

***TEACHING STYLES RATING SCALE
(TSRS)***

Manual

1998

*R. A. McWilliam
Rebecca A. Zulli
Renée E. L. de Kruif*

*Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill*

Introduction

The Teaching Styles Rating Scale (TSRS; McWilliam, Scarborough, Bagby, Sweeney, 1996) was developed to capture specific interactional behaviors and affective characteristics of early childhood teachers¹. We needed such a scale to complement a microbehavioral coding system we were using in a research project. Part I of the rating scale has items similar to the coding system, but Part II has items hard to capture through microcoding. The purpose of the TSRS was, therefore, to measure the quality of interaction behaviors and affective characteristics of teachers for research. We realize, however, that such a measure might also be useful for supervision, self-monitoring, and guided observation (e.g., by parents).

Instructions for Using the Rating Scale

The TSRS measures two basic aspects of teaching: specific interactional behaviors and general affect.

Interactive Behaviors

The interactive behaviors are measured through seven discrete items² found on the front of the instrument. Ratings consist of seven points with four anchors: *never*, *occasionally*, *often*, and *most of the time*. The behaviors rated on this scale are not mutually exclusive, so a number of items could be rated as occurring most of the time. Note that the ratings should be based on the proportion of interactive time spent in each interaction behavior. For example, if a teacher seems to have elicited behavior related to what children were already doing almost every time she interacted with them, the rating should be a 7 (*most of the time*).

Affect

Affect is measured through 13 items that can be averaged³ to produce a single score for affect. Affect ratings consist of five points with three anchors, which are different for each item. Because of these differences, the rater needs to read the anchors carefully.

Scoring Instructions

At the end of the observation period (e.g., 15 minutes, as suggested below), read each item carefully and circle the number that best describes what you observed during the observation period. Be careful not to include ratings that reflect observations you have made at other times. If you're afraid you're not capturing the essence of a teacher's style, this indicates you need more observations or longer observation sessions. Circle one number for each item, and be sure to score each item.

¹ "Teachers" is used to refer to caregivers working with young children. Similarly "Teaching" is used to refer to the variety of interactions caregivers have with children. The terms are not meant to restrict who is considered a teacher nor what interactions are considered teaching.

² Internal consistency for the interactional behavior items was low, indicating that the items do not measure a single construct.

³ Internal consistency for the affect items was .85, indicating that the items measure a single construct.

Recommended Usage of the Rating Scale

This rating scale was originally designed to be used in multiple observations of each teacher, because a single observation tells us very little about the characteristics of an individual's teaching style. In our investigations, the rating scale was used to collect data in four to eight different sessions on each individual teacher. The observations also varied by the activities that were being conducted. For example, in one study we observed the teachers during four unstructured classroom activities, two meal times, and two structured activities.

The recommended observation period is 15 minutes. If the teacher is forced to leave the room to converse with a parent, administrator, to obtain materials, and so on, the observation should be lengthened so that the teacher is observed for a full 15 minutes. If the teacher is forced to spend a large amount of time soothing a crying child or rocking an infant to sleep, you may also wish to lengthen the observational period. The intent is to watch the teacher when he or she has opportunities to interact with children, and you should only lengthen the time spent in the classroom when circumstances prevent the teacher from interacting with the children. A teacher might regularly use free play time to get materials ready for future activities, plan with the assistant, or clean up the room. Because nothing prevents the teacher from interacting with the children, the observation time should remain unaltered and the teacher should be rated on the basis of what was observed. Decisions about observation in infant rooms are more difficult. Ideally, you would observe the teacher interacting with awake and happy children. If the teacher is putting a child to sleep or is forced to spend a great deal of time trying to comfort a crying child you will get very limited information on the teacher's normal interaction style. In these cases, it would be best to discard the observation and come back when circumstances are more conducive to capturing interaction between the teacher and the children. If the teacher has spent the majority of the observation time interacting with children who are awake and happy, then the observation can be used or extended as the observer sees fit.

Interactive Behaviors

1. Redirects

Teacher *stops current child engagement* to get a child to do something different. This does not include natural classroom transitions. Redirections can only occur when a child is presently engaged in some activity. (See *introduces* for when child is nonengaged.) Redirections can be a direct attempt to stop inappropriate behavior. Redirections also occur when a teacher redirects a child's attention from appropriate engagement in one activity to engagement in another.

