

Child Observation Project

Developmental Psychology
A.P. Psychology

Name _____

Date _____

Period _____

Goal: to learn more about a particular child's physical, cognitive, social, & moral development by observing and interacting with him/her. The child should be between the ages of 2 and 7 – the ideal subject would be 3 or 4 years old. Note the child's age in years and months. While observing and interacting, you are to take field notes. Later, write a report that carefully describes the child's behavior in light of what you have learned about Child Development. *Remember to staple your field notes to your report when you submit it.*

Observations: You are to observe the child 3 separate times. Ideally, space your observations about a week apart. Do them at different times of the day, morning, afternoon and early evening. You can do the observations in any order but this is what you must do:

- **Observation A:** You and the child are alone. You will have the child do multiple activities to assess the child's development.
- **Observation B:** You will observe the child with other children, playmates or siblings
- **Observation C:** You will observe the child with the mother or primary caretaker, without other people around.

Method: These are common rules for making a naturalistic observation study.

1. Assume everything the child does has meaning. It's all data. Take complete notes of everything the child says and does, everything done to or said to the child, and every gesture and facial expression.
2. Report and record your observations. Don't judge! Don't condemn! Control your bias, attitudes and opinions about children's proper behavior.
3. Look at what the child does and how the child expresses their feelings about what they do. Remember they are emotional often non-verbal beings.
4. Note the time every 15 minutes on your field notes so you can record what the child did for how long.
5. Encourage the child to play on its OWN so you can take notes and see how the child spends time on its own. Good Luck!
6. Make friends with the child. He or she will enjoy the attention and you will gain a lot from interacting with the child.
7. Make a note of the environment. Note the setting (classroom number, playground name, person's house) and who's present (parent, teacher, other children). A general description will do.

Parents/caregivers: Explain that you have to do a child observation for your child development unit in psych class. Tell them that the observations involve looking at aspects of the child's development. You may want to mention the names of the psychologists that we have been studying in class. Avoid saying "testing" or "intelligence". You are observing to find out what stage the child is in and apply the theories you are learning. You will need to take a picture or video of the child. Take a history on the child's background. Try to assess the child's temperament by what the parents/teachers say in general about him/her.

Dear Child Care Center or Parent,

Please allow my A.P. Psychology student to give basic Piagetian assessments to one of your children in order to assess the child's cognitive development. Students may also tell some moral dilemma stories to assess the child's moral reasoning. Finally, they will briefly observe how the child interacts with adult caregivers. Students must take pictures to provide evidence that they did the observation. EVERYTHING IS CONFIDENTIAL. Naturally, if you would like to see a copy of the child observation paper, you may request one.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at Shorewood High School (206.361.4372 or trey.messner@shorelineschools.org).

Thank you for your assistance,

Trey Messner

AP Psychology/Social Studies Teacher

GUIDELINES FOR *OBSERVATION A*: YOU AND THE CHILD ALONE

Suggestions: Assemble your “kit” and practice with your partner in advance. Decide who will be the observer/note taker and who will be the one to do the activities with the child. Make it fun. Take your time. It could take more time than you expect. You can do the activities in any order.

