

# Mothers' and teachers' opinions about the use of an observation protocol of performance of children with physical disabilities

## Opinião de mães e professoras sobre o uso de um protocolo de observação do desempenho de crianças com deficiência física

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.11606/issn.2238-6149.v27i1p36-41>

Zafani MD, Omote S, Baleotti LR. Mothers' and teachers' opinions about the use of an observation protocol of performance of children with physical disabilities. *Rev Ter Ocup Univ São Paulo*. 2016 Jan.-Apr.;27(1):36-41.

**ABSTRACT:** This paper aims to describe and analyze mothers' and teachers' opinions about use of an Observation Protocol of Performance of Children With Physical Disabilities During Painting and Collage Activities. A total of 13 mothers and 13 teachers of children with physical disabilities participated in the research. The participants had two tasks. First, fill in the Protocol after watching a recorded painting and collage activity. Subsequently, answer to an interview script prepared to identify their opinions regarding the use of this Protocol. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively. The results suggest that the Protocol is easy to fill in and the language is accessible to both groups. Its use enabled the identification of information related to the child's performance that, to some extent, may help teachers and parents carrying out school activities.

**KEYWORDS:** Psychomotor performance; People with physical disabilities; Mothers; Teachers; Children with physical disabilities/education.

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**RESUMO:** Objetivou-se descrever e analisar a opinião de mães e de professoras sobre o uso do Protocolo de Observação do Desempenho de Crianças com Deficiência Física na Realização de Atividades de Pintura e Colagem. Participaram 13 mães e 13 professoras de crianças com deficiência física. As participantes tinham duas tarefas. Primeiro, preencher o Protocolo com base na observação de uma filmagem da criança desempenhando uma atividade de pintura e colagem. Na sequência, responder a um roteiro de entrevista que tinha como objetivo identificar as suas opiniões acerca do uso deste Protocolo. Os dados foram analisados qualitativamente. Os resultados sugerem que o Protocolo é de fácil preenchimento e de linguagem acessível para ambos os grupos. O seu uso representou uma possibilidade para identificar informações referentes ao desempenho da criança que, em alguma medida, podem contribuir para a atuação do professor e dos pais frente à realização de atividades escolares.

**DESCRIPTORES:** Desempenho psicomotor; Pessoas com deficiência; Mães; Docentes; Crianças com deficiência/educação.

The paper is part of M. D. Zafani master's thesis, available in the library of the Faculty of Philosophy and Science, Unesp, campus Marília. - Financial support: CAPES. Partial results of this study were presented at: V Brazilian Congress on Special Education, VII National Meeting of Special Education Researchers, São Carlos, November 14-17, 2012; VII Multidisciplinary Brazilian Congress of Special Education, VIII Meeting of the Brazilian Association of Researchers in Special Education, Londrina, PR, November 05-07, 2013

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## INTRODUCTION

The "Observation Protocol of Performance of Children with Physical Disabilities During Painting and Collage Activities"<sup>1</sup> was developed to measure parents and teachers perception of two aspects of performance of children with physical disabilities in an activity usually carried out in the school context. These aspects are related to children ability or inability and independence or dependence to perform the steps of a painting and collage activity<sup>1</sup>.

The interest in studying parents' and teachers' perceptions of the child's performance lies in the importance of considering the influence of its internal variables (values, beliefs, expectations, prejudice, stereotypes etc.) and social environment on the formation of the percept regarding the child with disability<sup>2</sup>. The observer ends up revealing his/her own perspective and often projects his own feelings and beliefs about the person observed. This process can determine the nature of people's interaction, implying, among other consequences, more or less attention, expectation and demands.

"Studies on the nature of a child's perception from the perspective of family members and teachers can contribute to the understanding of the involvement of these actors in the inclusion process of this child in school contexts" (p. 24)<sup>3</sup>.