Examples

With infants. Hiding toys, ringing bells, or squeaking toys in an attempt to attract a child's attention from their present engagement (this is very common when the child is sucking on a toy); moving a child away from an object or other child; taking an object away from a child; or positioning a child so they can no longer see what they had been observing.

With toddlers. When the child is hitting or grabbing at something the teacher will say, "Gentle," or, "Softly." Other common redirects are, "We don't hit our friends," "He doesn't want you

to...,” “That’s not the way we use that toy,” “It’s not your turn.” With toddlers, many of the nonverbal examples for infants are also likely to apply.

With older children. When a child is trying to make something at an art activity, reaching for glue, paint, etc., and teacher moves the item away or takes it away from the child, saying, “You do not need more paint.” In the water center, when a child goes to wash a doll: “We are not going to put the babies in the water table today.” Other phrases often heard when a teacher is trying to get a child to stop doing something: “You are going to need to find something else to do,” “I am going to have to ask you to go to another center,” “We already have enough children here,” “This center is full.” When a teacher calls an already engaged child to join a new activity, it is a redirect.

2 Introduces

This item is designed to capture any teacher behavior attempting to *give a new activity* to a child not presently engaged, such as wandering aimlessly around the room, staring off into the distance, or looking for activities to join. Introductions take place when a teacher invites children to join an activity, provide the children with an activity, or make suggestions for potential activities.

Examples

With infants. The teacher takes out toys and gives them to children who are awake. The teacher puts on music and encourages the children to dance. Any new activity or toy that the teacher gives to the infants who are not currently doing anything is an introduction. A child gets bored with the object she has—and therefore is nonengaged—and the teacher introduces her to a new activity or another use of the object she had.

With toddlers. With toddlers introductions are more verbal: “Do you want to throw the ball?”, “Do you want to come paint a picture?”, “Who wants to play dress up?” Again, introductions require that a child is not presently engaged in any activity, and the teacher is offering something to do. The teacher may also take out new materials and give them to children. Many of the examples for infants will also apply here.

With older children. Verbally inviting a child to join an activity or bringing materials to a child who is not doing anything. This frequently happens when the teacher is involved in an activity and a child wanders over or nearby. Another frequent form of introductions with older children is asking nonengaged children what they are doing or what activity or center they would like to go to.

3 Elaborates

Elaborating is providing the children with *information or materials related to the child’s present activities* but going *beyond the scope* of the specifics of the activity. This item is designed to capture instances when the teacher is building on the child’s current activities or language by providing the children with additional related information or materials, without requesting a response from the child (see *follows*). Elaborations can be verbal or nonverbal. Verbal elaborations include teacher’s narration of a play activity, clarifying, expanding on, or restating

what a child has said by using new, different and additional words, explaining, phrases that notify the child of the presence of an item (i.e., “Here you go”). Nonverbal elaborations include demonstrating, modeling, or bringing out extra materials.

NOTE: For young children (infants and toddlers) all language provided by the teacher and related to children’s activities is considered to be elaborative. An infant or toddler teacher who is describing the child’s activities is modeling language for the child and therefore elaborating. However, merely repeating a word does not add something to the interaction and should be considered an acknowledgement. For older children (preschoolers) the teacher has to add more than just a description of the child’s activities to be rated as elaborative.

Examples

With infants. The teacher uses an exaggerated tone to model specific words. The teacher describes the child’s activity, saying, “You’re shaking the rattle. It’s making a noise,” or “You are trying to get the red block” to a child who’s reaching for a block. The teacher notices that a child is intently gazing at an object and carries the child close to the object so that the child has the opportunity to explore it further. An infant is shaking a toy and the teacher brings out other toys that make different noises when shaken.

With toddlers. The child says “buh”, and the teacher says “button”. The teacher says, “You put in two yellow squares” to a child playing with a shape sorter. When the children are playing with animals, the teacher brings out a barn they can use in their play. A child is playing with a lion, and the teacher gets out a baby lion, saying it is called a cub, telling the child they have lions at the zoo, or saying that lions live in the jungle.

With Older Children. The children are painting a picture, and the teacher notices the colors have mixed together. She uses her observation to explain how certain colors can be mixed together to produce other colors. The children are examining the hard boiled eggs they are eating, and the teacher pulls out a book about how an egg can turn into a chicken. The children have built a house in large blocks, and the teacher brings over some of the props from house keeping, such as a phone for the children to use in their play.

4 Follows

Following occurs when the teacher seeks to *elicit a response* related to the activities in which the child is presently engaged. Follows can be verbal or nonverbal. If the teacher is seeking to elicit behaviors unrelated to the child’s present engagement it would be considered *redirects*.

