CONDUCTING OBSERVATIONS

The purposes for these observations are to help students acquire the necessary skill to analyze the behavior of self and others, and to gain necessary information and skills in which to cognitively analyze behavior using understanding of patterns of growth and behavior, trends in childrearing practices, cultural molding forces, and the theories of Erikson, Maslow, Piaget, and others.

PURPOSE

Observations of others offer many possibilities for learning. Through observations, it is possible to discover causes of behavior, to increase acceptance of individual variations in growth and development, and interact with others on a more meaningful level. This learning depends, however, largely upon the skill and understanding of the observer. The behavior of children and adults is fascinating, especially when you have newly acquired intellectual tools to help you process the behavior beyond an emotional level. The average observer, when watching a group of children, will make comments such as, "Aren't they cute," "The children are just playing," or "My, he is naughty." You will be surprised and pleased to find yourself with a new depth of understanding and new insights that will enable you to bring a new sensitivity to all observed behavior. The understandings and observation techniques acquired in this course can be used throughout your lifetime to sensitively observe and cognitively process the behavior of others. This will increase your effectiveness when working with children and adults.

Observation Techniques:

There are several observation techniques, such as a running record, factual record, time sampling, checklists, hypothetical statement supported by facts, and others. You will be introduced to primarily two techniques in this course: (1) A factual record and interpretation of those facts; and (2) hypothetical statements with facts to support your hypothesis (actually, these are very similar).

1. Factual Record with Interpretation.
   a. A significant objective fact related to a given problem or episode is recorded first.
   b. The fact is followed by personal reactions and feelings and cognitive interpretations.
   c. This process is repeated until you have satisfactorily finished the assignment.

2. Hypothesis Supported by Fact.
   a. The observation form is divided into two parts.
   b. A hypothetical statement related to the given problem or situation is made.
   c. Facts supporting the hypothetical statement are listed under the statement.
   d. Personal reactions and feelings may be stated at the beginning or end of the observation.

*(Hypothesis: Something not proved, but assumed to be true for the sake of testing it's soundness. An educated guess.) Observation Procedures
1. It is important that the observer remain as inconspicuous as possible while observing, and does not let the person know his behavior is being observed. When people become aware that they are the center of attention they tend to behave somewhat differently than they otherwise would, and the observer fails to see a true picture of development. 2. All observational information is treated as confidential material in order to protect children and adults. Some behavior taken out of context can be misinterpreted and may easily lead to misunderstanding.

3. Good, specific examples, indicators, and clues are expected. Do not record unrelated, insignificant facts.

4. Some of the observation facts related to given problems and situations will be more difficult to find then others. Plan to observe long enough to find the significant clues and indicators required.

5. Do not try to complete your observation on the last day in a limited amount of time, for it is almost impossible to find the experiences needed.

6. Observation Time and Place . You will need to plan on observing at least twenty minutes per observation. The observations will need to be conducted in the Melba Lehner Children’s School located on the main floor of the Education Building. Students who are interested in optimum learning will probably went to observe more then the required time.

Children’s School Observations
1. The Children's School has observation booths are designed specifically for your use. When you are observing in these booths you will need to be quite. The children can hear you as well as you hear them

2. Remember to observe the outdoor play experiences as well as the indoor experiences. Outdoor play offers the child an opportunity for greater freedom and an opportunity to use a louder voice, bigger muscles, and to enter into different types of social situations.

3. It may be to your advantage, when possible, to observe different teachers working with the young children, for their guidance techniques and their personalities vary. It will help you understand that there is not just one right way to work with children. Each teacher and each child brings his/her own unique personality into the situation.

4. The observation of any child in any situation will not be acceptable. Observation of trained teachers guiding the development of young children is as important as the observation of the child.
Writing the Observations

1. Your observations will be written in a format similar to what is provided.

2. Observations should be equivalent to one typed page.

3. Observation headings are extremely important. Name, time, place, date, names of children and teachers, and problem give the reader important information.

