

NICE & MEAN INTERACTION SCALE CODING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Kurt W. Fischer, Rebecca Hencke, Helen Hand, Catherine Ayoub, and Claire Russell
Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Page 1 of 7

➤ **SKILL**

A skill is a capacity to act in an organized way in a specific context - emotions are action based and context specific: like riding a bike, playing tennis or performing interpersonal communication. Skills do not appear fully developed; they are built gradually through the practice of real activities, in real contexts and are gradually extended to new contexts by the same strategic process. Skill is a useful way of conceptualizing the developmental relationship among psychological, socio-cultural and biological processes because skills are built on and integrate these processes (Fischer & Biddell, 1998).

➤ **PRETENSE**

During replica or symbolic play, the child implicitly or explicitly takes on a role and/or attributes roles to his/her play partners or to dolls and other toys (Adapted from the Emotions in Pretense Manual. We need to develop this definition and give some examples. Please bring us your contributions☺)

➤ **EMOTION**

Emotion refers to the biasing or constraining of an individual's action tendencies based on their assessment of the physical or cognitive environment such that it is positive or negative, beneficial or threatening (Lazarus, 1991; Fischer & Biddell, 1998)

➤ **THEME**

A theme represents a specific bias toward a central overarching idea during play, so for example a child might be playing "cops and robbers" with much used of aggressive action tendencies, making aggression a theme in that child's play during that episode. You may find that the child doesn't reveal any themes during their story telling or responses to questions and prompts. Alternatively (and usually), you will find that the child displays combinations of themes. At the time of the thematic display, we ask you to observe the child's emotional/affective state and to consider whether these are congruent with the thematic display. Please consult the manual each and every time that you code to ensure that you always document the child's thematic/emotional displays.

NICE & MEAN INTERACTION SCALE CODING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Kurt W. Fischer, Rebecca Hencke, Helen Hand, Catherine Ayoub, and Claire Russell
Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Page 2 of 7

➤ WHERE DO I START?

N.B.: Please familiarize yourself with the Nice/Mean Manual before starting to code. If you require extra literature or training vhs tapes then please ask the project coordinator. You should also have attended the training meetings and will not receive vhs tapes to code until you have reached reliability with your year's intake of research team members.

1. It is always a good idea to look through the full measure administration before starting to code. Always start at the beginning and work your way to the end when watching the administration.
2. **Start with the basic questions:**
 - Does the child observe the task administration (i.e. are they focused)?
 - Does the interviewer administer the task correctly (i.e. does s/he follow the protocol)?
 - Does the child attempt to provide a storytelling effort when asked to repeat the story?
 - Does the child act with the dolls, narrate, or do both?
 - Does the child elaborate on the story they are told?
 - Does the child switch the story around in any way or start with a spontaneous story from the story they are told?
 - Does the child refuse to tell a story or refuse to answer questions when prompted? Does the child only refuse when they are asked to refer to themselves, or do they refuse with reference to others? Or, do they refuse to tell stories or answer questions in relation to self and other?
 - Does the interviewer need to prompt the child beyond their initial story telling effort?
 - Does the child meet the passing criterion (as shown on your coding form)?
 - What themes and emotions are displayed in the child's story telling efforts and when they are prompted? Are they congruent according to theme-emotion and emotion-affect? What is the valence of the themes/emotions?

➤ TASK ZERO

Task Zero used to be called the 'warm up task'. If you are unsure if the child is representational (usually this occurs when the child is a young preschooler) then you will need to administer task zero. Although it is included in both of the manuals (adult/child and peers), it only needs to be administered **once**. If the child fails Task Zero and fails the first story on Task One (either adult/child or peer versions) then you do not need to proceed with the administration. Note that the form requires less coding for task zero than for other tasks. This is because we are interested in whether the child passes or fails this task in order to ascertain whether we can proceed to administer the later tasks (task one onwards).

**NICE & MEAN INTERACTION SCALE CODING
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
&
OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS**

Kurt W. Fischer, Rebecca Hencke, Helen Hand, Catherine Ayoub, and Claire Russell
Harvard University Graduate School of Education

NICE & MEAN INTERACTION SCALE CODING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Kurt W. Fischer, Rebecca Hencke, Helen Hand, Catherine Ayoub, and Claire Russell
Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Page 4 of 7

➤ **OVERALL PASS / FAIL DECISION FOR EACH TASK**

The decision to pass or fail the child on each task must be taken in accordance with the criterion for passing that is listed in each task story (see your coding form). Most of these criteria give the child credit if they repeated the story (verbally or through acting with dolls) *or* if they responded appropriately to questions and prompts. Thus, we are interested in whether the child passed through their storytelling effort **and/or** through questioning/prompting afterwards so please be sure to mark this on the form. We ask you to follow the pass criteria **exactly** as it is laid out. This was developed by Professor Fischer and it is vital that you adhere to this when you code the child's performance, in order to prevent coder drift. However, we actively encourage you to ask questions and discuss ambiguities in team meetings (you need to drop off your vhs tape/question to the project coordinator one-week *before* the scheduled discussion date to give the team leader time to look at the story) or via electronic mail. It would be useful if we could cc everyone in on the mail so that we all learn from the discussion. If you agree with this, please let us know when you email us.

➤ **IN ORDER TO DISCONTINUE THE ADMINISTRATION:**

The interviewer will usually observe the child's failure on the task they are administering and on another **two** tasks before discontinuing with the measure administration. *For example*, IF a child fails task 3, the child must then fail task 4 (N) and task 4 (M) whereupon the administrator will discontinue the administration. However, if the child passes at **any** stage (i.e. fails task 3, fails task 4 (N) and then passes on task 4 (M), then the interviewer should continue with the administration).

