

# OBSERVING AND RECORDING the Behavior of Young Children

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Records of Use of Materials The Unique Quality of the Child, or <i>How</i> the Child Does <i>What</i>	36
Records Illustrating Detail	38
Interpretation—The Last Dimension	41
Persistent or Changing Patterns of Behavior in Relation to Materials: A Summary	44
Records of Overall Response to Materials	45
	47
<b>Chapter 4: RECORDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR WITH ONE ANOTHER</b>	49
How Children Learn to Socialize	49
Do We Really See What Is Going On?	52
Details to Look for in Observing a Child's Behavior with Other Children	55
Resumé of Details of a Single Episode	64
Group Membership	66
Summary of a Child's Behavior with Other Children	68
<b>Chapter 5: RECORDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR IN DRAMATIC PLAY</b>	70
Records of Dramatic Play	72
Children Take on Roles (Persig Play)	73
Children Play with Symbolic Objects (Obsig Play)	78
Assessing the Content (Persig and Obsig)	80
Social Aspects of Dramatic Play	81
Summary of a Child's Behavior During Dramatic Play	85
<b>Chapter 6: THE CHILD'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS AND IN ADULT-DIRECTED ACTIVITIES</b>	87
Recording a Child's Interaction with an Adult	88
The Child in Teacher-Directed Group Activities	90

<b>Chapter 7: CLUES TO COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING: STAGE-RELATED STYLE</b>	97
How Do Children Learn?	97
Cognitive Style Is Related to Stage of Development	102
<b>Chapter 8: CLUES TO COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING: INDIVIDUAL STYLE</b>	112
Idiosyncratic Cognitive Style Reflects Temperament and Culture	112
How Much Does a Child Know?	120
<b>Chapter 9: OBSERVING CHILDREN DEVELOP THE POWER TO THINK</b>	124
Children's Thought Processes That Indicate Intellectual Development	124
<b>Chapter 10: RECORDING CHILDREN'S DEVELOPING LANGUAGE</b>	137
To What End Does a Child Use Language?	138
Technical Aspects of Language Development	143
<b>Chapter 11: OBSERVING AND RECORDING THE BEHAVIOR OF INFANTS AND TODDLERS</b>	146
Making Sense of What You See	146
The Value of Recording	148
Time	148
What to Observe	149
<b>Chapter 12: RECORDING THE BEHAVIOR OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL PROBLEMS</b>	178
Physical Functioning and Development	179
Relationships with People	182
Affective Modes	183
Cognitive Functioning	185
Language and Speech	188

Ego Functioning	190
General Impression	192
<i>Chapter 13: PATTERNS—SUMMARY— AND INTERPRETATION</i>	
Patterns	194
Need for a Summary	194
Adjustment to School	195
Features of the Final Summary	197
Interpretation	197
Final Summary	200
	202
SUGGESTED READING	207

## INDEX

209

## PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

At the time the first edition of this book was written, the practice of observing and recording the behavior of children as it was happening was pretty much confined to a small handful of early childhood teachers who were fortunate enough to have been trained in the tradition of child study. The tradition began in the nineteenth century, when some psychologists studied children, often their own, through recording their activities. The technique was applied to the study of children in educational settings just after World War I, when it was pioneered by early proponents of a developmental approach to curriculum. Although early childhood teachers accepted the principle of record keeping based on observation, the practice failed to become widespread because the skills were not taught at most institutions preparing teachers. The original edition of *Observing and Recording the Behavior of Young Children* was a first effort at translating these skills into teacher terms.

In the years between the first and second editions, interest in young children escalated, and research brought to our attention fresh information about how children learn and how their language develops. At the same time, there was a resurgence of interest in natural observation, probably because young children so stubbornly and persistently resist being captured by the more commonly used standardized tests. Since then, innovations in the field of preschool education have come about through the passage of legislation and the accumulation of new knowledge about children resulting from research on changes in social attitudes and roles that influence family life and, therefore, young children. This new edition is a response to those innovations. Without in any way altering

the basic approaches or premises concerning the study of children, we have added new materials that reflect recent information. In addition, we have included records that capture some of the different styles of responses from today's child.

Additions to Chapter 5, "Recording Children's Behavior in Dramatic Play," and the additional material relating to the capacity for symbolic representation in Chapter 9, "Observing Children Develop the Power to Think," are the result of research that provided increased detailed knowledge about young children's dramatic play.

Chapter 11, "Observing and Recording the Behavior of Infants and Toddlers," stems from a striking change in preschool education, that is, the increasing number of settings that have opened their doors to toddlers and infants.

Chapter 12, "Recording the Behavior of Children with Special Problems," has been added because of the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which requires that the education of handicapped children take place in the "least restrictive environment," that is, as much as possible within a regular class. This law encompasses both private and public schools attended by school-age children. Federally funded preschool centers, such as Head Start, are also required to accept some handicapped children.

Although, fortunately, men are now entering the field of early childhood education, the teacher is referred to mostly as "she," because the overwhelming majority of teachers of young children are still women.

We hope that this third edition will increase the usefulness of the book to teachers and that through it they will become more aware of children as the whole and integrated people they are. Special thanks are due to the many students at the Bank Street College of Education whose efforts at learning to observe and record appear in this volume and give it its contemporary validity.

We have revised this edition without the very special insights of Dorothy Cohen, who died before this effort came to fruition. Dorothy's commitment to children was complete; her knowledge of development, both profound and encyclopedic. Her philosophy, which is reflected throughout this book, has provided thousands of teachers with a fundamental tool of the trade. Dorothy's death is a great loss not only to the field of education, her colleagues, and future students at Bank Street, but also to this edition of our book.

## GETTING STARTED

### WHY RECORDS?

EACH OF US has known at some time the glow of satisfaction that comes with reaching through successfully to a child. Having applied just the right touch at the right moment, we have warmed to the smile of pleasure and trust a child bestows on us when we have understood what he or she feels and thinks. And each of us has known, too, the frustration of using to no avail tested wiles and approaches, of being baffled and irritated because we have felt completely ineffective with some children. All teachers want to understand their children better. Many have tried to keep records of children's behavior in an effort to gain insight into why they do what they do. But all too often even records conscientiously kept seem to reveal very little, and we fall back on our hunches and our intuition as bases for judgment.

This manual on record-taking describes recording techniques that will help teachers of young children toward their goal of understanding children's behavior. The manual does not tell how to interpret behavior, but it does suggest the details to look for that will be meaningful in explaining behavior. The manual tells how to gather data and how to make the best use of data. It discusses principles of observation rather than principles of diagnosis. If we could say that understanding a child is like unraveling a mystery, then taking records is the gathering of clues. Like experienced detectives we must recognize the significant clues; we must develop special skills.

Teachers of young children do not get very far when they ask

ple expect the human child to behave as adult as possible, and the sooner the better! In point of fact, we can be much more successful in guiding a child toward mature adulthood if we are clear about the nature of childhood.

Perhaps the thing that fools us about young children is the fact that they can speak. Because this special human ability is achieved so early in life, it is easy to assume that the thinking that lies behind the speech is surely the same as ours. By this reliance on children's speech as the key to understanding them, we close off too many meaningful avenues of communication between children and ourselves.

How many times do we say to a child, in anger or in sorrow, with insistence or with sweetness, "Why did you do it!" And in anger or in sorrow, belligerently or helplessly, the child answers, "I don't know." The truth of the matter is that children do not know, and cannot tell us why they do as they do. When we don't know either, that leaves us both confused!

#### **Children Reveal Themselves in Special Children's Ways**

There are reasons for a child's behavior, of course, plenty of them. Sometimes it is hard to decide which is the most likely of several possible reasons for the same kind of behavior! But while every bit of behavior is caused by something, we must sadly admit that what that something is for the particular child who is the enigma is often a mystery. That is why as teachers we must gather good clues that will lead to understanding. Only by learning to see children as they are, and especially as *they see themselves*, will we get our clues. It is not as simple as it sounds.

Young children are still operating out of strong physical and emotional bases. Their bodies not only move into pretzel shapes with fluidity; body movement, body processes, and feelings loom large on the horizon of their existence. Young children *think* with their *hands* (they *touch* to find out) and *socialize* with their *feet* (stamping and kicking noisily are fine acts of comradeship!). Or, they might think with their *feet* (what happens to a worm?) and socialize with their *hands* (what will happen if I touch him in the eye?). If we would record their growing and learning, we must record what they do with their bodies, even as we listen to what they say with their mouths. And we must listen without our grandmother's prejudices peering over our shoulder!

Thus, even though the speech of a young child is a wonderful

thing indeed when it occurs, it is far from complete for a long time for all the help it is to adults trying to understand childhood meanings. It is not too good a tool for expressing feelings and thoughts, for example, although it fast becomes highly skilled at expressing *wants*. (Even this is not true of all children.) Does a young child say, "I feel sad," or does she hang her head, cry, or stare into space (all *physical* expressions)? If we wait for her to grow to the stage where she is mature enough to pinpoint her emotions and tell us about them, we shall wait a long time indeed! We must learn, therefore, to recognize other behavior as clues to thought and feeling.

Children communicate with us through their eyes, the quality of their voices, their body postures, their gestures, their mannerisms, their smiles, their jumping up and down, their listlessness. They show us, by the way they do things as well as by what they do, what is going on inside them. When we have come to see children's behavior through the eyes of its meaning to them, *from the inside out*, we shall be well on our way to understanding them. Recording their ways of communicating helps us to see them as they are.

#### **THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF RECORDS**

There are many ways of keeping records of children's behavior to suit different purposes and situations. Some records are frankly *impressionistic* and this is perfectly acceptable at times. When a new boy or girl enters school, a teacher cannot help but react, and size up the child in her own terms. If she writes down her impressions, she will have a record to turn to later when she has developed another perspective on the child. How correct are her early impressions? To what extent are they borne out by more knowledge?

Some teachers keep a *log* or *diary* about their group. At the end of the day, or perhaps during rest hour, they put down what stood out that day in as much detail as they have time and energy for. This is an excellent way of recording the activity of the group, its shifts in leadership, its ideas and interests, its accomplishments. It is an invaluable aid to planning. Some teachers do the same thing but with less regularity and only from time to time, spot-checking in a sense. There are charts and checklists that help a teacher remember which children have not used paints for a while, which should get a turn at the workbench, and which are taking a large share of social responsibility. And of course there are snapshots and drawings, movies and tape-recordings (too expensive for most of

us!). One can also keep track of the number of times a certain kind of behavior took place, like how many times Amy hit someone, and how many times she threatened to hit but didn't; or with whom and with what Orrin was playing at 10:30 every day during a three-week period. All these techniques are good and can be used profitably. The use of any recording technique, however, must be determined by our purposes.

#### **What Are We After? Why Are We Taking Records?**

We are here suggesting a recording technique that will show a fairly full and realistic picture of one living, breathing child, as he (or she) responds to life in his own unique way, as he interacts with people and materials and functions at his own stage of maturity and growth. It is hard to focus on a child as an individual in this manner when one has grown accustomed to planning for an entire group. But while a group has its own laws of interaction that are surely worth studying, the study of individuals in the group leads to greater awareness of what is significant in human growth and development. The technique of studying one child in detail leads to deeper understanding of the one child and broader knowledge of all children.

Records, however, are not a panacea. They are no more than a means by which a busy teacher can take hold of a squirming, slippery, smiling, screeching, intriguing, and bewildering child and hold her still long enough to examine her carefully. This procedure, taking on-the-spot records of behavior as it is occurring, we call, for want of a better name, the *on-the-spot running record*.

#### **Recording Behavior As It Happens**

It is comforting to know that there are practically no fixed rules in this job of record-taking. The whole technique is relatively new to education; it has its creative aspects and its weaknesses. There will undoubtedly be modifications and changes as the technique becomes more widely used. We are going to be suggestive for the most part, and the rest is up to you!

Since your primary responsibility is to be the teacher of the group, your times for recording will literally have to be snatched. Children's needs come first, and you may have to drop your pencil to race to someone's rescue. It helps to have pads, cards, or a small notebook in your pockets, on shelves around the room, and up your sleeve, too. Never miss out on a choice bit because no pencil is

handy! Be casual and unobtrusive about it all. Get close enough to hear things, but not so close that you interfere with the play. Notes can be rough and full of abbreviations, to be filled in and cleaned up later. Get the date down and the child's name as well as where the action is set. Should the children ask you what you are doing, don't let them in on the secret because they may become self-conscious. Be nonchalant and say something noncommittal, like "It's teacher's work," or "It's writing I have to do."

Take records of a child at as many different periods of the day as possible, although not necessarily all in one day. You will want to record behavior at arrival and dismissal, at toileting and at rhythms, at wash-up and at story time, at free play and with creative materials. You will want to see what a child does indoors and out, alone and with others. Recording in a variety of situations will show up all-pervasive behavior, such as relationships with children and adults, adjustment to school, feelings about routines, position in the group, etc.

