Structured Observation of Children’s Play with Teacher Impression Scale: a test among Swedish Preschool Teachers

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Background
Children with special educational needs (SEN) could risk become less included in play with peers in inclusive early childhood education (ECE) without appropriate support. According to several research studies and official reports this also applies to the Swedish ECE context, where 85% of all children aged 1-5 (2018) are enrolled in predominantly inclusive preschools.

For ECE professionals and researchers to plan for support and interventions for increased peer interaction in play between children with SEN and without SEN, observations with a functional approach could be viable, as also children without formal diagnosis, could have SEN. That is, observing social behaviours as these appear in different play situations in natural settings, rather than with starting-point in traditional disability categories. The Teacher Impression Scale (TIS) may serve this purpose.

Teacher Impression Scale
• is an informal rating scale for structured observations of children’s social behaviour in play situations.
• can be used to identify children needing interventions to participate in play with peers, and to plan for and evaluate such interventions.
• has 16 items, rated on five point Likert scale (1 = never performs skill, to 5 = frequently performs skill).
• was originally developed for the intervention Play Time/Social Time, which aims to increase interaction in play for children with SEN aged 3-5. This intervention stimulates basic social skills such as sharing, persistence, requesting to share, play organizing, agreeing and helping, through peer-mediated learning.

Aims

To test the reliability of the Swedish version of Teacher Impression Scale, TIS-S, to evaluate its use for identifying participants for interventions aiming at increasing interaction in play between children with and without SEN, and to explore its social validity for teachers in inclusive Swedish preschools.

Method
Participants and settings
16 teachers at 12 preschools in four Swedish municipalities participated in the study. The teachers conducted observations with TIS-S of two children each aged 3-5, considered of the teachers as having SEN (N=16) and as not having SEN (N=16), and evaluated TIS-S by a Social Validity Survey which followed a three-component definition of social validity.

Measures
• Teacher Impression Scale the Swedish version (TIS-S)
• Social Validity Survey (fourteen closed and eight open-ended questions)

Data Analysis
• Descriptive statistics
• Principal Components Analysis
• Thematic Analysis

Results
The scale provided satisfactory values of internal consistency, with a Cronbach’s Alpha reliability coefficient of .97.

The scale mean total scores on TIS-S were calculated for all children (N=32; M=56.8; SD=17.1; CI= 50.67-63.01) and for the two groups: children with SEN (N=16; M=43.3; SD=11.46; CI=37.20-49.42) and children without SEN (N=16; M=70.3; SD=9; CI=65.53-75.21). The difference between these groups was significant (ANOVA child with SEN, child without SEN, F= 54.73, p-value < 0.000).

For the teachers TIS-S was social valid in terms of suitability of observation goals, acceptability of observation procedures and satisfaction with the observations’ results.

Conclusions
The results demonstrate that TIS-S has high internal reliability and indicates that it supported identification of participants for play interventions.

The teachers in Swedish ECE settings perceived TIS-S suitable to clarify children’s needs of support in interactions with peers, to plan for adaptations for all children in the social learning environment and to reflect upon the complexity of children’s social behaviour in play. The study indicates that TIS-S was considered acceptable for the teachers when related to the objectives of socially accessible learning environments.

Further tests of TIS-S in a larger sample are planned with the aim to verify its test-retest reliability, and to evaluate trials of peer-mediated interventions for increased interaction in play for children with SEN.

Key References


This study is part of an ongoing Swedish research project on Play Time/Social Time and other ECE interventions. Follow link for more information:
www.rikshandeln.com

Fig. 1. Sharing behaviour in play for children with and without SEN (N=16), M=6.5, SD=3.7; CI=3.42-9.59.
Fig. 2. Engaged social play behaviour for children with and without SEN (N=16), M=3.9, SD=1.2; CI=2.55-5.25.
Fig. 3. Engaged interactional behaviour for children with and without SEN (N=16), M=6.9, SD=2.4; CI=4.12-9.67.
Fig. 4. Social emergence for children with and without SEN (N=16), M=6.5; CI=5.03-8.02.

Note. Teacher Impression Scale (Odom & McConnell, 1997).

Useful knowledge and applications
Doable observation procedures
Highlights several dimensions of play
Supports reflections about play and interaction
Makes me aware that social play changes with context
Gives insights in children’s strenghts and challenges

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