➤ **TASK**

A task is the name that is given to the specific level of the nice/mean administration. In total, there are 12 tasks for the Peer measure and 12 tasks for the Adult/Child measure. It is unusual for the child to be administered all of these tasks in the sample that we have in the Developmental Pathways Project and in the Early Head Start Project. However, you should always keep the manual with you (to reduce researcher drift) and be prepared to administer the full measure if necessary. When the child is young (i.e. a preschooler) or if the child's representational level is questionable/not known, it will be necessary to administer Task Zero. Regardless of whether you intend to administer the Peers **or** the Adult/Child measure first, Task Zero only needs to be administered once. If the child passes and is assessed as being 'representational' then you need to proceed to administer the full nice/mean measure until the child fails the procedure (see notes above regarding this).

NICE & MEAN INTERACTION SCALE CODING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Kurt W. Fischer, Rebecca Hencke, Helen Hand, Catherine Ayoub, and Claire Russell
Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Page 5 of 7

➤ **PUPPET**

The role of the puppet in the administration is two fold. The puppet is useful in task zero. It assists the administrator to ascertain whether the child has sensori motor/representational skills (does the child understand the use of the puppet as an 'other?', can the child find the puppet?, name it?, be nice to it?, be mean to it and so on – see task zero in your manual). Secondly, the puppet may be employed as a strategy to elicit a story from the child. The child may tell you that you have just read the story so you do not need the child to tell you again! In this case, you can ask the child to tell the story to the puppet who was hiding and did not hear the story. The children usually like the puppet so it is a nice addition to this measure. Please be careful to ensure that your puppet does not look frightening and does not frighten the child [especially with the DPP sample of children].

➤ **SWITCH**

A switch is defined in different ways. It may occur when the child tells a story with a different valence to the one that they were shown (i.e. a child is told a mean story and the child tells a nice story). A switch is also coded when a child changes the character's behavior (i.e. the child is told a story when the mummy doll is being mean and the child tells a story where the self doll is mean to the mummy doll). Combinations of the above may also occur (i.e. a child switches the valence *and* the character's behavior). In order for a switch to be coded, the child's story must be similar in some way to the administration protocol story that they were told. If the story is unconnected in any way, then code SPONTANEOUS. If the story the child tells moves beyond the switch valence and/or character behavior then code SWITCH & ELABORATION.

➤ **SHIFT**

A shift is defined when a child shifts from a nice to a mean story or from a mean to a nice story. OR A shift is defined when a child has a different character perform the nice or mean action. So, if a child is told a story where the Mom doll is mean but the child tells a story where the child doll is mean, this is a shift.

➤ **DEVIATION**

A deviation is defined when a
ELABORATION

NICE & MEAN INTERACTION SCALE CODING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Kurt W. Fischer, Rebecca Hencke, Helen Hand, Catherine Ayoub, and Claire Russell
Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Page 6 of 7

The child elaborates beyond the task version that they are given by the interviewer. *The child always starts with the same story.* The child may provide an elaborated version that follows the same trajectory of the story on the protocol (i.e. they add more detail into a nice story but they still ‘stick’ with the nice story). Alternatively, the child may elaborate and not follow the same trajectory as the story.

EXAMPLE:

The child is told a nice story i.e. Johnny and Billy kick the ball and say nice things.

The child may elaborate and say the same as above and then say “after playing ball they went home for dinner”. Alternatively, the child may elaborate and say “after playing ball they got into a fight because Johnny wouldn’t share his candy with Billy”. (in the latter example, the child elaborates, deviates and shifts in focus).

➤ HIGH SUPPORT/LOW SUPPORT

The measure has been administered in the context of **high** support when the administrator first tells the story according to the protocols **and then** prompts for response or asks questions in an attempt to engage the child or ascertain the child’s responses. If the administrator tells only the story and then asks the child to repeat the story with **no** prompts/comments/questions then the administration is considered to be ‘low support’.

➤ SPONTANEOUS STORY

The child offers a spontaneous story that arises independently and is not connected to the administration protocol that they have just heard. So, if the child is told a mean peer story and the child begins to tell a story about ‘when they went swimming with grandma last week’, it is considered to be a spontaneous story. The child can start by following an administration protocol and lead into a spontaneous story but remember that the spontaneous story must not be connected to the administration protocol that they just heard (i.e. the child has finished with their version of the protocol they heard and is now telling another story). If that story *is* connected to the administration protocol that they just heard then code it as ‘elaboration’ instead.

➤ REFUSAL

The child may refuse to tell a story. The child may also refuse to answer questions when they are prompted. If the child is distracted when they are asked for their version of the story and/or they take some encouragement to get ‘on task’ then code this as refusal (even though the child may have then proceeded to tell a story/answer questions about

NICE & MEAN INTERACTION SCALE CODING FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS & OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Kurt W. Fischer, Rebecca Hencke, Helen Hand, Catherine Ayoub, and Claire Russell
Harvard University Graduate School of Education

Page 7 of 7

that story. In any case, we would like to capture and code that response. Specifically, we need to know if the child refused to tell a story or answer questions with reference to the doll that is them (self) in the task, OR does the child refuse to tell a story or answer questions with reference to others (i.e. peer or adult) OR does the child refuse with reference to both self and other? Please write this on the coding form.