Often it will seem that these everyday records are not getting anywhere, and it is easy to become discouraged. But when, after a period of time, details of similar character are grouped together, patterns of behavior emerge, and we begin to see what it is a child is really doing. Be patient and let the thing grow. Recording behavior is, after all, recording growth, and since children are in transition between stages much of the time, you will need many stills before you see the common movement running throughout.

#### **A Word of Caution**

Never, never allow records to lie around in public view. Treat them the way a doctor treats data about patients. Even the most inconsequential information about a patient is kept confidential, and we must do the same. Unless there is a professional reason for doing so, tell your funny and delightful stories about children *without identifying the particular child or family*.

#### **LANGUAGE AS A TOOL IN RECORDING**

The language of recording presents its own difficulties, especially for people unaccustomed to writing. It is easy to feel the challenge too great and to give the whole thing up as a bad job. Since the important nuances of behavior cannot be recorded adequately without some use of descriptive terminology, it is worth exploring

this aspect of the recording technique. It is not at all impossible to grow in skill if you consider that almost everyone has a larger passive vocabulary than an active one. As a beginning, suppose we joggle our memories for verbs, adverbs, adjectives, and phrases that can be used descriptively.

### Verbs

Some of us could think of a dozen synonyms for the word *walk* in a matter of seconds—

amble, stroll, saunter, clomp, stomp, march, strut, ramble, etc. Others of us get paralyzed at the challenge. Yet the distinction between one child's actions, or gross movements, and another's may depend on the correct synonym for the word *walk*.

Look at it this way: A turkey walks. A cat walks. Are they the same? A one-year-old walks and an octogenarian walks. Their movements are obviously dissimilar. Johnny walks and Susie walks, and we must record the quality of each. To find the exactly characterizing word, we might say the turkey *struts*, the cat *slinks*, the baby *waddles*, the old man *totters*, Johnny *lopes*, and Susie *minces*. The word *walk* tells us *what a person does* but not *how he does it*. No two children walk across a playground or over to a child or toward the teacher in exactly the same way. As teachers, we respond to the *quality* of the behavior as we watch the child. We respond to the child who walks frantically because we sense trouble, and we feel in our own muscles the swinging walk of a child who is full of joy.

Here are some synonyms as a starter for verbs commonly used in records. There are many more with which to become familiar.

*Run*—stampede, whirl, dash, dart, gallop, speed, shoot across, bolt, fly, lippety-hop, dash

*Say*—whisper, bellow, shout, scream, roar, lisp, whine, demand, tell, murmur

*Cry*—wail, howl, whimper, fuss, bawl, sob, mourn, lament, weep

### Adverbs

Adverbs are one means by which pedestrian verbs can be given character when the exact verb is elusive. They are somewhat interpretative in that we define the mood and feeling of the behavior when we use them. But they are not used to pass judgment on the child. They describe an action, a part of the body, a look, a smile. For example, we can say, "She smiled bitterly," "He tugged de-

terminedly," "She looked at the teacher vacantly," and not in any way describe the child as bitter, stubborn, or stupid. The descriptive word is a one-shot assessment of a single aspect of the child at a particular moment. Thus, going back to the verb *walk*, we can say a child walked merrily, jauntily, heavily, etc. Or the ordinary verb *talk* can be narrowed down meaningfully when excitedly, pleasantly, sourly, resentfully, cheerfully, cheekily, laughingly, etc. are tacked on.

At the same time, the consistency within the child becomes a safeguard against erroneous generalizations from a single gesture, smile, posture, or movement. For example, if a recorder writes at the same time that a child "whined" in describing the voice and "grinned" in describing the mouth; or walked "merrily" with "tearful eyes," it is clear that that recorder is not really observing.

As we indicated earlier, teachers cannot be absolutely objective, since they themselves are part of the total situation in which the recording occurs. Yet in trying to capture the quality of *how* a child builds, sings, jumps, cries, fights, paints, speaks, or whatever, we may use the descriptive language of *how* a child does *what* without courting an unnecessary or biased interpretation of the child as a person.

### Adjectives

We need a good supply of adjectives too. For example, is every smile a cheerful smile? Could a smile be joyous, tearful, wholehearted, toothless, toothsome, forced, heart-warming, wavering, fixed, reluctant, etc.? Could a child with a reluctant smile possibly be feeling the same way as a child with a tearful smile, or a timid one? Here are special shades of *happy*:

joyful, joyous, gay, bubbling, bouncy, sparkling, effervescent, delighted, cheerful, contented, etc.

Here is *sadness* qualified:

mournful, wistful, depressed, downhearted, gloomy, heavy-hearted, melancholy, downcast, sullen, dejected, discouraged, etc.

### Phrases of All Kinds

Still another descriptive tool is the little phrase that has the telling action in it. Although these have their place, one must be careful to avoid becoming too dependent on such phrases; sentences can be cumbersome when too many phrases weigh them

down. Here are some phrases to give character to the verb *walk*:  
*he walks*

dragging his legs  
 scuffing his toes  
 swinging his arms  
 hunched and bent  
 hands in pockets

with head turned to the sky  
 looking neither here nor there  
 with boredom on his face  
 intently observing  
 with an awful clatter

In mentioning the language of the record, it seems as though we are adding more hurdles to the ones teachers already face while taking records. Certainly there are not enough good opportunities for recording, the speed at which one must work is frustrating, and sheer muscular endurance plays its part in the difficulties too. Even though the challenge of using descriptively precise language may be still another hurdle, the problem of good use of language in recording is one we must overcome. We are not accustomed in our culture to being colorful and descriptive in our everyday speech, although we may enjoy such language when reading. Nevertheless, records that are truly pictorial are so in large part as a result of imaginative language. If you feel too discouraged, try looking in Roget's *Thesaurus* or the dictionary for synonyms for some of the most commonly used action words and feeling tones. You will be surprised at the number of descriptive words you actually know and can put into your active command with a little joggling. Just make sure that the descriptive word you use really characterizes the quality of the action.

## 2

## RECORDING A CHILD'S BEHAVIOR DURING ROUTINES

### ORGANIZING THE INFORMATION

SINCE WE NEED a starting point, let us start with observing a child at tasks and behavior that make up so much a part of a young child's life—the routines. At school we generally think of these as cleanup, toileting, snack-time, lunch, rest, etc. These are the "uncreative" but necessary aspects of the program that are repeated day after day, the activities around which many a program revolves. Let us look at a child about to become involved in a routine—for example, getting dressed for outdoors. Although this seems to be a simple and obvious activity, let us look at a child with the following questions in mind.

#### *What Is the Stimulus for the Activity?*

- How does it happen that the child is dressing now?  
 Did the teacher ask her to, individually?
- Did the teacher make an announcement to the class?
- Did the child notice others and follow suit?
- Did he just get an impulse and begin to dress himself?

In a word, we want to know what set the child off on the dressing process. We could call this spur to action the *stimulus*. It might come from within or outside the child. It might be obvious (the teacher told the child to get dressed) or not obvious at all (apparently an unexplained impulse).

#### *What Is the Setting?*

- What's going on around the child while he is dressing?  
 What is the physical setup affecting the activity?



ideas. At first contact, a material is something outside oneself, and a curiosity for that reason. It has to be explored as an item of the world outside of self. Then there is experimentation with it for its own sake: What are its properties and possibilities? Does it stick, stretch, break, fall, crush, smear? Eventually the material becomes a medium for expression and projection, and it is *used* for the child's own purposes.

When a child is fairly well able to break down the details that pertain to objects and people, and has the physical coordination for detailed work, materials are used representationally to crystallize that clarity. If a child is confused about some details, the confusion is set down too. Interestingly enough, if feelings are stronger than intellectual curiosity or creativity, a child may seem to misuse the material, as when a boy or girl makes mud out of clay or uses a doll for poking and throwing, or deliberately breaks block buildings. At such a point, children may need materials that are especially suited to their individual needs.

Materials that have a specific use and function, like dolls and bikes, are "structured" materials. Children use these for the implied purpose, but they will also project feelings onto them. (The doll is naughty and rebellious or is crying and upset.) Or children use them as a means for carrying out ideas, desires, or fantasies. (The bike is a plane, the doll is a traffic officer, the lotto cards are tickets, etc.)

Semi-structured materials, like blocks (not as fluid as paint or clay, nor as finally formed as a toy car), give the satisfaction of construction and three-dimensional solidity.

But beyond this analysis, there remains the wonder of children's imagination: If they need a plane, a car or a stick can become one. If they want to make a person, they will struggle with the material until the essence of *person* is there.

In short, materials are used by children in the way children themselves need and want to use them. The manner and style, however, is unique to each child.

### DETAILS TO OBSERVE IN RECORDING A CHILD'S USE OF MATERIALS

#### THE SETTING

- Include the nearby significant people and activities, as in routines, and also such things as the abundance or scarcity of

### Recording a Child's Use of Materials

materials, availability of supplies, amount and kind of adult supervision, etc.

#### THE STIMULUS

- How does the child come to use the material? (teacher-suggested; group procedure; imitation of another child; self-initiated; suggested by another child, etc.)

#### RESPONSE TO PAINT

- What colors does the child use? Does she mix colors (in jars, in coasters, or on the paper)? Are the colors separated on paper?
- Does she paint one color over another?
- Is he able to control the drips?
- Does he try to control the drips? Does he deliberately drip?
- Does he confine himself to one small spot or bit of space, or does he spread out? Does she paint off the paper?
- What forms, if any? (vertical lines, curves, circles, fill-ins, letters, dots, numbers, blotches of color, representation, etc.)?
- Does the child paint over the forms?
- What kind of brush strokes? (scrubbing, dotting, gliding, etc.)
- How many paintings? Does she paint quickly? Does she work for a long time on one?
- Does he name the painting? In detail? In general?

#### RESPONSE TO CLAY

- How does the child handle the clay physically? (pounding, rolling, pulling apart; squeezing, poking, making mush; making balls or snakes; slapping it, stamping on it; patting, stroking, scraping, etc.)
- Does she use supplementary tools, such as tongue depressors, sticks, toothpicks, scissors, beads, etc.?
- Is there representation? (naming; size of products; accuracy of detail)
- How does he use material in the space available? Does he work in his own area or does he spread out (off the board, over the table, etc.)?

#### RESPONSE TO BLOCKS

- What blocks does the child select?

it gently. "I'm making cake." She takes a spoonful of sand and puts it on teacher's hand. She looks up and sees Patty on the swing. She runs over to her, carrying spoon with her.

Manuel, five-and-one-half, is in an after-school group who are waiting for their working parents.

Manuel thrust his hand into the clay bucket. As he pulled out a large piece of clay, his face took on an expression of mock nausea. He uttered one loud and spirited word, "Yuck." He walked over to where Stephanie, Johanna, and Lora had already started their work, and threw his clay upon the board vigorously. Immediately, he started to pound and slap with his hands. Then, using a flat piece of wood, he quickly slapped the clay into a flat, circular shape. His gestures were made even more forceful by the lunging movements of his body, which was stretched across the floor.

Manuel picked up a roller and began rolling out his pancake, stopping every now and then to use the wooden stick to shape the edge into a smooth, circular form. He then dropped both tools and began slapping the clay with his hands. Once again he used his whole body while chopping with his hands at the clay in the manner of a karate expert. "Kawabunga!" he shouted. Stephanie and Lora joined in the action, and a chorus of voices chanted, "Kawabunga!" Manuel's fingers began scraping the clay off the board. His hands began shaping the formless mass into a cake-like form. His body stretched out, and he assumed a more contemplative posture as his fingers smoothed the sides of the shape.

He then picked up one edge of the clay and began to roll it up slowly. This done, he squeezed the roll with his hands and shaped the clay into a ball. He slapped the ball down and flattened it out. His fingers spread out and pushed the clay in a long, sliding movement back and forth over the board. He picked up a clay hammer and, with full strength, delivered a blow on the flat piece of wood. "Kawabunga chop!" he yelled over the noise of the loud hammering.

"My ears are hurting," the teacher said. "Don't hammer on the wood, Manuel. It makes too much noise." He continued hammering directly on the wooden piece. The teacher moved closer. "What did I say to you?" she asked.

Manuel looked up at the teacher, hesitated, and then repeated, "Don't bang on the wood." He dropped the hammer and discarded the wooden piece. Then he rolled the clay into a ball with a slow, twisting motion. He pressed his fingers into the clay, picked it up, now pie-shaped, and flipped it into the air. Then he picked up a hammer, pushed the clay, then pounded it. He rubbed his palm into the board as his mother made a quiet entrance into the room. Alerted

(size and type of blocks; supplementary materials—dolls, small blocks, cars, wedgies, etc.)