1. **M&M’s:** Bring with you a package of M&M’s. In case the caregiver objects, also bring raisins or beans. Sit down at a table with the child, and line up 7 M&M’s in a row in front of you where the child can reach them. Then put a pile down for him or her to draw from. Say, “These are for me. Now you take the same number (pointing to the pile) and make a line of them next to mine.” Record what the child does and says. After the child has selected some M&M’s to match yours, spread out your row into a longer string, without adding any. Ask, “Now, do we have the same number?” If the child says “no”, ask, “Who has more?” Then say, “You fix it so it’s right.” Record what the child does and says. Write up: *Based on the child’s response, what can you assume?*
2. **Playing Store (5 Pennies and the M&M’s):** Put 5 pennies out in a row where the child can see them. Tell him/her you want to play store, and that s/he is going to buy candies from you. Push the pennies over to them, and put the M&M’s in front of you (depending how young the child is you might have to hide them on your lap.) “Now you buy some candy. Give me a penny and I’ll sell you an M&M.” Repeat this 5 times. Hide the pennies under your hand. Now ask, “How many M&M’s have you got?” Then ask, “How many pennies have I got?” Carefully record what the child’s answer is. Write up: *What does the child demonstrate with their answer?*
3. **Paper strips of different size:** In advance, tear paper into 2, 3, 4, 5, & 6 inch strips. Now, place 4 strips out in row (increasing in length) with the same distance separating each strip. Omit the 2nd or 4th strip in the series. Say, “I guess I left this one out. Would you please put it where it belongs?” After they do whatever, ask, “Why does it belong there?” Record their actions and answer. Write up: *What particular rule does the child follow? What does that show about their cognitive development?*
4. **Two short fat glasses and one tall skinny one:** Fill the 2 short glasses with water close to the top and at the same level. Ask the child if they think there is the same amount of water in both glasses. If the child agrees, continue the experiment. If s/he disagrees, adjust the water levels until s/he agrees the amounts are equal. Once the child agrees there is the same amount in each, pour the water from one of the short glasses into the taller glass. Ask the child, then, “Which glass has more water?” Point to the shorter glass with water and to the taller glass with water as you speak. Note the child’s response, any hesitation in responding, facial expression, gesture, etc. Do not try to teach them the right answer but understand that whatever s/he answers is the correct answer for them. Write up: *What does this answer tell you about their development in terms of Piaget theory? If you wish, retest with balls of clay.*
5. **Question, question, question time:** 1) “Do you have a brother/sister? What is his/her name?” Then ask, “Does _____ (name of sibling) have a brother/sister?” Note the response of the child. Do they know if he is his brother’s brother? 2) Ask “Why is the sky blue?” or “Why does it get dark out?” 3) “Is a tree alive? Is the ocean alive? Is a car alive?” Write up: *what do his/her responses to questions 1 & 2 tell you? And 3?*
6. **Drawing time:** Ask the child to draw a picture of his/her family. If the child doesn’t know the word “family” don’t define it by telling him the members of their family, but say the people in your house you live with – or something like that. Ask them to tell you all about the picture. Ask them if you can keep the picture. Write up: *INCLUDE the picture, the child’s comments, and your analysis of the art with your write up. Put the picture with Observation C (see below).*

7. **Story time:** You can tell them the more mature version or the simplified version. Mature version: “This woman was very sick. One medicine might save her, a form of radium that a druggist in that same town had recently discovered. The druggist wanted a lot of money for the medicine. The sick woman’s husband, Henry, went to everybody he knew to borrow money to buy the medicine to save his sick wife, but he only got together half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said no. The husband, Henry, got desperate and broke into the druggist’s store to steal the medicine for his wife. Should Henry have done that? Why or why not? (Get them to explain their thinking). Simpler version: “Pretend your best friend is having a birthday party. Your friend lives just across the street and as you are going to the party this little boy/girl who moved in next door has fallen down and is hurt and crying. If you stop to help him/her you will miss the cake and ice cream. What do you do?” Follow-up story (tell after whatever version you use): This kid (make up a name) climbed up to steal a cookie and broke one of his mom’s favorite dishes. Well another kid (make up another name) accidentally bumped over a stack of his mom’s favorite dishes and broke five. Who did the worst thing? Alternative Follow-up: In advance, draw 2 pictures. They both depict a boy/girl standing beside an office-style desk, belonging to the boy/girl’s father, with a spilled bottle of ink on it. In one picture, there is a large puddle of ink. Tell them that the boy/girl spilled the ink accidentally. In the other picture, there is only a small amount of ink on the desk. Tell them that the boy/girl spilled the ink on purpose. Ask, “Which child is naughty/naughtiest?” Write up: *Where are they on Kohlberg’s ladder of moral reasoning?*