Examples

With infants. Holding the spoon of food in front of the infant’s mouth to get him to open it and eat, holding a toy in front of a baby to make her grasp for it, or holding an infant to encourage him to stand are examples of nonverbal follow-ins. Saying, “Shake it,” to an infant who is holding a rattle while modeling the behavior to encourage the child to imitate or holding the child’s hand and demonstrating shaking to make the child shake it.

With toddlers. Asking a child playing with a toy barn, “Where are the cows? What sound does the cow make?” or picking up the horse and asking, “Is this the cow?” Pointing to the correct

hole in a shape sorter for a child trying to put a square peg in a round hole. Putting a spoon in a child's hand to make him or her use it. Asking a child about the picture in a book: "What do you think the bear is doing? Is that the momma bear?" Telling a child who is working with Play doh, "You need to flatten it out more. Can you make me a heart? Roll it out first."

With older children. Asking a child at an art activity, "Pass me the glue. What are you making? Cut it out first. Put more glitter on it." During story time, when teachers ask questions about the book, "What do you think happens next? Why doesn't she have any shoes on?" Follows also can be nonverbal, such as pointing to an area of a picture that needs to be colored.

5 Informs

This item is designed to capture those times when the teacher is *providing information without elaborating* on the child's present activity. This item includes singing, reading, nursery rhymes, talking about future activities, field trips, teaching a lesson, informing the children what centers are open and what activities are available. The activity is initiated and directed by the teacher and is not responsive to a child-initiated activity (see *elaborations*).

Examples

With infants. The teacher tells nursery rhymes or reads stories to the children. A teacher telling the children that "Jack and Jill went up the Hill," is teacher initiated and includes directed information unrelated to the children's present activities.

With toddlers. The teacher sings songs with the children or tells them about a field trip they will be going on in the future. The teacher is reading a story to the children.

With older children. The teacher teaches (lectures) the children about insects. The teacher tells the children what centers are open and explains the activities that are available in the different centers. The teacher is reading a book or has initiated singing songs with the children.

6 Acknowledges

Acknowledging occurs when a teacher *responds to children or their activities but does not describe, expand, or follow in* on them. The teacher's behavior alerts children that she has heard or seen what they have done but does not add to the interaction or activity. Acknowledges includes repetition of what the child has said when it seems that it is not the teacher's intention to continue the interaction. Acknowledges also includes simply complying with a child's request (e.g., passing materials that were asked for, answering children's questions with a one or two word answer). Nonverbal acknowledges include such behaviors as adjusting the child's chair, brushing hair from the face, or leading the child by the hand.

Examples

With infants. A baby reaches for a rattle in the teacher's hand and the teacher simply hands it to a child. Asking an infant, "What have you got there?," "What are you looking at?" and, "What are you doing over there?," are examples of acknowledgment with infants because they do not describe the child's current activities, and a response of the infant is not expected.

With toddlers. The child says, “Ball,” and the teacher replies, “Ball,” without trying to clarify or elicit a further response. Repetition of children’s elaborations is common in many toddler classrooms. If the child asks the teacher for the Play-doh, the teacher’s handing the child the Play-doh is a nonverbal acknowledgment.

With older children. Child: “My dad drives a truck.” Teacher: “He does, doesn’t he.”
Child: “We finished our pictures.” Teacher: “OK.” A child asks for more milk and the teacher gets up and gets it. Acknowledging also occurs when the teacher says, “Uh huh,” in response to children’s statements. The children run over to the teacher who is busy and tell her they went to the moon. The teacher replies, “That must have been fun,” and then goes back to what she had been doing.

7 Praises

The teacher increases affect to *convey pleasure or admiration* of children, their behavior, their efforts, or their products. Praise is usually characterized by a noticeable change in intonation from the teachers normal voice and affect. The teacher’s apparent intent is to reinforce the child’s participation in an activity by conveying pleasure or admiration to the child.

Examples

With infants. “Good reaching! OOOHH! Yeah!” Any verbal expression that conveys pleasure with the child or the child’s actions is praise. An infant teacher may be able to display these feeling through exaggerated facial expressions and clapping.

With toddlers. Clapping is frequently used with toddlers, but in order for it to be considered praise it must be accompanied by animated affect. Most frequently, clapping and the word *Yay* are used to convey pleasure. A teacher may say, “Good job!” to a child who has just fit a shape in the hole. Young children can initiate praise; when the teacher joins in, it is considered praise on the teacher’s part.