- What forms does she construct? (up in the air, crisscross, along the floor, piling, enclosures, recognizable structures, etc.)
- How does he use space? (confined or spread out; close to shelves; aware of obstacles; etc.)
- How flexible is the child in solving problems? Does he/she try different approaches? Repeat the same ineffectual ones? Repeat a successful approach again and again?
- Does the child verbalize while working?
- Is the structure named? Is it used in dramatic play? Is the child interested primarily in the process of building?
- Is there a repeated theme? Are themes changeable and varied?
- Does any kind of imaginative play develop while the building is going on? After it is finished?

#### LENGTH OF TIME SPENT WITH MATERIAL

The length of time spent can reflect concentration span, interest, distractibility, disinterest, feelings of inadequacy, tolerance for struggle, tolerance for challenge, response to something new, age, etc.

#### RECORDS OF USE OF MATERIALS

The following two children are getting something very different out of their play with materials. First, two-year-old Penny at the sandbox:

Penny runs to sandbox carrying tablespoon, empty orange juice can, and toy plastic teacup. She climbs down into sandbox, sits down in corner, and silently and intently begins to fill can with sand, using spoon. She is oblivious to several other children around her. She stands up, dumps sand from can onto asphalt outside sandbox. She bangs can down on sand several times, then gently pats sand with open palm, saying "Cake." René, age four, comes up. She starts to take can from Penny, saying, "Can I have that?" Penny pulls the can away and stands still, staring at René.

Teacher gives René a small spoon and plastic cup. She stands beside Penny and they both begin to spoon sand, occasionally smiling at each other. Penny climbs out of the sand and goes to bench where teacher is sitting. She dumps the sand onto the bench and then spoons it back into can. She dumps it onto the bench again, and pats

by the other children, he greeted his mother gleefully and went off to wash his hands in the bucket.

### THE UNIQUE QUALITY OF THE CHILD, OR HOW THE CHILD DOES WHAT

Thus far we have recorded children's use of materials in such a way as to get a fairly inclusive picture of *what* they are doing. But we must also note what the special meaning of the experience is to an individual child. We must get down *how* a child does what he or she is doing. We must consciously and deliberately include, along with the actual action itself, the signs that show feeling.

When we record *gross* movement, such as "she reached for a block," "he lifts the brush," "she grabbed the sponge," we are recording actions completely objectively, but without their life-pulse, or even our own response to their meaning. A child might be reaching for that block stealthily, hesitantly, or victoriously; perhaps she grabbed the sponge angrily, defiantly, efficiently, or just quickly; and he could lift the brush suspiciously, hastily, or absentmindedly. It is not enough to record what he or she *does* (i.e., reached for a block), we must tell *how* a child does the *what*. In the above descriptions, the meaning of each activity is different with each qualifying word. The descriptive adjective or adverb indicates the unique character of the *gross* action.

As we live and work with people, we react spontaneously to their range of feelings without ever thinking about how we know they feel as they do. We just sense it. With children, we certainly sense when they are delighted with themselves, when they are unhappy, when they are tense, when they are completely at ease. Actually, we take into our mind's eye a wide variety of cues that the other person sends out and get a composite picture that we then interpret according to our own experience and associations. Often we jump to conclusions before we get all the clues. It helps, therefore, to break down the nuances of behavior so that we are able to include them in the record. Even though something of our own interpretation will be there, the evidence to support us will be there, too.

As indicated in the discussion of the language of recording, there is a difference between the subjective interpretation that *labels the child*: "He is hostile," "She is stubborn," "He is anxious," "She is greedy," and the interpretation of one *small piece* of the total be-

havior: "He gave the teacher a *hostile look*," "She *replied stubbornly*," "He showed an *anxious smile*," "She *reached greedily* for the cookies."

The difference is more than semantic. Labeling children defines them and confines them within a total appraisal. Interpreting a piece of the whole, such as a gesture, a smile, a posture, a voice quality, etc., leaves room for the gathering of many such expressions of feeling within a variety of situations. One can have hostile feelings under certain conditions and not be a hostile person. One can be stubborn about certain convictions and not be a generally stubborn person. One can feel anxiety about particular occurrences and not be an anxious person. One can even be greedy about one or two things and yet not be totally greedy at all.

Describing *how* a child does *what* adds up in time to clues we seek in order to understand children's motivations and feelings. These clues to feeling are the involuntary, noncontrolled, nondirected movements and gestures that accompany any gross action and give it its character. They are *unique* for every child and every action, for no child works at *materials*, or is involved in any form of play, without a variety of accompanying behavior. Thus, as we pick up the child's action and at what or whom it is directed, we note other things as well.

• We include the sounds a child makes and the language a child speaks.

If the voice is being used, what is it like?

- Loud, soft, ringing, well-modulated, high-pitched are descriptions of the *physical quality* of the voice.
- Jubilant, wavering, whining, reassuring, hesitant, gleeful, nonchalant, casual, fretful, smug describe the *feeling tone* of the child's voice.

What does the child say? (Pick up direct quotes if possible.)

Does the child chant, sing, use nonsense syllables, phrases, tell stories, etc., while working?

• We note the movements of the body as a child uses materials

What is the posture like?

(erect, rigid, hunched, floppy, straight, curled, squat, etc.)

What is the rhythm of the body movements?

(jerky, smooth, easy, jumpy, staccato-like, flowing, etc.)

What is the tempo of the body movement?

(rapid, sluggish, measured, slow, swift, leisurely, deliberate,

speedy, hasty, moderate, unhurried, etc.)

How much and what kind of effort does the child expend?

(a great deal, excessive, very little, moderate; strained, laborious, easy, vigorous, forceful, feeble, etc.)

What kind of freedom does the child show in his/her body movement?

(sweeping movements; cramped, tiny movements; free-flowing; restrained, tight, restricted, etc.)

- We identify the details of facial expression.

—Eyes (glint, dullness, brightness, shine, teariness, blinking, etc.)

—Mouth (grin, quiver, pucker, tongue between lips, biting lips, smiling, wide open, drawn tight, etc.)

From these details we can surmise the child's emotional response to the materials, e.g., excitement, contentment, frustration, self-criticalness, confidence, squeamishness, stimulation, overstimulation, taking in stride, intense interest, preoccupation, etc. Feelings come through clearly in this next episode.

Angelita, four-and-one-half, was sitting next to the teacher, playing with Tinkertoys. One of the other children held the box. In a very annoyed voice, Angelita blurted out, "I want to use that." She had a look of strong concentration on her face as she took each piece and pushed it forcefully into place. She took time choosing which piece to use next. The teacher got up and walked away, but Angelita did not seem to notice. She kept on working in the same way, thoughtfully and forcefully, without talking to any of the other children at the table. Her construction was large and intricate. When the teacher told her it was cleanup time, Angelita said, "No!" in a determined way and continued working. Later, when the teacher told her that she could keep her finished work on a shelf, Angelita very carefully carried it there. When she noticed a child going toward the piece, she screamed, "Don't touch that!"

### Reactions to People While Working

The feelings that children reveal may be reactions to things other than the materials they are using. We include in the record, therefore, what we see of their reactions to the people around them.

- Is there any socializing with children as the child uses materials?

How does the child show awareness of children nearby?

(talking, showing materials and products, touching others,

etc.; using products in dramatic play; helping others, criticizing; calling for attention to what he/she is doing, etc.)

Does the child work alone or with others?

- What are the child's relations to adults while using materials?

Does he call for help, approval, supplies, etc.?

Is he suggestible, defiant, indifferent, heedless, mindful, etc., regarding adult offers of help, adult participation, reminders of rules and limitations, offers of suggestions, etc.?

- How does the experience end?

What events and feelings follow immediately after?

(puts things away, puts work on the storage shelf, destroys own work, shows things to the children or teachers, leaves everything and goes to another activity, dances around the room, etc.)

### RECORDS ILLUSTRATING DETAIL

The following records all show attention to detail and nuance. The first is primarily a recording of gross movements and sequence of events.

*Yvonne, age five:*

Yvonne came directly to the outdoor table on which teachers had prepared a basket of scissors, crayons, paste in a six-ounce jar with a spoon in it, and small paper cups. The children were encouraged to help themselves to the paste and to put it in a cup. There was also a stack of paper and two aluminum plates filled with paper collage, string and wool, and cloth collage in various shapes. "I wanna paste, I wanna paste, I wanna paste."

Teacher, busy with another child, "Yes, Yvonne. It's Bill's turn now . . . It will be yours next. Help yourself, Yvonne." (She can be very self-sufficient, but now and again becomes completely helpless, usually with a smile on her face as though she knows she is acting.)

Standing in the same place, and not looking at teacher, Yvonne says, in a babyish, whiny tone, "I wanna paste, I wanna paste." She looks along the table at the others who are cutting, crayoning, pasting. She moves around a child, and helps herself to the entire basket of crayons, placing it in front of her seat. She helps herself to paper, sits down, and makes a few crayon marks. As though realizing that this was not what she had planned to do, she calls, "Mrs. M.?"

"Yes?"

"I wanna paste."

"The jar is down at the end of the table, Yvonne."

Yvonne goes for the paste and gives herself some. Back at her seat she pastes a piece of collage on her paper, helps herself to another piece, and pastes that. She works intently, lips parted. Spends more time than needed pushing her finger around and around in the paste on the paper, as though enjoying the feel of it. She pastes wool, lace, paper, and cloth. A piece of string frustrates her. Teacher approaches.

"May I help you?"

"Yes," whiny and a little pouty. Teacher puts a short line of paste on the paper and lays the string on it.

"Now you show me how you want your string to go and we will put some paste there." Yvonne accepts this idea.

"Now you put the paste where you want the string to be." She docs.

"I'm finished!"

"O.K."

She smears the paste around on her hands. "I wanna wash."

"There's water and towels on the tree stump," says the teacher. Yvonne washes and runs off to the trikes. She had not spoken to any child while she worked.

The second record has more of the "qualifying" details, and reveals the mood of the child more successfully.

*Winky, age four-and-one-half, at the paints:*

Winky points to the window and with radiant face calls in delight, "It's snowing cherry blossoms! First they are white, then green, then red, red, red! I want to paint!" He goes to the easel and quickly snatches up a smock. Sliding in beside Wayne, he whispers to him caressingly and persuasively, "Wayne, you want blue? I give it to you, okay? You give me red because I'm going to make cherries, lots of red cherries!"

After the boys exchanged paint jars, Winky sits erect, and with a sigh of contentment starts quickly but with clean strokes to ease his brush against the edge of the jar. He makes dots all around the outer part of the paper. His tongue licks his upper lip, his eyes shine, his body is quiet but intense. The red dots are big, well-rounded, full of color, and clearly separated. While working, Winky sings to himself, "Red cherries, big, round, red cherries!" The first picture completed, he calls the teacher to hang it up to dry. The next picture starts as the first did, dots at the outside edge, but soon filling the whole paper. He uses green too, but the colors do not overlap.

Still singing his little phrase, Winky paints a third and fourth picture, concentrating intently on his work.

The other children pick up his song and Wayne starts to paint blue dots on his paper. Waving his brush, Winky asks, "Wayne, want to try my cherries?" Swiftly and jubilantly he swishes his brush across Wayne's chin. Laughing, he paints dots on his own hands. "My hands are full of cherries," he shouts. He runs into the adjoining room, calling excitedly to the children, "My hands are full of cherries!" He strides into the bathroom emphatically to wash his hands. Nellie follows him in, calling, "Let's see, Winky." "Ha, I ate them all," he gleats as he shows his washed hands with a sweeping movement. He grabs a toy bottle from the shelf, fills it with water and asks the teacher to put the nipple on. He lies down then on a mattress and contentedly sucks the bottle, his face softly smiling, his eyes big and gazing into space, his whole body limp with satisfaction.

This record shows us something of a child's need to relate to others while working.

*Freddy, age five, at clay:*

After hanging up his snowsuit Freddy entered the playroom in a manner which for him was thoughtful and quiet, a great contrast to his voluble propulsion, as if shot out of a cannon. He edged into a chair at the end of a table where no one else sat, his eyes dreamily watching in an unfocused manner the actions of others at two other tables as they rolled, punched, and pounded the clay they were using. Like a sleepwalker he accepted a hunk of clay and in an absent manner rolled it under the palm of his right hand, his head turned to the side, eyes directed toward the ten or twelve in the room.

A few minutes passed thus. Then he picked up the hunk of clay and let it fall "kerplunk" on the table. Instantly his mood changed, like pressing a button and changing a still picture into an animated one. "Boom!" he shouted, "I got a ball! Look at my ball, teacher! Bounce! Bounce!" He banged it down a few times. Then he started rolling it into a long thin piece. "Here's a snake. I'm making a rattlesnake. Are you making a rattlesnake, Donna?" he asked the child nearest him at the other table.

To David, who had a moment before entered the room and started to work at Freddy's table, "That's a snowman, David. Now I'm making a snowman. . . . Now I'm making a snake big as Edward's. Freddy held it up and chortled with glee. "Hee-hee-hee."

"Look what I made. I twist it here." He dropped it on the table and began pounding it.

