when they happened (if you can!).

ACTIVITY: Record type of play or activity, and note when it changes. Some examples might be “playing on playground equipment” “playing with blocks” “drawing” “playing role-playing games” “group reading circle”, “wandering around”, “staring into space” “interacting with teacher” “conversation only, no play” etc. If child uses toy or equipment in a way it was not designed to be used, note that.

**behavior variables: Episodes**

CAUSES CONFLICT: Record if subject engages in hostile behavior to another child, and note how it was expressed: (a) physical (e.g., pushing), (b) verbal (saying mean things), or (c) indirect (e.g., refusing a request, etc). Record start and stop times if it goes longer than a minute, otherwise just note it as an episode.