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVATION B: OBSERVE CHILD PLAYING WITH ANOTHER (OR OTHER) CHILDREN

In order to see how your child is when playing with one or more children, ask the mother or primary caregiver to select a play situation which is more or less a usual one for the child. The mother should not be immediately present for this play observation. The children might play in the back while the mother is in the front of the house, for example. Include in your notes the names, ages and gender of playmates/siblings. After or before the child plays, ask the child to skip. Show him/her how and then ask your child subject to do it. Write up: *First, note the child’s level of physical maturation. Note the child’s cognitive & social development in play. Note their level of play involvement. Refer to Parton’s 6 forms of play & dominance ranking (attached).*

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVATION C-1: OBSERVE CHILD WITH MOTHER OR PRIMARY CARETAKER – ATTACHMENT FOCUS

Ideally, the mother and child should be present together, indoors, with no one else present except you, the observer. The TV should not be on. Tell the mother you want to see how the child plays when s/he is not with other children and they interact. You might suggest she have some toys there for the child so that the child will not want to leave the room during the session. Ask the mother to explain to the child that you cannot play with them right now because you have to study. Carefully record all your observations of their interactions. Be far enough away to be unobtrusive but close enough to take everything in. Tell the mother she should go ahead with anything she would normally do and that she should feel free to talk to the child or help him/her do anything she ordinarily would do with him/her in the current setting. Write up: *What are the kinds of attachment you notice? (Ainsworth) Include child’s drawing (from part A-6 above) and what it might show about the family structure.*

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVATION C-2: OBSERVE CHILD WITH MOTHER OR PRIMARY CARETAKER – PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES & TEMPERAMENT FOCUS

Observe anything that the child/family does which illustrate what you saw in the video *Everybody Rides the Carousel*. Write up: *Apply any of Erikson’s psychosocial stages when they arise. For example, when the child relates to mom or dad or others.*

Observe the child’s emotionality (reactions when upset, fearful, angry). Look at their sociability level (loner, shy, friendly, outgoing). Note: *How would you describe their temperament?*

MILDRED PARTEN'S 6 FORMS OF PLAY...USE TO CODE OBSERVATION B

Mildred Parten identified 6 stages of play. She contended that child's play mirrored their social development.

1. Unoccupied Behavior: the child is not playing at all, but occupies himself with watching anything of momentary interest. When there is nothing else to do will play with own body, gets on and off furniture, stands around, follows people around, or sits in one spot glancing around the room looking at anything exciting.
2. Solitary Play: The child plays alone and independently with toys that are different from those used by the other children who are within speaking distance. Child makes no effort to get close to or speak to the other children. Their interest is centered upon their own activity and pursues it without reference to what others are doing.
3. Onlooker Behavior: The child spends their time watching others play. Often s/he talks to the playing children, asking questions, or giving suggestions but does not enter into the play. S/he stands or sits within speaking distance of the group to hear and see all that is taking place. Unlike unoccupied play, the child is interested in the group.
4. Parallel Play: Child plays independently but the activity chosen naturally brings him or her among other children. S/he plays with toys which are like those which the children around them are using, but s/he plays with toys as he sees fit, without trying to influence the activity of the other children. The child plays beside, rather than with, other children who are very close by, using similar toys or doing similar activities.
5. Associative Play: The child plays with other children. They may be borrowing and lending play materials or following one another with trains or wagons. There are mild attempts to control which children may or may not play in the group. All engage in similar, if not identical activity. There is no division of labor or organization. Each acts as they wish and does not subordinate their interest to the group. The children interact but have no common goal.
6. Cooperative Play: the play within a group that is organized for the purpose of making some material product, of striving to attain some competitive goal, of dramatizing a situation of adult or group life, or of playing formal games. There is a marked sense of belonging or being in the group, the control of the group is in the hands of one or two of its members who direct the activity of others. The goal necessitates a division of labor and taking different roles. The group is directed toward a goal by some leader.*