"Now I'm making a pancake. Look at my pancake. Taste my pancake, teacher."

"Flop! he dropped it on the table again, rolling it over and over,

faster, faster, his motions in keeping with his words. Head and shoulders were hunched over the table, his lips and tongue stumbled over each other in an effort to increase the speed of his words. "Chee--ee---cc--cccccccc."

Everything slowed down. He was quiet, absorbedly working for a moment. Then in sharp staccato and prideful tone: "Look what I made, teacher. . . . Look what I made, Donna. . . . Look at my wrist-watch."

At this point it was necessary for the teacher to help another child, and she was in a stooping position, with her back to Freddy. He poked her insistently in the back to add emphasis to his exhortation. "I look at me, teacher!"

She turned to find the clay covering Freddy's upper lip. His head was tilted back to prevent its slipping off. "It's a mustache. Ha-ha-ha (he laughed uproariously). Now it's a hat." He quickly transferred the clay to his head. "Teacher, look at my hat."

It seems that Freddy's satisfaction in all he does comes not only from his creative use of materials but from the response of individuals, especially adults, present.

### INTERPRETATION—THE LAST DIMENSION

Even though we spot the separate, small parts of an action, we actually respond to the whole, integrated behavior of a child, such as his anger, joy, surprise. Our response follows a spontaneous, unspoken assessment of the child's feeling which is drawn from our personal experience and understanding. To some extent we must rely on this subjectivity to define or interpret a child's behavior. We are dependent, however, on correct descriptive words about significant details to place that feeling on record. The value of a record that includes details such as those suggested in the preceding section is that our interpretation (he is happy, he is sad) is rather better bolstered by objective evidence. We are therefore less likely to be assuming that a feeling is present in a child because we happen to be identifying with him as the underdog or victim, or because we are reacting with subjective antagonism to an aggressor or uncouth person, or because for any other reason we are putting ourselves into the situation irrationally. Interpretation represents the sum total of our background of understanding. Professionally valuable interpretation relies heavily on objective data.

#### A Note of Caution

It is impossible to get everything into every record. No child ever

does everything possible in human behavior at any one time, nor could a teacher get it all down if a child did. Don't try to use the suggestions for details to record as a checklist! While the teacher is busily checking off what seems important to look for, the child may be doing something we never thought of at all, and that would be missed. Keep your eyes on the youngster, not on the printed page! It is not *how much* you record, but *what* and *how*, that makes a record valuable.

### On-the-Spot Records Lead to Supported Generalizations

The review of children's use of materials over a period of time will be a mirror of their growth in this area. We will get to know many things about them that we might have missed without these concentrated observations of their activity. We will see a profile of their tastes and ideas and learn how much confidence they have in their own imagination and capacity. We will note their dependency on adults and children, their concern for standards or indifference to them, their pleasure in doing or their anxiety about doing things wrong. These responses are evaluated best when seen against the backdrop of a child's general coordination, maturity, experience, and age, as well as against the usual behavior of children of the same age group.

### PERSISTENT OR CHANGING PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR IN RELATION TO MATERIALS: A SUMMARY

As with the summary on routines, we look for patterns of behavior—overall patterns that indicate a general approach to materials and specific patterns relating to different materials. Here are suggestions for what to include in such a summary:

1. How the child uses the various materials—paint, clay, blocks, etc.—over a period of time, in persistent or changing ways

How the child comes to use the material generally (on his/her own initiative, on the suggestion of the teacher or another child, through imitation of other children)

Coordination (physical ability to carry out techniques)

Techniques (Include the stage of development—manipulative, exploratory, representational—in relation to child's age and background of experience. For example, painting dots, rolling clay, or piling cubes are techniques



that can be early steps in the use of new materials, typical techniques of an age group, or excessively simple usage of material by a child who has the age and background for more complex approaches.)

**How** the child works (concentration and care used; exploratory; competently, skillfully, intently, carelessly, tentatively, distractible, in different ways).  
Language or sound accompaniments.

**Mannerisms.**

**Products** (creativity, imagination, originality shown).

**Attention span** (in general, and in relation to specific materials and activities).

**Materials** chosen by the child for dramatic play and how they are used.

**Whether or not** the child completes what he/she starts.

**Adult role and child's response.** (Indicate rules, limitations, participation, what is permitted, and how child accepts all these.)

**How** the child seems to feel about the materials.

**Number, variety, frequency** of materials and activities enjoyed, used, and avoided. (Include changing and static interest.)

**General attitudes**—enthusiastic, eager, confident, matter-of-fact, cautious, etc. (Include attitude toward new as well as familiar materials.)

**Importance** of given areas to the child—interest, intensity of pleasure, preoccupation, fears, avoidance, resistance. **Specific materials** in relation to which the child apparently feels satisfaction, frustration, self-confidence, inadequacy, etc.

**How** the child reacts to failure, to success. (What constitutes failure or success? What is the level of aspiration?)

**How** the child's use of line, color, and form compares with what most children in the group seem to be doing.

**Child-adult relationship** revealed via materials (independence—dependence).

**Special problems:** distress over breakage, avoidance of messiness, concentration on only one material or idea, inability to concentrate and enjoy.

**Following** are examples of two children's overall use of materials.

The various items from the records, when brought together in a summary of persistent or changing patterns, are easily written up as a sketch of a youngster's use of materials. In time this sketch becomes part of the end-of-the-year record of the child.

## RECORDS OF OVERALL RESPONSE TO MATERIALS

*Lee, age four-and-one-half:*

Lee's work with creative materials has been largely teacher-initiated. Before he begins any activity he usually spends some time watching the other children. Then, when he apparently feels sure of himself, he begins. His attention span is adequate to complete the activity. He works deliberately and quietly, absorbed and interested in the task at hand. It is quite evident that this is real work. His work is neat and carefully done. When he abandons this approach to materials he seems worried, and seeks reassurance from the teacher that this untidiness is accepted comfortably by her. He verbalizes as he works, a running commentary to teacher, children, or no one. He shows pride in accomplishment and again often seeks approval from the teacher. His work with clay is delightful and imaginative and he seems to feel more freedom here than in the use of other media.

*Iris, age three:*

Materials most used by Iris are sand, mud, crayons, easel paints, finger paints, and water. Just recently she has begun to use the clay to make cakes with cookie cutters or make imprints with any article handy. At first her attitude toward materials was one of indifference, but now she is interested in what she is making and comes to show it to the teachers or children. Paste on her hands at first annoyed her so that she did not want to use it. Today she was pasting and I was delighted to see a paste smear in her hair, and Iris concentrating intently on her creation.

When a new material was introduced she looked at it but did not attempt to play with it. Recently we received train and track, musical bells, new dishes, and started a new project of covering our rug chest. She wanted to be part of each group, except dishes, and went from one thing to another as fast as she could. This was so unusual that we almost gasped in surprise. The part that gave us the biggest thrill was this morning when two children were taken upstairs to cover the chest. Iris went to the toilet and on the way back noticed what was going on. Going up to a big five-year-old she said, "Give me hammer" in a demanding voice. Teacher said she could have a turn next. Stamping foot, trying to pull hammer from Lucy's hand, she replied, "Now, I want it right now." Not receiving it instantly, she came down to tell the other teacher her trouble. She did get a turn and then

went to the musical bells. While there are still materials she has not touched, such as blocks, setting table with dishes, cars, she is adding to her play more materials each day. Outside equipment is now, and has been from the beginning, used without fear of falling. Every piece of equipment has been used by her, and with good control of muscles, expression and movement of body indicating extreme satisfaction. The swing is the one place where she always hums and sings.

4

## RECORDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR WITH ONE ANOTHER

### HOW CHILDREN LEARN TO SOCIALIZE

It is perhaps hard to believe, but nevertheless true, that young children at first look at one another as they do at objects and materials—as something to touch, to smell, and maybe to taste! So much is this so that a little two-year-old pours sand on another child's head and then stares in amazement at his distress, or calmly pushes someone down the stairs if she is in the way, or pokes a finger into a youngster's eye to see what makes it shine. This sounds like the crudest savagery but it is really nothing more than evidence for the fact that there is a time in the life of human beings when they do not understand that other people have feelings like their own. As a matter of fact, there is even a time when human beings do not understand that they themselves are separate, individual people, capable of independent feeling and action. The consciousness of self, of being somebody, comes gradually. Paradoxically, one must have awareness of this selfness, this being, before one can even suspect that other living creatures feel pain and pleasure.

#### *Feelings and Know-how*

The early years are the time when attitudes toward people are laid down in the character structure of the child, and the techniques for getting along in our culture are more or less painfully learned. As teachers, we have to be aware of three things about children's social development:

- A child's attitudes toward people



(affection, love, trust, suspicion, hate, etc.)

- The strength of a child's feelings  
(deep, casual, indifferent)
- How much and what kind of know-how a child has in getting along with others  
(Do you get a doll by asking for it, stealing it, or grabbing it?)

In this sense, a child may feel warm and loving to all humanity, but show it crudely, perhaps by hugging those who do not want hugging at the moment. Or a child may be jealous or resentful, but knowing that hugging is approved by adults but hitting is not, may hug to hurt. By the time children come to school, there has already been a complex background of experience shaping their attitudes and techniques. They are, however, still very much in the process of learning (as we are too) and quite receptive to our efforts to help them feel wholesome attitudes and practice constructive techniques.

#### *A Child Becomes Aware of Self*

Babies at birth are completely unconcerned about other human beings. They become conscious of others in relation to the fulfillment of their own needs and wants, which means, quite naturally, from a self-centered point of view. This is neither wrong nor unnatural. It is, however, the base from which future behavior will develop, sooner for some, later for others.

At the time that children start to speak of themselves as "I" instead of in the third person ("Baby wants a drink"), they are still examining other children with curiosity and interest but without comprehension. Not until children feel themselves persons (know their names, their sex, their likes and dislikes, and something of where they belong) can they look at others and sense "They feel even as I feel." It is natural to the growth of a young child, therefore, to be in a state of progression from nonidentification with others toward increasing capacity for sympathy and understanding. Before one can guide a child in social relationships, one must know how far along that child is on the road to maturity.

#### *How Far Is Far?*

A brief look at a pair of two-year-olds and a pair of three-year-olds reveals clear differences in their social maturity.

Two-year-old Natasha and the teacher have been playing together with a Snoopy Jack-in-the-Box on the floor. Cory has been playing hide-and-seek in a nearby closet with some of the other children. Suddenly Cory's attention is caught by Natasha's happily saying, "Bye-bye, Snoopy," as she pushes the toy back into the box, and he reaches out to grab the toy with a look of envy in his eyes. Natasha, startled, whines, "No." Hesitantly she reaches out toward the Snoopy while gazing pleadingly at the teacher. The teacher explains to Cory that Natasha does not want to share the toy just now, maybe later. Cory looks angrily at the teacher and then leans viciously against Natasha, attempting to bite her but biting the Jack-in-the-Box instead. He breaks into a frustrated sob, then, after some comforting by the teacher, wanders off to find another toy to play with.

A group of three-year-olds were sitting on the floor in music class while the music teacher was playing her guitar and singing "There was an old woman . . ." The children were instructed to clap their hands and sing along if they knew the song. Melissa and Daniel were sitting next to one another, each focused on the music teacher. Both of them clapped and joined in singing many times. At one point Melissa sang words that were different from the teacher's and Daniel's. He quickly switched his focus to Melissa and stopped clapping and singing. He leaned over, looked squarely into Melissa's face and announced matter-of-factly, "Stupid!" Melissa stopped singing and clapping and looked at Daniel quizzically but said nothing. Daniel once more proclaimed Melissa "stupid" but not before he was almost on top of her with his voice and body. By this time, neither one was focused on anything but each other's eyes, waiting to see who would make the first move. Suddenly Melissa smiled, happily repeated "Stupid!" to Daniel and fell on the floor laughing. Daniel caught her infectious laugh as he fell on the floor, having fun with the word stupid. Very soon they were both just laughing together and the word stupid was no longer heard. By the time the music teacher finished the song, both children were sitting up and clapping along with one another and with the teacher.

When teachers first see them at school, children have not had too much time as yet for maturing. They behave with one another only as they know how within their limits. They may long to please but still do unto each other only as they know how rather than as we think they should. Even as we show them better techniques for getting along with one another, we must accept without condemnation the inadequate techniques they already have. This does not mean

that all and any behavior is permitted to go on without an effort to direct it. To do that would be a real disservice to children because they are dependent on us for cues to what is socially acceptable. It does mean, however, that we may not expect of children behavior they neither know about nor are capable of performing. So often what we judge to be naughty is due to sheer ignorance.

By the time we reach adulthood we have already incorporated into our personalities the morality and ethics of our culture. Young children, however, are still somewhat uninitiated and much of what they do is meaningful to them only in the purely personal terms of how they feel about what's happening and not in the objective sense of what is right or wrong. Understanding and accepting children's anger, jealousy, rivalry, fear, ambition, and anxiety establish an atmosphere of acceptance in which they can grow into socially necessary and morally desirable behavior without losing their self-respect and dignity as human beings.

