

LAB EXERCISE #12 GROUP BEHAVIOR

Note that Lab #12 requires less time to complete. This is for two reasons. One, it gives you extra time to finish observing your one child to write down any final observations. It allows you to gather any information you need to complete that project. Two, it allows you time to tell the children and the staff thank you and goodbye. It is very important that you thank the staff and let them know that you appreciate their cooperation. You also want to say goodbye to any children that you have gotten to know during the semester.

Much of children's social behavior occurs within the context of small groups. Since most families today are relatively small, young children often do not have a great deal of experience with larger groups. Learning to interact in groups is one of the important skills that are acquired in childcare centers. Group behavior involves many of the areas of development that we have already explored. Thus this activity will give you a final chance to use your observation skills and to pull together many of the topics we have already examined.

When children play together in groups, there are several areas that we can observe.

One area is leadership skills. In an unstructured (and sometimes in a structured activity) it is common for one or two children to assume leadership and other to become followers. Leadership skills involved issues of gender, language skills, self-concept and peer relationships, all areas that we have previously covered during lab activities. During this observation who assumes power and how they handle the power is one aspect of behavior you should look for.

Another issue to focus on is the gender segregation that may or may not occur in groups of children. This issue obviously includes the issues you examined during the lab on gender. You should review that lab as well as the labs on self-concept and peer relationships. Do the children gender segregate within the group? What are the dynamics going on between the boys and girls? What are the ages of the children?

A third issue to focus on refers to the roles assumed in the group situation. This is somewhat related to the leadership issues but is not the same thing. Within all groups, there are roles that members either are given or assume. Some of these roles include organizer (keeps group on task), enforcer (enforces any rules, especially of a game), peacemaker (tries to keep everyone happy). What roles do the various children assume?

This activity allows you to engage in what is called event sampling. Rather than time sampling which you have used frequently throughout the semester, in this lab, you will observe a unit of behavior (i.e. some group activity.) Event sampling is a holistic approach as you watch an entire event, from beginning to end and try to describe the sequence along with other observations.

Event sampling is a more global type of observation and it can be more difficult, especially if the event occurs over a large physical area or if the event involves a large number of people. Event sampling, however, allows us to view an event in its entirety. We see antecedents and consequences of behavior rather than bits and pieces. It is easy to miss pieces of behavior that we might see in a time sampling. However neither format is perfect and gives us a complete picture. Thus when we observe we need to think about the purpose of our observation so we can choose the appropriate method of observation.

ACTIVITY

You should bring several sheets of notepaper as well as copies of the center diagram in order to facilitate this observation.

In this activity you will observe one or two group activities. Some group activities for children at the age do not last long. Thus, you may need to watch 2 separate activities. Your observation should last for a total of 20 minutes. If you have time before the group activity begins, describe the setting. If not, describe it after the activity is over. You may use your center diagrams to show where the activity takes place. If no group activity is scheduled, ask several children to play a game or some other activity which would create a group activity.

Describe what activity is taking place. Then delineate the roles that emerge within the group. Describe the participants, including gender and age.

LAB REPORT
PART B QUESTIONS

1. Describe and discuss what occurred in the group activity. Who were the leaders?
2. Analyze any gender differences in the group that you noticed.
3. What impact might you as an observer-participant have had on the observation process?

FINAL LAB REPORT

The final lab report is due on the date in the syllabus. You should include all of your notes from the weekly visits as well as the returned lab reports so that you have a complete lab journal.

The final lab report has two parts. In the first part, you will describe and analyze the child that you followed all semester. You should look at the various aspects of development. Refer to the theories to support your analysis. How well does your child fit into the theories' timetables?

In part two you are to evaluate the entire laboratory experience. What were the strengths and weaknesses of this part of the course? What did you learn that you didn't know before? What do you think you will remember?