** Observe dominance ranking:*

- *Which child is the Alpha Animal? The alpha is most dominant child, most of the time. They control most of the group by bossing them around with a superior will or by persuading them with their superior verbal or intellectual abilities or simply by pushing them around with superior strength or size advantage.*
- *Which child is the Beta Animal? The beta can be dominant some of the time with some of the group but is a little less powerful than the alpha. Beta will often defer to the alpha but sometimes will challenge and test the alpha's control over the group. The alpha knows the beta has influence but can win over the beta.*
- *Who is the Delta Animal? The delta has the least power in the group. Often delta child is the target, getting picked on more often by more members than anyone else. Something about them is very different or not valued by the group which "invites" the group's negativity. Delta wants to belong but is most often rejected by the group.*
- *Who is the Isolate or Floater? They act as if they don't need to belong to the group and are the most independent and self-directed. They come and go at will often accepted by all.*

CHILD OBSERVATION PROJECT WRITE UP

1. Cover: Include a picture of the child with his or her name. Of course, include your own name and period.
2. Please number your pages.
3. Introduction: state the child's name, age in years and months, and sex. Give a general description of the child and their family. Include what temperament traits are used by the family or others to describe the child.
4. Title the sections of your paper according to the observations (A,B,C) and what was the main focus within each. Report and apply theories to what your child did or said.
5. Attach your field notes to the end of the report.
6. Put the grading rubric inside your report.
7. Little extra touches count. Pictures of the kid or other cuties stuff. Hey, kids are neat!

FINAL SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO GET AN "A"

1. In the write-up state what you and your partner did. Both you and your partner should complete your own rough write-up and analysis separately. Then compare and collaborate on putting together your final report. Include the rough drafts that you each did.
2. Don't put off your observations. It will take more time than you plan. There may be a disaster and thing's will get out of control at some point so factor in "disaster time". I estimate it will take approximately 4 visits (or about 4 hours) with the child. Develop a relationship with the child before or while you are testing them. You will tire out the kid if you try to cram too much into one time. Remember space and time! Rushing this will only frustrate you and the kid!
3. While you've got the parent's ear, ask them there best advice on child-rearing.
4. Avoid every day judgment words such as "s/he's smart or slow". You will see "intelligence" indicators. If the challenge exceeds the child's skills, the child will fall apart, freeze, or get really hyper. If the child's skills exceed the challenge, the child will act bored and might even call you names. How quickly a child catches on is another indicator of "intelligence".
5. Good clean writing is important. I deduct one point for every spelling and grammatical error. After 5 mistakes, I may place your write-up in my special "circular file". Use spell check and if English is your second language and you have lots of interference, get a proof reader who knows English as a first language to help you edit out your mistakes.
6. Avoid having TV on or the older or younger bro's and sis's or friends around. Too many distractions! Avoid rewarding with too much candy or you will have a hyper kid on your hands and possibly a mad mother.
7. Follow this prompt/guide and the rubric and you can't go wrong!

ENJOY ALL YOU CAN... AND SURVIVE THE REST WITH STYLE AND GRACE!

CHILD OBSERVATION PROJECT RUBRIC

PRESENTATION: How the report looks. The impression the writing leaves.		/
	Cover is attractive. Includes child's picture and name	
	Report is typed and legible	
	Organized into distinct sections	
	Pages are numbered	
	Writing is error-free	
	Has style, voice, and professionalism	

OBSERVATIONS: Experiments with subjects		/
	Reporting is detailed and vivid... makes me feel like I was there	
	Accurate and clearly supported by field notes	
	Conclusions arrived after presenting evidence & empirical analysis. Not generalized judgments	
	Bonus: Other insightful analysis and personal observations	

APPLICATION OF RESEARCH THEORIES		/
	Piaget's cognitive developmental stages (testing with child alone)	
	A-1 A-2 A-3 A-4 A-5 A-6	
	Kohlberg's moral levels	
	A-7	
	Parten's play patterns and dominance (observing child with other kids)	
	B	
	Attachment, Psychosocial stages, Temperament (observing child alone with care-giver)	
	C-1 C-2	

CHILD OBSERVATION PROJECT TOTAL		/
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