We cannot close the gap between adulthood and childhood by trying to behave like children ourselves. But we can use our imagination and feel with children so that we see what is important to them from the limits of their experience as well as from the breadth of ours.

### DO WE REALLY SEE WHAT IS GOING ON?

It is inevitable that teachers will apply their own yardsticks of social right and wrong to children's behavior, and it is good for children to learn from people who have convictions. But we adults have to be reasonably certain that our expectations fit the capacities of the children. We feel sure about what is right and wrong because we learned our lessons well in childhood. It may happen, however, that our "intuitive" knowledge is contradicted by thoughtful child study, because what we learned as children we learned uncritically and without understanding. Many of the attitudes we consider "natural" and "right" as adults were learned this way. Earlier in this manual, biases and prejudices that influence interpretations of behavior were discussed. They influence what we see, too, as anyone can testify who has listened to the conflicting testimony of eyewitnesses to an accident. Biases and prejudices are not necessarily negative or undesirable. But observation and, it follows, interpretations of children's behavior are more likely to be accurate when we know what our particular biases happen to be.

Seeing a child rejected by his peers is for some of us clearly a call to come to the child's defense, and in we move to demand humane behavior from a little tyrant. For others of us a physical tussle between youngsters is unnerving and perhaps a little frightening. Again we hear the call to action and with feelings of righteousness mete out justice "impartially." For still others the "show-off," the "bossy type," the "hog," the "poor sport," the "sneak," etc., are children whose behavior does something to us, impelling us to stop them somehow. And stop them we do, not always because it is necessarily right or in the children's best interests, but because we need to quiet the disturbance inside ourselves. We have feelings, too. And when children's behavior makes us uncomfortable, we do something to ease the discomfort if we possibly can.

How sure can we be that our techniques for handling antisocial or asocial behavior are the most helpful ones when we ourselves feel personally involved in this way? How sure are we that we are seeing all there is in a situation, and not only the obvious, the dramatic, or that which is personally important?

Do we assume that all smiles mean pleasure and all tears pain? That boisterous, noisy fighting can hurt more than quiet, calculated avoidance? Do we really see what is going on?

What, for example, is happening to the two who are smiling at each other on the swings? Is this a budding friendship of two shy ones or a budding plot of two rascally ones? Just what is going on between the two who hug a corner and engage in endless conversations? Are they seeking each other out for support or for stimulation? Can we always be sure what and who started a fight? Is every fight bad?

We need to ask ourselves whether every child in the group has a friend and whether all the friendships are profitable to those concerned. Do some children need special help from adults in getting along with others? Are there some for whom the best adult guidance is a "hands off" policy?

We must learn to look at children without preconceptions of what they "ought" to be doing, if we want to see what they are doing.

The following observation records a scene that is quite commonplace among six- and seven-year-olds. It shows behavior that can be very upsetting to some teachers. Yet the recorder does not reveal a single bit of her own attitudes. She just describes what she

content of the play with these symbolic objects are compounded of bits from the real world and pieces from inside themselves. Bits and pieces do not always make a logical whole in the eyes of an adult, and that is perhaps why children's play often seems inconsequential, irrational, or delightfully fluid and without boundaries to adult perceptions.

But play has logic to children, and the strongest evidence of this is the amount of dramatic play that goes on all through childhood. Even children who hardly know each other slip into the world of imagination together, understanding each other hardly at all in our sense, but speaking the language of dramatic play.

Listen to these two children working things out individually and together as their imaginations meet, diverge, meet, and develop together.

*Willie and Tracy, four-and-one-half:*

Willie was building with the large cardboard blocks and using one of the child-size trucks in his construction. As he carefully placed the blocks in rectangular formation around the truck, he began howling with a high-pitched "Oh-Ooh!" that sounded like the siren of a police car. Tracy came over and got on the truck, and she and Willie rode over to the nearby playhouse and went in.

Willie began tapping a rhythm on a drum, with a stick in each hand. "Give me one," Tracy asked playfully, pointing to the sticks.

"I have to practice somethin'," Willie replied in a spirit of concentration. After a few more taps, he gave the sticks to her and announced with an air of having come to a conclusion, "I'm finished." He got up to leave and stepped out of the house.

Tracy poked her head out and caught Willie's eye. "I have to go to do my work. How should I go?" she asked expectantly. Willie was busy pushing the truck over a mat that prevented its movement, and didn't answer.

They both then got on the truck, and Willie drove it over to the area where he had been building with the cardboard blocks. "At last we have a new garage," he declared proudly as the truck rolled into the enclosure which he had constructed earlier.

"This is my house," Tracy cried gleefully.

"This is the garage," Willie countered.

"So where can I sleep then?" queried Tracy with a note of concern in her voice.

"In my room. You'll sleep with me," Willie replied firmly. "We must go," he commanded.

## 5

# RECORDING CHILDREN'S BEHAVIOR IN DRAMATIC PLAY

DRAMATIC (or symbolic) play often springs from children's contacts with one another, but it also occurs when children play alone. Whether the child plays alone or with others, there are many aspects to be considered. These can best be understood if we recognize that children project themselves into their play and work out problems both of intellectual comprehension ("Is steering a bus different from steering a plane?") and of emotional complexity ("I want what I want now, but if I say so, Rashid may go away"). Mostly, dramatic play is fun, and deeply satisfying fun at that. But it is also the children's way of exploring the meaning of activities and relationships in the grown-up world. It is, of course, learning to get along with other children, to share and bargain, to compare and evaluate, to compete and cooperate, to give and take. At the same time, the magic of "make-believe" allows children to work out their wishes, aspirations, fears, and other childhood fantasies. All this they do by playing a part, a *role* (persig play), or by making objects—real or imaginary—act as if they were animals, persons, superheroes, etc. (obsig play).<sup>\*</sup> Both the roles they take and the

<sup>\*</sup>*Persig* and *obsig* are neologisms devised not only for the purpose of brevity and clarity, but also because there is no commonly used word for play in which objects are made to act like people, animals, etc. See Virginia Stern, "The Symbolic Play of Lower-Class and Middle-Class Children: Mixed Messages from the Literature," in *Current Topics in Early Childhood Education*, vol. 4, ed. Lillian G. Katz (Norwood, N.J.: Ablex, 1982).

Tracy walked quickly over to the housekeeping corner. "Honey, don't leave," Willie urged in a manly voice. Then he drove the truck around to the library corner, where he picked up two pillows, and drove back to the playhouse. Tracy returned to the housekeeping corner carrying a small blanket and pillow. "I got the blanket," she said cheerfully.

"You can lie on it if you want to," said Willie with an air of unconcern. They both went into the house.

"Let me sleep this way," Tracy said lying down on the pillow.

"I have to practice somethin'," said Willie as he tapped the drum with two rhythm sticks.

"Who's wakin' me up?" Tracy complained, sounding annoyed.

"I'm practicin' somethin'," said Willie, defending his activity.

"Honey, could you sleep?" pleaded Tracy. Willie put down the drum and sticks, and, sounding tired and weary, said, "I'll do this tomorrow." He lay down next to Tracy with his head on the pillow too.

Suddenly he shouted angrily, "Who' wakin' me up?" He popped his head out the door to observe some other children who were playing on the jungle gym nearby. "They are big boys. They can stay up," he said in a tone of responsibility. "Just ignore them. Go to sleep," he said to Tracy fondly. For a moment they just looked at each other as they lay quietly together.

## RECORDS OF DRAMATIC PLAY

Many of the same features are recorded for persig and obsig play:

### Features to Be Recorded in Both Persig and Obsig Play

- How the play gets started:
  - Does the child initiate it? The teacher? Another child?
  - Does the child join the ongoing play of another child or group of children?
- The setting (the block corner, housekeeping corner, outdoors, etc.)
- The course of action, or sequence of events
- All the child's comments and verbal interaction *about* the play; for example:
  - What is happening ("The car is going into the garage.")
  - The roles each child should take ("You be the mommy. I'll be the daddy.")
- What other participants in the play say and do
- How the play ends

Since the content of the play and/or the child's role is often ambiguous, all actions and remarks should be recorded whether or not they are meaningful, at the time, to the recorder, as in the following short record:

David (age three) picks up a figure of a man and lies down on the floor, cradling his own head on one arm. He moves the figure about and says, "Mailman, mailman, boom-da-boom-da-boom."

The *content* of both kinds of play may come from the real world or from television or stories.

- Ideas from the tangible world of reality may come from:

The people they know or have seen—father, mother, baby, sister, pilot, astronaut, bus driver, storekeeper, fire fighter, police officer, beauty parlor operator, etc.

- Inanimate objects—train, airplane, truck, car, doll, etc.
- Ideas may come from television or stories.

By reproducing aspects of the real world that they have experienced, or long to experience, children try to fix in their minds the properties, processes, and relationships of what they have encountered. Observations of dramatic play can be used by teachers to assess how well children understand what they are experiencing. Such information furnishes a base for planning experiences that can increase and/or clarify children's conceptions of the real world.

Whether the play's content is related to the real world or to fantasy, it may be used by children to work out their feelings—their fears, wishes, aspirations—and as a means of solving their developmental and emotional problems. Teachers can learn from dramatic play the emotional meanings attached to the content: how the child perceives the important people in her life or how she wishes they would be; the feelings the child is unwilling or afraid to express overtly in daily behavior.

There are also aspects that are peculiar to each kind of play. Let us look at the details that relate to each kind of play.

## CHILDREN TAKE ON ROLES (PERSIG PLAY)

### The Role Itself, Its Content

In persig play, the role the child takes is usually related to the general content of the play. Thus, the role may come from the real

blocks on top of each other and sat on them. Danny had just come in and walked over to Alfred.

Danny: "Is that a bridge?"

Alfred: "No, it's a train."

"Where's it going?" Danny asked.

"To New York," replied Alfred. "I'm the engineer. I build big trains."

"I'm conductor. I drive the train," boasted Danny.

Alfred (impatiently): "No, no. I'm the engineer. I made it."

Danny: "What can I do?"

Alfred replied, "You collect the tickets."

"What tickets?" asked Danny.

Alfred: "The ones the passengers give you. . . . (out loud) Who wants a ride on the train? . . . All abo-a-rd . . . All ab-o-o-ard. Train going. Woo . . . woo . . . It goes so fast."

Harry came into the room and ran over to the train.

Harry: "I want to get on." He got another block from the shelf and put it on the middle of the train. He picked up a very small block from the floor and held it to his mouth as he would a telephone and yelled, "Hello, hello. What's wrong with you? We're leaving and we gotta have food. Bring hundreds of boxes. . . . Right away, you hear?" He slammed the telephone down.

Alfred: "We got a flat. I'll fix it. Got to fix it now." With swaggering pretentiousness he removed one of the blocks from the line and turned it upside down and replaced it. Then he got back on the two blocks.

Mitchell came over and got on the train.

Alfred: "Get off, get off. It's my train. . . . (demandingly) *Go away!*"

He gave Mitchell a push to get him off. Mitchell attempted to get on again, and again Alfred pushed him off. The teacher complimented Alfred on his train and suggested that he allow other children to share it with him. Alfred made no response, but did nothing when Mitchell got on again and sat behind him.

Alfred: "No gas, no gas. Hey, Mitch, no gas. Ha, Ha! Now no gas. First flat tire, now no gas."

Danny took the block which Harry had used as a telephone and called on it. "Hey, you. Bring gas. Train needs gas. Ha! Ha! Hurry up, you dope."

Alfred: "All off! It's lunch time. Let's get some food. Follow me. I'll show you, men."

We can deduce what Alfred knows about trains from his train play (that they are long, that the engineer sits in the front of the

world or from television or stories. In these roles, children include that which to their minds and limited experience is the meaningful *quality* and *character* of the person or thing. And *how* accurately children pinpoint the essence of train, plane, animal, or parent in terms of outstanding action, sound, or feeling value! It takes them longer to see and understand technical details, parts of a whole, ramifications, complexity, variety, etc. We must be careful, however, not to jump to conclusions. Fantasy is a very important part of children's play, and a child may be sitting on what looks like a train and not give us a hint as to whether he or she is the engineer, the train itself, a passenger, or the cargo.

### What to Record

The details to be recorded relate both to the content of the role and how the role is played. They include:

- All *symbolic* actions taken by the child in his role (Tracy picks up a very small plastic baby bottle, gets a doll, and sits down. She puts the bottle to the doll's mouth and holds it there for a moment. She gets up and puts the doll down and the bottle on the shelf. She gets a doll bib and pretends to iron it. When she finishes, she takes the bib and puts it on the doll.)
- The language spoken by the child in his role (as mother, conductor, Superman, etc.)
- Onomatopoeic sounds uttered by the child (as a cow, she moos; as a train, she makes engine or whistle sounds; etc.)
- Accessories used by the child (a conductor's hat, a firefighter's coat, a man's or woman's hat, etc.)
- The child's facial expression, body movements, tone of voice, etc., which give the role its emotional quality (e.g., a nurturing or punitive mother, a timid or aggressive child)
- Any *symbolic* objects the child uses while playing (a block building on which the child sits, a long unit block used as a gun, etc.)

