Systematic Behavior Observation: General Instructions

**Your sample.** You have in the attached file two numbered lists, one of the West side class, the other of the east side class. Figure out which class you will observe and use [random.org/sequences](http://random.org/sequences) (or equivalent) to sequence them in a random order. You want to observe 6 different children. You may observe children from both classes if that is more convenient.

We did not discuss stratifying by sex, but since some of the hypotheses involved comparing boys and girls, doing that would make sense. This means we are drawing the same number randomly from the group of girls and the group of boys, so that we have the same number of each. So let’s do that:

Observe them in the random sequence that is generated, except that once you have observed 3 girls (or 3 boys) don’t observe any more of the same gender, go to the next on the list that is the other gender. If you can’t find 3 boys, just do 2 boys and 4 girls.

**Reliability observation.** Pair up with someone in the class, and arrange a day when you can both observe the same child. 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.

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

Record the background variables before you start, then record the time when there is a change of any of the behavioral variables, or when it occurs. If you were unable to observe for 10 minutes, indicate the number of minutes you observed the child. Do the best you can and don’t worry about it.

**background variables:**
child’s class (east or west)
child’s name
gender
hair color (light, medium, dark)
time at start
day
location (inside or outside)
if a joint observation, who you observed with

**behavior variables**

GROUPING: Subject child is (a) alone, (b) in a pair, or (c) in a group. Child is in a “group” if they are engaged in a shared activity, or interaction (playing separately near each other is not a group). Record status at beginning of observation, and all changes and when they happened.

SPACING: Subject is in (a) center of space, (b) on periphery, or (c) in-between. Record when location changes, if the new location is held for at least one minute (i.e., if the child is just running through the center, record only where they are when they stop.)

ACTIVITY: subject child is (a) running, (b) doing other very active play, (c) sitting, or (d) other moderate or quiet play. All activities should fit into one of these 4 categories. Count walking as “other quiet play” for these purposes, and riding a trike as active. Record when activity changes, so long as the activity continues for at least a minute.

**For the following variables, record when it happens, do not record duration:**

INITIATES TEACHER INTERACTION: Subject child initiates interaction with a teacher.

INITIATES PLAY: Subject child initiates play with another child.

ORDERS OTHERS: Subject child orders someone else to do something

REQUESTS FROM OTHERS: Subject child requests something from teacher or another child

CAUSES CONFLICT: Record if subject child upsets another child.

UNCONVENTIONAL TOY USE: subject child uses a toy in a way it was not designed to be used.