It is necessary to create conditions or procedures for parents and teachers to feel they are able to contribute to the child's development process and to participate actively in this process. Accordingly, the opportunity to observe the child's activity performance by parents and teachers may draw attention to specific performance details and, consequently, make easier to express opinions on the child's potentialities and difficulties. Since parents and teachers are carefully observing the same aspects of performance, there are concrete and specific elements that may contribute to the discussion on impressions and perceptions.

The family and the school are considered responsible for the promotion of human development, acting as a promoter or inhibitor of an individual intellectual, physical, emotional and social growth<sup>4</sup>. At school, "the support given to cognitive, psychological, social and cultural needs of a child is carried out in a more structured and pedagogical way than at home" (p. 304)<sup>5</sup>. Contrarily, the family environment has different methods, goals and contents, promoting the socialization process,

protection and development of its members affective, social and cognitively<sup>4</sup>.

Marcondes and Sigolo<sup>6</sup> called attention to the need for collaboration and communication between parents and teachers, so that family and school contexts become beneficial to the child's integral development. However, this relationship does not work always in a harmonious and satisfactory way, because often the expectations of each party involved are not met<sup>7</sup>. Parents and teachers must know what they expect from the child, what they believe or realize the child is able to do, because it is through the exchange of information between them that it will be possible to identify the child's capabilities and limitations and discuss them<sup>1</sup>.

Although the Observation Protocol of Performance of Children With Physical Disabilities has not yet been used with the aim to investigate its contribution to approximate family and school, it is assumed that the way it should be used and scored may bring them together.

Parents and teachers watch the recordings of the children performing painting and collage activities and then indicate separately the option that better fits their judgment regarding the children's performance. This procedure allowed the identification, in a previous study, of each of these subjects perception of the child's performance, the perceptions divergences and convergences. When researching the similarities and differences in the perception of parents and teachers we tried to enlighten issues that may contribute to the construction of a consonant relationship between them<sup>1</sup>. The constitution of this relationship can be investigated in future studies by using the Observation Protocol of Performance of Children With Physical Disabilities During Painting and Collage Activities. Hence, this Protocol requires an accessible language, easy to understand by its users.

In this perspective, the overall objective of this study is to describe and analyze mothers' and teachers' opinions about the use of this Observation Protocol. The specific objectives are: to identify the ease and/or difficulty of using the Protocol, the items semantic adequacy and the opinion of observing the child's performance.

## METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy and Science of the State University of São Paulo – FFC/UNESP/Marília-SP, under the protocol number 0125/2011.

Thirteen teachers participated in this study, who had students with physical disabilities aged from 4 to 9 years: three early childhood teachers, nine elementary school teachers and one special education teacher. Teachers' age ranged from 29 to 53 years old. Of the thirteen teachers, twelve had a degree in pedagogy and one had teacher training.

In addition to the teachers, we included thirteen mothers of children with physical disabilities in the study. The mothers' age ranged from 25 to 42 years old. Regarding educational background, one mother had elementary school, two had some elementary school level, four completed high school level, four had some high school, and two mothers had completed Higher Education. All participants signed the informed consent form.

We used two means of data collection, described below:

1 – Observation protocol of performance of the children with physical disabilities during painting and collage activities, developed by Zafani<sup>1</sup> (2013) and focuses on identifying parents' and teachers' perceptions of performance of these children aged between 4 and 9 years. The children performed activities chosen for their suitability for parents and teachers detailed observation. Activity standardization was a methodological requirement. It is worth mentioning that there was no intention of educating children through the chosen activity, since the Protocol's focus is not on the learning process of students with disabilities, nor on their inclusion. This research Protocol on similarities and differences between family and school perception points out the importance of having consistency between them in the context of inclusive education<sup>1</sup>.

The activities have been previously selected and analyzed to adapt them for perceptual, cognitive and motor skills of children of different ages. Three painting and collage activities were elaborated with different degrees of difficulties, such as number of parts to be glued, drawing complexity, figure-ground discrimination ability and collage complexity<sup>1</sup>.

This Protocol consists of 20 items, divided into two sections. Section 1 contains 13 items and section 2 contains 7 items. Section 1, on motor skills, scores the child's efficiency to move objects and him or herself in the environment. Section 2, on process skills, scores quality of performance based on attention, comprehension, spatial notion and visual perception.