Records of dramatic play show the level of the child's understanding and comprehension, as well as the content of the role and how the role is played.

Four-year-old Alfred went straight to the blocks when he came to the nursery. There were only two other children at school at the time, both at the clay table. Alfred started to build what looked like a train. He set five blocks in a long row on the floor. At one end he put two

train, that trains have passengers, that the conductor collects tickets, etc.). His confusion of trains with automobiles (the "flat" that must be fixed, the train needs "gas") are also portrayed vividly in his play.

In the following record, the source of the content is television. Frankie plays alone, for the most part. His occasional contacts with other children are short-lived.

As Frankie gets to the door of the yard, his face broadens into a wide, happy grin, and he races down the steps into the yard. He shouts delightedly, "The monsters!" and begins jumping on one foot and then the other while his arms flap wildly in every direction. He shouts to some nearby children, "Come on!" and begins to race around the playground boundary with his arms waving exuberantly and a wide smile on his face. Two or three of his classmates follow his path and copy his gestures.

Frankie then walks over to a large, circular wooden spool, climbs up effortlessly, and sits down on it cross-legged. He sits for just a few seconds, then stands up and leaps off, making flying gestures with his arms. He seems quite excited and delighted with these movements, since there is a broad smile on his face and his joyous shouts ring out. He runs around the yard again and leaps on the wooden spool. He stays a few seconds and shouts forcefully, "I'm getting outa here," and leaps off again. He turns around and jumps up again. He neither looks at nor talks to the other children on the spool. He seems preoccupied with his own movements at this point.

He jumps off again and runs wildly around the yard with fast, strong movements and his arms swinging from side to side. He runs back to the spool, sees Monte, and acknowledges him with a nod. Monte gets up (he was sitting next to Frankie), kneels behind him, and begins to massage his shoulders. Frankie starts to move his body up and down (he is sitting cross-legged), and one arm is outstretched and moving rhythmically in the air. He has a look of concentration on his face, and his movements look as if he is imitating a horse-and-buggy rider.

He stops abruptly and leaps up. He shouts, "We're playing Tarzan!" and he beats his chest shouting, "Ah-a, ah-a, ah-a." He then yells, "Now I'm Spiderman!" and leaps off the spool and races off. He runs over to the basketball net and begins to climb one of the poles. Using the brick wall in front of him as support for his feet, he extends his arms up the pole, first one hand and then the other, pulling his body up with each reach. He gets to the top and slides down, holding the pole with his hands.

Christa comes over and demands, "Let me try." He turns to her

and shouts excitedly, "Try and catch me." He races off with Christa chasing him. He again runs around the perimeter of the yard and back to the basketball pole. He climbs again, making loud, grunting sounds as he pulls himself up. On reaching the top, he yells, "Watch out!" and slides down. He runs over to a group of children and shouts at them, "Bulls." He runs around the yard yelling, "The bulls! The bulls! The bulls!" while putting two fingers on his head to imitate a bull's horns.

He runs up to Vivian and announces, "I'm Batman." He clenches his fist and begins making imaginary hits on her body. She stands there watching him calmly while he begins to bob around like a fighter. She says matter-of-factly, "I'm the mother," and Frankie turns and runs off without acknowledging her statement.

True to his stage of development, Frankie picks out the more obvious aspects and imitates these. He jumps, climbs, "flies," and hits—but there is little comprehensible content. The swift changes from one role to another are indicative of his inability to play out in a differentiated and coherent fashion what he has seen on television.

### **Emotional Investment in the Role**

As children play a dramatic part with real-life content, such as, doctor, mother, baby, captain, they may give the part an emotional tone that is deeply personal.

- They may play the role in terms of their feelings and attitudes toward other children.
  - (Even though a child is storekeeper, mother, or firefighter, he/she might be domineering, bossy, timid, conscientious, kind, forceful, subservient, tyrannical, protective, etc.)
- They may act out areas of feeling not otherwise revealed, e.g.,
  - How they think people feel toward each other
    - (The doctor may be kind, brusque, or scolding; mothers and fathers may be kind, brusque, or scolding.)
  - How they wish people would behave toward them
    - (A father is understanding, forceful, positive, kind, a friend, etc.; a sibling is a giving, helping person, a pal, etc.)
  - How they would express themselves if it were permissible
    - (He plays the baby so he can pretend he is protected and dependent; she becomes a tiger so she can growl with impunity; he plays father so he can dominate, etc.)



Any of these attitudes could be consistently held in any kind of play. A child would then always be tyrannical or always kind, or always meek, whether father, mother, captain, police officer, uncle, or aunt. But it is just as likely that attitudes will change with the role as with different play companions. A child could be subservient to a big, strong playmate, but high-handed with a small one, a bossy doctor but a gentle father. We have to observe a child at dramatic play more than once and with many children to see which behavior is characteristic of his/her relations with others.

When children play superhuman/magical roles, they can fulfill certain emotional needs more satisfactorily than in roles with real-life content. These needs, however, are very limited:

- The need or desire to be powerful, more than human—a need that is common to young children because of their powerlessness.  
(As Superman, they can fly, exhibit superhuman strength.)
- The need to be aggressive  
(As the Incredible Hulk, they can be aggressive in order to right wrongs, protect the weak.)

### CHILDREN PLAY WITH SYMBOLIC OBJECTS (OBSIG PLAY)

#### What to Record

In obsig play, the details to be recorded relate to the content of play. They constitute actions that are slightly different from those in persig play.

- The symbolic actions that the child makes a symbolic object (real or imaginary) perform (e.g., moving a small car, or object representing a car, on a road of blocks; pushing a long line of interlocking blocks representing a train on block "tracks"; "flying" a wedgie or small figure of a man, representing Superman, through the air, etc.)
- The words the child speaks for symbolic objects that represent a person, character in a story, or superhero (e.g., Jim, speaking for a "child" wedgie in a high, squeaky voice, "O.K., then I'll get my fadder." And Tom, speaking for his "man" wedgie, also in a high, squeaky voice, "But I am your fadder.")

- The quality of voice used by the child when speaking for a symbolic object (as in the above example)

As in persig play, you also record onomatopoeic sounds (a train whistle, motor sounds), other symbolic objects used in the play, and comments, if any, that a child makes about what symbolic objects represent, what is happening in the play, etc.

In obsig play, ideas come from the same sources as do the ideas for roles.

- The content can be inspired by inanimate objects in the real world (train, airplane, boat, car, spaceship, doll, etc.).
- Real people can be the inspiration (conductor, engineer, storekeeper, astronaut, mother, father, etc.).
- The idea can have its source in television characters (Batman, Superman) or stories.

In the following record the content comes from real life. It is simple repetitive play.

Lawrence (age 4:10) is in the block corner. He takes the Tinkertoys and puts some together in the shape of an airplane. Holding it in the center, he zooms it through the air, making motor noises. He "flies" it to the book corner then back to the block corner.

He says to Johnny, who is watching, "I making a airplane." Then he goes over to the teacher, saying, "See, airplane." The teacher admires it, and he leaves her and goes to the book area where he zooms the airplane around.

Johnny, who also has an airplane, joins him and they both zoom their planes around, making motor noises. Lawrence lies on the floor and "flies" the plane around over his body, rolling as he does so. He puts the plane on the floor and, with a slowly accelerating noise, has it take off and zoom and then land. He then goes around the room, zooming his plane and making motor noises. He has the plane touch table tops, as he passes, and go up in the air again, making a louder noise when the plane goes higher in the air.

The teacher says it is time to go out. Lawrence puts the Tinkertoy plane in the box and lines up with the other children.

Here, two four-year-old boys engage in Superman play together. They both contribute ideas to the play.

Ben and Alan, each holding a small rubber figure of a man, go to the house-keeping corner, where there is an old television set. The set

is a large old table model with an open back. The front, of course, is the glass screen and there are two holes where the knobs once were. Ben now gets behind the set, lying on the floor, and begins to push his figure through the round hole that once held a knob.

ALAN (who is in front of the set): Good, Ben. O.K. Now here's a trap. (He then pushes his figure in.)

BEN: That's a good trap. Now we'll pretend that they got out.

ALAN: O.K. Now pretend he got in a truck and got locked up and then he still got away.

BEN: Now he gets out. He gets away.

ALAN (talking for his figure): Superman, come and play.

BEN (talking for his figure): I'm coming. I'm out of my trap.

(Ben then pushes his figure into the hole and Alan takes it.)

BEN (stands and shouts): Eeeeeeek, give it back.

(Alan hands it back and Ben gets right back down on the floor.)

ALAN: That's fun. Let's do it again.

BEN: No.

(Both boys leave and go over to the tool bench.)

### ASSESSING THE CONTENT (PERSIG AND OBSIG)

The source of the content that inspires children's play seems to make a difference in the way they are able to adapt the content to their make-believe. Real-life experiences of actions and processes they can reproduce seem in general to lead to better developed, more sustained, and more productive play than poorly perceived or confusing experiences. The former allow the children and the teacher to extend the children's knowledge with additional information and/or clarification.

This record of Wanda making popcorn suggests that she had spent a considerable amount of time observing how popcorn is made.

Wanda was standing at the kitchen table and slowly looked down at the bowl of fruit on the table. She continued to look at it for awhile and studied the contents of the bowl intently. She turned around quickly, heavily using her whole body to propel herself, and grabbed a large frying pan from the "stove." She spun back to the table forcefully, and carefully and noisily, with a thud, plopped the pan on the table. In a loud, firm voice she said, "Cooling," as she held the handle and looked quizzically into the empty pan. She did not look at the girls, who were busy with their own housekeeping activities. She began gently to shake the pan back and forth on the table top. Her face was expressionless while she seemed seriously involved in this activity. She moved her body closer to the table and quickly changed

the intensity of her shaking from the gentle and slow rhythm to a swift and energetic one, creating a bristling, forceful sound. Loudly she said, "Popcorn in the big pot." Upon hearing this, Helen, Audrey, and Sasha came quickly to look. Wanda held the handle while the other girls dipped their fingers into the pan and put the pretend popcorn in their mouths. "Yum," they said gleefully. In the meantime, three boys joined the girls. At once, and eagerly, they also pretended to taste the popcorn. Wanda continued to hold the handle and smiled as the children tasted. Her smile was soft and she glanced into each child's face as each tasted with glee. The pace quickened as the children reached into the pan faster and faster to gobble up the popcorn.

Television sources, on the other hand, generally lead to simplistic play about superheroes whose few major activities are endlessly repeated and rarely developed imaginatively. Here is José (age 5) playing he is Bionic Man.

When José finished sanding his piece of wood, he said something about "bionic" and moved, with his elbows back, his head down, his knees high, in a sort of slow-motion effect, across the room. He then came back, moving the same way, and went to the doll corner, where he declared he was bionic. He started to play-fight with Fernando, who complained. He picked up a toaster and moved it to a doll house (near the window), then back to the doll corner, and, with the same bionic walk, brought a can to the house. He left the house and, still walking like the Bionic Man, went over to the rocking horse, stood up in the stirrups, then sat and rode gently, looking around. Although José's pace was slow, he leaned very far forward and back on the horse, occasionally saying, "bionic."

When the teacher said it was time to stop playing, José got off the horse and went over to the rug.

### SOCIAL ASPECTS OF DRAMATIC PLAY

When two or more children engage in dramatic play together, they express not only what they know about the world, their fears, wishes, and aspirations, but also their social attitudes, techniques, and relationships.

#### Children's Reactions to One Another

Children test and modify the effectiveness of their social attitudes and techniques via the response of others. Position, status, and acceptance within a group depend to some extent on an individual



child's actions. But they are affected also by the willingness of other children to see an individual in terms suitable to his or her own self-concept, wishes, needs, and wants. The teacher who would help a child achieve more mature social behavior must know the impact of children on each other in two ways: objectively (this is what happened), and in the subjective meaning to the youngster involved (what that child thought happened).

- Which children react? To whom?
- What do they do? How do they do it?
- What do they say? How do they say it?
- Do they fit in with others' plans, use others, resist others, follow them under protest, etc.?
- Does a child's desire for status, prestige, affection, or attention interfere with the progress of the play situation?
- What is a child's general tone at play—amiable, hostile, creating dissension?

Jan is dressed up in a long skirt and a hat from the dress-up corner. She is moving pots on the stove while Aaron uses a wooden iron on the tablecloth. Aaron says, "Pretend this is an eating table."

Jan does not reply but keeps on cooking. Aaron ignores the lack of response. He leaves the iron and gets another hat from the dress-up corner. He says, "Look what I brought you, Mother. Does it look nice?" He gives the hat to Jan and takes the old one. Jan puts the new hat on her head but says nothing; she continues her cooking.