4. Exact conversation should be recorded as fact. Use correct punctuation in recording conversation: "Look what I made."

5. Observation facts may be recorded in present or past tense. Example: Present tense: “Johnnie is sitting at the desk. He is smiling.” Past tense: “Johnnie sat at his desk. He smiled as he looked at the teacher.”

6. Required cognitive tools for interpretation are also given in the observation. Example: Interpret using the theories of Erikson, Maslow, and Piaget.

7. Underline concepts used from required interpretation. Example: I did not find clues that suggested he was in stagnation or despair (these are terms from Maslow’s theory). This indicator I observed and recorded seemed more like Maslow's description of safety.

Fact and Interpretation

1. Too often, an observer looks at the activities of others and tends to interpret what they are doing in light of their own past experiences and feelings. Thus, several people looking at the same situation could well interpret it differently.

2. An objective observational record separates personal reactions and feeling from actual facts. Parents and others often get their feelings so involved with the actual facts that it is difficult to separate them. To gain the important skill of making decisions intellectually rather than just emotionally, one must be able to say:
   a. This is actually what happened. These are the facts.
   b. This is how I reacted.
   c. This is how I feel about it.

3. In a factually recorded observation, an attempt is made to describe and record behavior that is actually seen (facts) and interpret the behavior based on personal reaction, feelings, and cognitive understandings.

4. In a hypothetical observation, a statement is given and significant facts are recorded to support the hypothesis. Personal reactions and feelings are recorded separately. A technique that helps to differentiate between fact and feeling involves an awareness of some of the words that indicate feelings rather than facts. One such example is:
a. "Johnnie seemed very happy when he saw his father." Very happy does not tell how Johnnie reacted when he saw his father, but it does tell how the observer interpreted Johnnie's behavior. A more objective description might be: "Johnnie jumped up and down three times and laughed out loud when he saw his father." Then, on the "interpretation" of the recorded observation you would write: "He was very happy to see his father."

b. Using the hypothesis supported by fact technique, the observation would read: "Johnnie seemed very happy" This would be the hypothesis, and it would need to be supported with facts. An example is: "Johnnie jumped up and down three times and laughed out loud when he saw his father." (Notice how similar this is to the above example in "a."

5. Some other emotionally toned words that tend to give difficulty in objective observations are: "He thought he would go to the window." "Jean is very mischievous." "Tommy bothered the other children." "Mrs. Brown was sensitive." "The older woman was concerned." "She was lonely."

Many Activities Expressed by One Word

1. Students have a tendency to group many meaningful activities into one word.

             b. "The teacher helped the children."

2. Sometimes one word covers an hour's activities. The reader would immediately need to know: Who played? What did they play? Where did the play? What did the teacher do to help the children?

3. If the reader finds one word representing many activities, a circle will be drawn around the word. This indicates that you will need to break out the activities and relationships that were involved in your one-word description.
OBSERVATION 1 - Factual  
Human Development 1500

Instructions: This assignment is designed so you can demonstrate that you can make an “objective or factual” observation. Although it is impossible for anyone to be truly objective, you will need to try to be as objective as possible. You can do this by being a television camera, and only record that which you see, not which you feel. For example, it is more objective to write “the boy is smiling” rather than the boy is “happy.” As you know, we can smile and still not be happy.

For this assignment, you will also need to record events and behaviors that would be relevant for future interpretation. For example, it probably would not be relevant (although, it would be factual) to state “the boy had a small speck of brown paint on his shoe.”

Finally, you are not to do any interpretation of this observation. Write only factual statements.

Assignment:
Observe child(ren) in the Melba Lehner Children's School for approximately 20 minutes. Record only factual information but, potentially, relevant information. Do not interpret.

Format:

Use the following format. This assignment will need to be typed and should be one page in length using a point size no larger than 14.

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(Include the following headings)
Name ____________________________  Class Period ____________

Observation: Objective (Factual)

Child(ren)'s Name(s) __________________ Age(s): ________ Time: ________
Date: ______ Classroom ________ Lead Teacher’s Name ______________

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Objective/Factual Information.