In each of the Protocol's items there are two columns with four response alternatives. Column 1 contains four response alternatives regarding the child's ability or inability of executing the activity:

capable without difficulty, capable with little difficulty, capable with great difficulty and not capable. Column 2 contains four response alternatives regarding the child's independence or dependence in executing the activity: does not need help, needs little help, needs a lot of help and the therapist performs this step of the activity without the child's participation.

Participants watch the recording of their child or student performing a painting and collage activity and based on their observation they fill in the Protocol. Mothers and teachers choose one response alternative from column 1 and one from column 2 in all items of the Protocol.

To measure parents' and teachers' perception from the Protocol they filled, it was necessary that they observe the same standardized performance situation of the child, and for this reason we established the use of filming.

2 – Structured interview script, composed of three questions. One close question with five response alternatives: very easy to fill in, easy to fill in, neither easy nor difficult, hard to fill in and very difficult to fill in. When the respondents chose one of the last two alternatives, they must justify their choice.

Two open questions intended to identify the participants' opinion on the existence of items of difficult understanding and the reasons for such difficulty, as well as their opinion on the experience of observing the child's performance in the recording.

A day and time was scheduled with mothers and teachers, individually, for watching the recording, filling in the Protocol and answering the structured interview script. Teachers carried out the activity in the school where students are integrated and mothers carried out the activity in the rehabilitation clinic where children receive care.

The answers were recorded and fully transcribed for further analysis. The reports were read and examined in detail to identify and organize the units of analysis, which consisted of stretches of speech grouped by criterion of thematic similarity. It was determined three axes of analysis:

- *Degree of ease or difficulty of filling in the Protocol* that includes the participants evaluation of the degree of ease or difficulty of using the Protocol;
- *Understanding of items wording* that verifies whether there was difficulty in understanding the content of each of the items and the reason for such difficulty;
- *Opinion on the experience in observing the child's performance* that illustrates with reports assigning adjectives to the experience; and verbal reports that illustrate the respondents' self-evaluation on their

actions concerning the child and their opinion on the child's abilities.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are organized by axes of analysis. Teachers are identified by the letter T and the mothers by the letter M.

### Axis 1 - Degree of ease or difficulty of filling in the Protocol

This axis contains the analysis of the participants' opinions on ease or difficulty of using the Protocol. Table 1 shows the results obtained.

**Table 1** – Degree of ease or difficulty of filling in the Protocol

Respondents	Chosen alternatives				
	Very easy	Easy	Neither easy nor difficult	Difficult	Very difficult
Teachers	3	9	1	0	0
Mothers	4	9	0	0	0

Source: Developed by the authors.

Data indicate that for most respondents the Protocol is easy to use.

It is worth mentioning that when M3 answered this question during the interview, she mentioned other kinds of difficulties, not in filling in the Protocol, as is stated below:

*It was difficult for me to see him doing like this, separately, segmenting the activity. And it is also difficult to say and think that he is incapable. (M3).*

We derive from M3 words two important factors for consideration. The first one refers to the difficulty in observing the child's performance based on the analysis of segments that constitute the activity. By way of example, to answer the Protocol items related to gluing, it was not observed globally, but in face of all steps involved: holding, rotating, tightening, among others; those steps exemplify what M3 referred as "segmenting the activity".

In fact, for a mother, this viewpoint may be complex, because it consists of paying attention to elements occurring before and during the execution of an activity throughout its conclusion. In their everyday lives, mothers possibly observe the activities performed by the child

from a more global perspective, not from a fragmented one. This perspective is inserted in Occupational Therapy knowledge as a way to analyze the activity taking into account the task demands, the person and the environment. The Protocol used in this study was developed by an occupational therapist and thus it was considered essential the performance observation from this perspective.