Aaron gets an apron and puts it on. Jan turns to him and says reprovingly, "No. That's a girl's suit." Aaron takes it off and Jan puts it on over the long skirt.

He gets another apron, a full-sized one with a bib. He asks, looking for approval, "Is this a boy's?" Jan nods. Aaron persists, "Is this the head?" Jan says agreeably, "Yeah." She helps him put it on and fixes it efficiently, adjusting the length so that Aaron doesn't trip.

She picks up a flashlight and tries to turn it on. "Turn on the light," she says. The flash does not work, and she puts it down after several attempts. Aaron and Jan stand side by side and pretend to cook. They talk quietly about what they are doing as if giving themselves directions.

Sometimes they address each other more directly and seem to expect a reply. For example, "You lay the table, right?" Eddie comes up and says, smiling, "Is this a real house?" Aaron replies, "Would you like to be visitors coming to the house?"

Eddie: "O.K." Donnie joins him and they formally approach, already immersed in the action. They knock at an imaginary door.

Aaron says as he opens the door, "This is a restaurant." Jan nods her confirmation. Donnie and Eddie come in and sit at the table.

Eddie calls out imperiously, "Service! Service!" Jan comes over and says, "O.K."

Eddie: "I want my dinner. What's for dinner?"

Jan goes back to the stove and calls over her shoulder crisply, "Hot dogs."

Eddie: "O.K. Hot dogs with mushrooms."

Jan continues cooking and Aaron joins her, moving pots and pans. Eddie and Donnie get bored and leave.

Jan makes coffee in the coffee pot. Aaron takes the kettle and comments, "This is the coffee." Jan contradicts him. "No, that's the tea."

Aaron: "You'd better hurry up. Here's more customers."

This time the customers are imaginary. They lay the table together. Jan says, "The yellow cups are for coffee, the other ones are for tea."

Eddie returns and seems to want to join the game. Aaron pushes him away roughly. "You're not playing. You can't play." Eddie persists and Aaron pushes him away again.

Meanwhile, Jan gets up, goes into the corner, and spins around and around, watching the motion of her long skirt and feeling the motion with her palms. She just might be deliberately avoiding the confrontation between Aaron and Eddie.

As soon as Eddie gives up and leaves, both Aaron and Jan return to the game. They continue play acting with a great deal of cooperation.

In this record, Jan's attitude toward Aaron changes as the play proceeds. At first she ignores him, then disapproves of some of his actions, and finally becomes cooperative and more amiable. Aaron, who obviously is very anxious to play with Jan, accepts her reproofs at first, but persists, and comes into his own as an equal partner in the play as Jan's attitude changes.

### **A Child's Position in Relation to the Others Playing**

As the members of a group interact, they tend to find spots for themselves in the group's hierarchy and structure. Some children are leaders, some followers, some peacemakers, and some moralists representing the adult point of view. Some children barely fit into the group as legitimate members at all.

A child's position in the group may be obvious or may be subtly concealed and disguised. A child who seems to be a cooperater may just be a slavey in disguise. Eagerness to be accepted or anxiety about what he has to offer may lead him to a fairly thorough denial

of his right to a genuinely cooperative position. The child who is noisiest in a group may seem to be the leader and yet the real direction may be coming from a quiet youngster who controls the play by force of ideas.

Position in the group is one of the important components of inter-relating. For one youngster leadership may be so important that she will resort to any trick she can think up to reach her goal. For another there may be quiet contentment in not being challenged. Position has two faces—how the adult sees a child's position in the group, and how the child sees and feels about it.

Position could be boss, constructive leader, cooperative member, "fringer," compromiser, etc.

Position can be maintained by bullying, force of ideas, persuasion, reasoning, coaxing, bribing, silence, force, etc.

In this record, the child's position in the group, his feelings about maintaining that position, and the reactions of others seem quite clear.

Several little groups of youngsters were scattered through the wooded area of the play yard, some digging, some filling cans, some using a rock for the dinner table in their imaginary home. Peter and cohorts had used cans to collect items for dinner, then to gather maple syrup (sap) from the trees. Peter left his cans by a tree and came swinging past Denise's rock.

Peter announced: "I'm going to get my fishing cast and go out in the boat. Mama (addressing Denise), will you row the boat for me while I'm fishing?" Peter did not wait for an answer but continued on his quest for his fishing rod. From far away he called, "Come on, Mama!" Denise was adamant. "I need to make the lunch at home on the stove!"

Peter found a long rod-like pole and returning, paused again by Denise. "Come on, Mama. Now you be careful making that lunch." He strode toward his boat rock. "Come on, Mama. Come on, we have to go. You have to row . . . That's the boat house and you come with me."

Denise kept on with her lunch-making, but called after Peter, "Goodbye!"

Peter was now back on his rock, his fishing rod stowed aboard. He stood there holding onto a tree branch, looking across the woods to Denise and calling. Impatience at being balked was beginning to creep into his tone. "Come on! You have to row for me."

Denise: "You go on. I can't do it."

Peter, screaming: "Come on! You *have to do it!*" With each word he

beat the branch with a short stick for emphasis and to give vent to his feelings, since he couldn't beat Denise but would probably have liked to rush over and do so.

Denise, in a disgruntled, placating voice, "All right. Let me finish the onions. Bring the children. Come on, Louise." She and her companion moved over to the boat.

Peter now had Stephen, Leslie, Robert, Denise, and Louise on the rock-boat. He was using a stick for an oar. Then he saw Nancy and Julie busy digging. (New fields to conquer!) "Come on, sisters (to Nancy and Julie). Will you row for us, sisters?" They came easily. But soon Julie was in tears. Denise was slapping her hands hard for dumping dirt from her can and getting the boat dirty.

"Stop that, Denise!" Peter commanded. Julie got off the boat, spirits wounded, head bent.

Louise edged in next to Peter on the rock. "That's where Mama's going to sit. Now get out." He pushed her away so Denise could come.

Then Denise took up Peter's long stick. "Stop! That's my fishing cast," he told her. Denise got off the boat, found herself a long fishing rod, and returned.

Peter, to Leslie: "Brother, will you row?" Leslie refused.

Peter, looking around: "Well, who's going to row?" Spying Denise with her own fishing rod: "Mama, you row. We only want one fishing cast. Look! I caught a big one (a leaf at the end of his stick). *Láttu*, who's going to row? (To Denise) Mama, you go over there and fish over there. It's the nicest place on the boat. Now, man (to Leslie), row with this stick."

Having at last made someone row, he turned to his fishing.

Peter obviously wants to be the boss, but seldom succeeds. He uses several methods to attain his aim—verbal insistence, persistence, and, occasionally, force. His manner provokes considerable resistance from the others.

### SUMMARY OF A CHILD'S BEHAVIOR DURING DRAMATIC PLAY

Records of a child involved in dramatic play would not only include evidence about the following aspects of his play behavior, but also reflect any changes in behavior over a period of time.

- Is obsig or persig play more predominant?
- To what extent is the content of the play concerned with real-life or fantasy activities?
- What are the usual specific contents of the play? (train, airplane, family, Superman, monsters, etc.)

- What roles does the child usually take in persig play? (driver, father, mother, baby, animal, superhero, train, etc.)
- Does the child tend to play alone or with others?
- When playing with others, does the child usually take on a different role from the others (e.g., he is the bus driver and the others are passengers)?
- When playing alone, does a particular content (e.g., playing house, putting out fires) or role (driver of a vehicle or superhero) predominate?

Records of play in which other children are involved would also shed light on the child's mode of interacting with others.

- In playing roles, what *position* does the child take in relation to others? (Although playing such roles as mother, baby, or storekeeper, the *position* is that of boss, subordinate, leader, cooperater, moralist, scapegoat, etc.)
- Does she always assume one position or is it only in relation to certain personalities, i.e., is she always the boss or only with the timid children (younger ones, older, boys, girls, aggressive children, etc.)?
- How is the child's position maintained? (By the enicement of ideas, rationalizing, talking excessively, reasoning, humor, verbal or physical aggression, threats, bribery, voicing protest, acting helpless, etc.)

As you complete the recording, be sure to indicate how the play ends. How the child terminates play if playing alone, or leaves a group when playing with others, has as many implications as how the child begins play or enters the play of others

- Does the child leave for some other activity?
- If playing with others, does the other child (or children) leave first?
- Does the teacher interrupt the play? (for juice, pick-up, etc.)
- Does it develop into some other kind of play?
- How long did the child's participation last?
- What or who seems responsible for the ending?
- How do the children disperse?
- What is the feeling tone? (happy, guilty, despairing, belligerent, contented, etc.)

## 6

## THE CHILD'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULTS AND IN ADULT-DIRECTED ACTIVITIES

CHILDREN ARE BORN helpless, and for a long time they remain largely dependent on adults. Yet, to reach mature adulthood, they must somehow make the transition to relative independence. This they accomplish in many steps and stages, sometimes obviously and dramatically, sometimes with quiet ease. The struggle for independence is not waged without qualms and fears. While they are breaking the bonds, children continue to need adults, not only for physical sustenance, affection, and understanding but for moral support in this drive to independence.

From the adults who are most important in the early years, their parents, children learn many things. Their concepts of people and what to expect of them and their concepts of themselves and what they may and may not do are shaped by their daily contacts with these significant adults. Children believe that all adults are like the ones they first knew best until long years of experience beyond early childhood teach them to recognize differences. They assume that what adults tell them about themselves is true, unless other people later teach them otherwise. Consequently, when a child enters school for the first time, his or her behavior with teachers will in large measure reflect home experience and indicate how far along the road to independence and a positive or negative self-concept the child has gone.

## RECORDING A CHILD'S INTERACTION WITH AN ADULT

Observation of a child's relationship with adults as we see it revealed at school can tell us whether the child feels that adults are to be trusted, or viewed with suspicion; whether they are to be exploited for one's own ends, hated fiercely, or avoided. We can tell, too, whether the child believes it is possible to run the gamut of human feeling from best to worst, break adult taboos of right and wrong, and still remain loved; or whether it is necessary to carefully refrain from doing anything that will offend adult standards and thus bring about a loss of adult love.

The details of the adult-child relationship will, in many instances, be an incidental part of the situations dealt with up to now, i.e., the child's functioning during routines, with materials, or in relation to children. In addition, however, there are special adult-child contacts, as all teachers know, because they themselves are involved.

There is the time a child grabs one's hand and squeezes it, or catapults out of the doorway and forcefully leaps onto us by way of morning greeting; there is the quiet moment of confidence when a child brings something precious for inspection or holds up a wet nose to be wiped; there is the imperious demand for attention, the teasing, and the shared laughter. Every day brings new relationships with the individuals who make up the group. Every child feels special in the eyes of the teacher and makes individual, "special" contacts with her. (If a child does not, it is worthy of note.)

### *Details to Look for in Recording a Child's Contact with an Adult*

- Setting in which the episode takes place
- Who makes the contact?
  - If the child makes the contact:
    - Is it purposeful?
      - (child asks for help, asks for materials, shows products, asks for comfort when hurt—actual or imagined, seeks help at routines, asks to be played with, etc.; bestows affection or asks for it; asks help in social relationships, ideas)
      - Is it indirectly purposeful?
        - (child seeks attention by excessive talking, by a stream of presents, by provocative activity done deliberately with awareness that it is not acceptable, such as screaming, dangerous climbing, breakage, hiding things, etc.)

If the teacher makes the contact, what is her purpose?

(to give assistance with materials or equipment, settle a dispute, enter the play, make suggestions or requests, give directions or orders, give comfort following injury or insult, offer props, etc.)

What attitude and feeling are revealed by the child as evidenced by voice, tempo of speech, facial expression, body positions and movement, body contacts?

- Dialogue (direct quotes)
- Sequence of events
  - Include what adult does and says.
- Indicate child's responses, both verbal and bodily.
- How does the contact end?
- What does the child do immediately after?

### *Patterns of Behavior*

These are two children who reveal different approaches to a teacher.

Sharon, very blond, pale complexion, blue eyes, flat pug nose, and mouth slightly open, arrives at school each morning with her mother. She walks up the path expressionless, almost dragging her legs. Looking around slowly, she heads toward the teacher. The teacher calls, "Hi, Sharon!" but does not receive a response. She calls again, "Hi, Sharon!" and this time receives a faint smile. Sharon maneuvers toward the swings, where one child is already swinging. Sharon wraps herself around the pole and waits. The other child, paying no attention to Sharon, gets off, and Sharon, still moving slowly, eases herself on and begins to pump. Once again she has a slight smile. After a few minutes, she begins to play in the mud, working seriously by herself. She looks up blankly and sees another child bring his finished mud cake to the teacher. The teacher tastes enthusiastically. Still staring, Sharon slowly stands up, and walks over to the teacher, carrying the mud pie carefully. Holding the dish, she stands motionless and speechless for several moments. Then, not saying a word, she turns and sluggishly moves away.