Another point of M3 answer seems to be related with feelings of denial in face of disability, widely described in literature<sup>8,9,10</sup>. Such feeling might have emerged in the moment that the mother noticed and mentioned the child's disability in the performance of the activity observed. Indeed, for many mothers of children with physical disabilities it may be difficult and even painful to recognize and declare that their child has some kind of limitation or is incapable of performing a certain task. This difficulty may be related to denial in face of disability and/or incapacity<sup>8</sup>. Camargo and Londero<sup>11</sup> state that, for many parents of children with disabilities, denial arises as one of the mechanisms adopted to provide an answer that is contrary to reality. This mechanism seemed to be very present in M3 answer.

### Axis 2 – Understanding of the wording of items

This axis was introduced to analyze possible difficulties of participants in understanding the content expressed in each of the Observation Protocol items, as well as to find out the reason for eventual difficulties.

The results indicate that none of the respondents had difficulty in understanding. This suggests that the content of the Protocol items used in this study is presented in a clear, simple way and elucidates the points to be observed, without confusing the respondent.

### Axis 3 – Opinion concerning experience in observing the child's performance

In general, the respondents used positive adjectives to describe their experience in the proposed activity, such as important, very good, interesting, productive, innovative/different experience, among others. The following selection exemplifies these data.

*I thought it was good, because it brings a little more information [...]. (T2).*

*I thought it was a productive opportunity. (T3).*

*I found it very interesting and I was surprised with the performance [...] (M3).*

*I thought it was good, it was possible to see her difficulties. (M10).*

The teachers emphasized that observation gave them opportunity to more thoroughly examine the child's performance, which probably will contribute to the review of their pedagogical actuation, according to the reports below.

*I thought it was important to see what he is able to do. The way you organized made it possible to see clearly which are the capabilities he has and the ones he does not have. And makes it possible for me, from what you did, to develop even other activities he's capable of doing. (T7).*

*I thought it was interesting, because I could see how his independence is. Because here he is very whining, he asks a lot of help at school and on the recording he didn't ask any. It was good to see the capabilities. I know he can do it but I have to keep saying to him to do it alone. It helped in my behavior towards him. (T8).*

*I thought it very interesting, because on everyday routine you are not able to be observing so many aspects, as in a recording that you can more specifically evaluate. It's different, when you're in the classroom you notice things, you can't not notice, but to pause to watch on the recording is different. (T13).*

The reports suggest that the possibility of observing the student on the recording can be a useful strategy in continuous formation of teachers and, besides, positively impact pedagogical practice in the classroom. Studies show that observation, analysis and critical reflection together has been an important tool for promotion of changes in reports and teacher's pedagogical practice, under the mediation of the researcher<sup>12</sup>.

As for the mothers, reports suggest that they realized that they underestimated their children's capacity, as stated in the answers transcribed below:

*Very good, because I thought he went much better than I expected. At home we end up doing things for him, we don't wait and let him do it, as you did. So it was very good. (M2).*

*I liked it, because I didn't even know he was capable of gluing, because I never let him glue, cut, never. I thought he didn't know how. (M13).*

Through the recording mothers were able to perceive their child's functional capacity, not perceived before. Such an opportunity could be even richer if observation was made along with health and/or education professionals that keep close watch over the child<sup>1</sup>. Reflections that seek to highlight the child's skills, instead of guidance on care, or the necessity of tasks to be stimulated by the caregiver, may help trigger feelings of enthusiasm and positive expectations in what concerns the development and social integration of children with physical disabilities.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The aim of this report was to present mother's and teacher's opinions on the use of the Observation Protocol of Performance of Children With Physical Disabilities During Painting and Collage Activities. In general, the results suggest that the Protocol can be easily understood by its users.

Furthermore, the results show that this Protocol may improve the interface between health and education professionals, facilitating the approach and joint reflection in what concerns inclusive education.

Teacher self-reflection on the pedagogical practice, observing and scoring systematically the child's performance, points to future investment in researches that try to gather data about the possibility of health care professionals, especially occupational therapists who work in education, use this Protocol as mediating the continuous formation of teachers who work with children with physical disabilities.

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Article received on: 07/14/15.

Article accepted on: 03/23/16.