Picking-up time and teacher is cleaning tables. Martha comes over "I can count to ten," she offers confidentially. "I'd like to hear you," says the teacher, scrubbing away. Hopping on one foot, Martha slowly and accurately counts from one to ten, holding her arms out all the time to help her keep balance. She gives the teacher a smile, all front teeth and crinkled eyes, jumps on two feet and runs off.

### Teachers Observe Themselves

Young children need adults but they must also gradually loosen the ties. Teachers must be able to observe the relationship in which they are themselves involved with enough dispassionate interest to see the child's dependency needs with objectivity and see the denial of dependence with realistic and unbiased appraisal. It is perhaps easier to do this if we ask ourselves about a relationship with a child, "Do I enhance or detract from this child's sense of personal powers?" It is hard to be oneself and the impartial observer at the same time. Our professional selves (objective and educated) must become one with our personal selves (subjective and emotionally involved).

### THE CHILD IN TEACHER-DIRECTED GROUP ACTIVITIES

The special relationship each child may experience with a teacher of necessity exists within a group structure. This means that the one-to-one contacts give way regularly to experiences in which a child must share the teacher with many other children. This sharing takes place in informal situations, as when a child must wait a turn to be helped, and in more formally planned activities, such as music time, a group story, or a trip.

How grown up must a child be to enjoy sharing a common experience with friends? It's one thing to be yourself and get along with others at your own speed. It's another to become an anonymous someone and be moved with a group as an integrated part of it! A child wonders whether to listen for an adult's directions and try to please her or him, or to listen to the cues the children give and seek to be acceptable to them. For most young children, the group situation offers challenges toward adjustment. The one-to-one relationship is still very meaningful, and individuals vary in the degree to which they can function comfortably outside close and intimate adult-child interaction. Children's responses when the group is directed as a group may therefore be quite different from their responses when the teacher speaks to each one directly or alone.

For one thing, in teacher-directed group activities, the teacher often speaks to any one child only by inference, because she speaks to all the children at once in a group. (This is often the reason

young children do not respond to requests given to the group as a whole for cleanup, dressing, etc.) For another, the obvious and compelling competition for the teacher's attention may affect a child's feelings about a group activity. If a child is more concerned about the teacher's favor than about the story, for example, he may respond to the most appealing tale by squirming and wriggling, meanwhile pushing and edging toward the beloved adult.

Or, a child's very ability to perform may be affected by the overwhelming presence of nonindulgent peers, because comparisons are all too often offered by them, and this is not always easy to tolerate. The group situation established by the teacher (i.e., everybody will do the same thing) may therefore be a challenge to a child that is quite different from the looser group situation in which individual behavior is more closely related to a child's own desires and wants and not as immediately bound by peer involvement. Behavior in a teacher-directed activity may thus have its own meaning to a child, quite unrelated to the intent of the teacher.

Any school activity may be reminiscent to a child of experience outside of school, and this will influence behavior in the group too. For example, if listening to a story at home is enjoyed as much for snuggling next to an adult as for the story itself, how well can a youngster listen at school, removed from physical contact with the teacher and sharing her with a lot of other youngsters? Or, if a child has been struggling secretly to conquer skipping, or jumping with two feet, or hopping, she may not yet be able to prance unconsciously at rhythms with her better coordinated peers. And it is easy to understand the panic some children undergo as they start across the floor and feel themselves swamped by the stampede of galloping bodies all around them!

### Details to Look for in Recording a Child's Reactions to Group Activity

In observing a child at any teacher-organized activity, we look for the general child-to-group and child-to-adult relationships as well as to the specifics of the activity.

- What is a child's initial reaction to the announcement that the group activity is about to begin?
  - Positive (eager, joyful, ready to discontinue previous activity immediately)
  - Negative (continues with previous activity, dawdles, refuses,

- complaints, runs away, etc.)
- Accepting (compliant, goes along in matter-of-fact way, etc.)
- What is the sequence of events?  
(the contents of the rhythms period; walking to a trip site; nature and length of the story read; directions given for a project; etc.)
- What part is played by the adult?  
(shows children how to move; keeps children from bumping into each other; plays an instrument; reads aloud; etc.)
- How does the child react to sharing the adult with other children or with other adults, as when the teacher is helping other children; is talking to another teacher or to a parent; is directing the entire group in an activity such as a story, game, trip, rhythms, an explanation, etc.?  
(child accepts easily, ignores, interrupts and demands attention, sulks, cries, has tantrums, waits for adult to return, awaits turn patiently but not resignedly)
- What does the child do if he/she participates?  
How does the child do it?  
(responds with body movement, facial expression, speech; is swift, impulsive; interested, involved; etc.)
- What does the child do if he/she does not participate?  
(observes group, disrupts, clings to teacher, turns back on group, does something else, runs out of room, etc.)
- How does the child respond to adult directions?  
(blankly, agreeably, happily, reluctantly, petulantly, tearfully, angrily)

Since a child's participation in a teacher-directed activity may also reveal a child's level of interest and functioning in the activity itself, recording the details of the child's involvement gives us additional data by which to measure the effect of the relationship with the teacher and the children. A child who can cope with feelings about adults, children, and an activity in a reasonable balance is clearly one who has integrated the several areas of relating. Many children are still working at achieving this balance. Four-year-old Mollie, in the next record, is clearly one such child.

It is 9:30 A.M. and the kindergarten is having music. The music teacher sits before the group while the two regular teachers sit with the children. Mollie sits near the music teacher. The children have

been singing a song about animals and are discussing what kind of sound a turkey makes. Mollie looks around at the children, and her face lights up in a bright, full smile. Her body is in constant motion, switching rapidly from one position to another. She makes hand motions; the contact is made.

Focusing on the music teacher now, she listens to the questions, her eyes darting around the circle of children, her mouth working, her brow slightly knit.

She moves to sit next to the teacher on the opposite side, then returns to the original spot next to John. The music teacher is telling a story. Mollie looks around at the other children, then looks pertly at the music teacher, listening carefully. She plays with her dress, turns to watch another child who is making a scratching sound, and turns her attention back to the music teacher.

Her face is alive, interested; sometimes she seems to slip off into her own world, then comes back. She is extremely attentive to the other children. She listens to their verbal responses and watches carefully, although she says nothing in response to questions directed to the group.

The children are taking parts to act out the story. Andy is a frog. Mollie says, "I wanna be a frog too." She becomes very involved in being a frog, joyfully jumping around. She continues being a frog after the time for the frog part is finished.

The music teacher begins singing "My Little Rooster." Mollie watches the children intently as they choose animals and make the sounds. Mollie doesn't sing. She wiggles over to Andy, whispers, then to Adele. A child chooses "donkey," and the music teacher sings "bray" for the sound the donkey makes. Mollie screws her face into a puzzled expression and says, "No, hee-haw," quietly but audibly.

Her expression shifts rapidly and constantly. She raises her hand. The music teacher calls on her immediately. "Mollie, what's yours?" Mollie giggles, says something inaudible. The children start guessing her animal. She says clearly, "Peacock." She listens intently as the verse is sung about the peacock. Then her concentration breaks and she makes contact with Ruth Ann.

### Summary of a Child's Relationships with Adults

A summary of a child's relationships with adults can be drawn from many areas of school living, such as casual adult-child contacts throughout the day (what the child says and does); the relationship at routines and while using materials and equipment; through the roles (and the meaning given to them) adopted during



dramatic play; and the child's behavior during teacher-directed activities.

1. How frequently does the child make contact with the adult and in what situations? (routines; coming for approval, help in conflicts, with materials, ideas, etc.; to give or get affection, be comforted; express hostility; involve adult in play, seek attention, directly or indirectly; group activities, etc.)

Is there a special quality in contacts with adults?

(whining, demanding, trusting, coy, timid, belligerent, clinging, openly hostile, matter-of-fact, warmhearted, reserved, etc.)

What are the child's special mechanisms for gaining attention?

(excessive talking; tattling; showing clothes, toys, products, bruises; bringing presents; telling about family; sidling up and touching, hanging on, etc.)

2. How does child react when the teacher is a giving person? When she offers affection:

child returns it, looks uncomfortable, squirms, seems startled, stiffens up, becomes effusive and gushy, rejects offering, etc.

When she offers help:

child accepts it as a right, becomes clingy and helpless, brushes it away, becomes angry, discusses, becomes interested in procedures, etc.

When she offers suggestions:

child follows through reluctantly, eagerly; ignores; is grateful; follows through mechanically; rejects; discusses; questions; etc.

The summary of a child's total response to the teacher as a giving person would indicate:

Dependence on this adult (and possibly all adults)

Rejection of this adult (and possibly all adults)

Ability to meet adults on equal terms, both to accept and reject the adults' overtures as appropriate

3. How does child react when the teacher is a controlling, inhibiting person, curtailing child's actions and feelings?

When limits are set down, such as group rules and/or personal denial:

child defies openly; resists passively by lingering, slowing up, remaining at another task; etc.; accepts with over-seriousness; accepts with no emotional investment; accepts with a verbalization of the reason; accepts and repeats instructions with parrot-like insistence.

When criticism is given:

child cries; pouts; accepts cheerfully; shows interest; becomes belligerent; sulks; etc.

The summary of a child's total responses to the adult as an authority figure would show the child as someone who

Always does as told, to whom following adult direction seems more important than his/her own ideas, who has a consistent pattern of subordination to adult wishes—who is compliant, or

Resists authority by any one of a number of patterns, by defiance, questioning, or indifference, or

Finds a balance between carrying out her/his own independent ideas and wishes and accepting reasonable restrictions.

4. Evidences of growing independence from adults, as seen in routines, use of materials, relationships with other children, identification with other children rather than with adults (perhaps even against adults)
5. Direct verbal expressions
6. Special problems:
  - Overdependence
  - Excessive insistence on independence
  - Fear of new adults
  - Persistent hostility to adults
  - Excessive displays toward adults, including strangers

### Records of Children's Behavior with Adults

The first two months José was at school, he seemed to need a lot of reassurance from the teacher that he was doing the right thing. He seldom talked, but would raise his eyes questioningly, as if to say, "Is this all right?" With a nod and a smile from her, he would take paper and crayon, or some other material, and proceed to work. But again and again he would seek the teacher out with his eyes. After finishing any work, he would always walk slowly and proudly to the teacher and say, "See, it's for my mommy!" Since he often wandered out into the hall leading into the kitchen, the teacher asked him one day if he

would like to accompany her to get the juice. He nodded enthusiastically and walked faster than usual down the hall and into the kitchen. There he struck up the beginning of his friendship with the cook. He remarked to her after a few minutes of observation, "I like it here. What are we going to eat?" After that, José accompanied the teacher into the kitchen every morning, and he would talk to the cook as the juice was being prepared.

José seems drawn to any visiting adults and will always edge his way slowly and cautiously to their side, usually displaying something he has made for approval and appreciation. For a long time he just smiled and dropped his head if spoken to. But by now he has gained enough courage to tell his name and age if asked. He is very happy if they praise his work and lingers near until they leave.

At the beginning of the year it was evident that Amanda was embarrassed by any attention shown her by adults, except in the routine of help with clothing or toilet. She showed this by her posture, gestures, voice, facial expression, and jerky movement of her body. Next came her bid for attention by loud and excessive talking, laughing, antics, climbing performances, and pretended inability to dress herself (this last in spite of the fact that in the beginning she never needed help with dressing with the exception of placing a garment into proper position). At present she is still behaving in this attention-demanding way, but not as frequently as she has. She comes to show us her dresses (she usually wears slacks), asks to pass out items when need arises. She also seeks help in toileting. Help is not actually needed, but she apparently wants the presence of the teacher in the room.

## 7

## CLUES TO COGNITIVE FUNCTIONING: STAGE-RELATED STYLE

HOW DO WE recognize that a child is a learning child? And just as important, how do we determine that a child is having difficulties understanding what the world and reality are all about?

### HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN?

As in the nonintellectual areas of functioning, we concern ourselves here too with the *what* and the *how*: *what* does a child know; *how* does the child go about the business of learning?

Piaget's studies have made us realize that children work hard and steadily at finding meaning in everything they encounter. They continuously shape a reality that makes sense to them out of their interactions with the people, places, and things of their everyday lives. Naturally, their understanding is limited by their egocentric interpretations of everything they encounter; yet unless they are restricted by adults to learning only what adults want them to learn, they tend to explore freely and happily in a variety of directions. They need to learn from adults, of course, but they do not feel constrained to focus only on adult-directed paths unless parents and teachers misunderstand the motivating force of childhood curiosity and insist on repressing it.

Thus, the capacity to learn feeds, and blooms, on curiosity, that human birthright that goes into action the day a child is born. Read the following description of a baby less than one month old and see how early curiosity appears:

This was on the twenty-fifth day, toward evening, when the baby