With older children. The need for change in affect and intonation is still present but it need not be as dramatic with older children. The focus here is on a sincere attempt to convey pleasure with the child, the child’s work, or the child’s behavior. “I really like the picture you are making,” “That’s a great mask you’ve made,” “Wow! You really stacked those high,” “That was really nice of you to share your crayon with Michael.” This also includes any excited praise such as “Great!”, “Good Job!”, “Wow!”, etc.

Affect

8 Activity Level

This item is designed to measure *how much energy* the teacher seems to be expending in order to meet the children's needs. Differences in the amount of energy expended can be judged on how *stationary* the teacher is during the session. Is the teacher seated on the floor in one location, requiring the children to come over to her, or is she moving around and approaching the children's activities? Does the teacher get up to follow the children when necessary? Do not count a teacher as not exerting energy merely because of physical movement. Many activities such as story time do not require the teacher to move. In these cases focus on the energy the teacher is exerting to keep the children interested, such as asking and answering questions and supplementing the activity. Scoring reflects the amount of energy.

High score (5). Getting materials for the children, answering questions, putting in the mental or physical energy to maximize activities and meet the children's needs.

Low score (1). Exerting little energy to meet the needs of the children as evidenced by being stationary and only having limited interaction with the children who approach the teacher. Running about cleaning tables, straightening the room, or setting up activities would also score on the lower end of the scale, because while highly active, there is not interaction with children.

9 Positive Expression

This item is designed to measure the *extent to which the teacher conveys enthusiasm, excitement, and happiness* to the children and affect during interactions with the children. Does the teacher smile often or does she seem to have a blank expression? Does the teacher convey excitement through voice inflection or use more of a monotonous voice? Scoring reflects the frequency of positive expressions and nothing about negative expression.

High score (5). Frequent smiling and the use voice inflection to convey pleasure, happiness, and excitement would score on the higher end of the continuum.

Low score (1). No use of an excited tone of voice and no display of positive facial expressions such as smiles (e.g., apparently remaining calm).

10 Negative Expression

This item is designed to measure *the extent to which the teacher conveys displeasure or unhappiness*. This item captures scowls, sarcastic comments, "grouchiness," and negativity on the part of the teacher. Does the teacher seem irritated or bothered when interacting with the children? Does her affect appear stern or "grouchy"? Scoring reflects the frequency of negative expressions.

High score (5). Lack of scolding, making sarcastic comments, having a stern countenance, or similar behaviors.

Low score (1). Interactions characterized by a harsh tone or cold affect conveying irritation; scolding, making sarcastic comments, frowning, scowling, grabbing children to restrain them.

11 Visual Involvement

This item is designed to capture *the extent to which the teacher is visually following the children's activities*. There are two levels to this item, joint attention and scanning. Joint attention involves examining how closely the teacher pays attention to the activities of the children in her presence. Included are the extent to which the teacher is watching the children to see when help is needed, success is achieved, problems are arising, and lack of interest is developing. The second level of this question (scanning) includes examining the extent to which the teacher is watching the children in the room who are not directly involved with her. Is the teacher watching for children who are not appropriately engaged in an activity, or who are engaging in potentially dangerous behaviors? Higher ratings indicate that the teacher is visually following the children's activities at both levels. Scoring reflects the consistency of the teacher's looking at children and visually following their activities.

High score (5). Careful observation of the children working in the teacher's presence (joint attention) and regularly monitoring the activities of the other children in the room (scanning).

Middle score (3). Careful observation of nearby child activities but not remaining aware of the activities of other children in the room would not be scored at the highest or lowest end of the scale. Similarly, seating oneself in one place to watch the children in a manner that promotes monitoring the behavior of the class as a whole but not aware of the specific activities of the children would also a middle score on the scale.

Low score (1). Getting activities ready or chatting with other adults in the room and not watching the children unless a problem arises.

12 Physical Responsiveness

This item is designed to examine *the extent of physical contact* between the teacher and the children. Physical contact includes the teacher's touching children to wipe their noses, zip their coats, show them how to hold the scissors. It also includes hugs, tickling, holding, having a child sitting on one's lap, placing a gentle hand on a child when talking to him, stroking the child's hair, etc. Scoring reflects the frequency of physical contact with children.

High Score (5). Interactions with children frequently involve some form of physical contact with the children.

Low score (1). Minimal physical contact with the children, including few physical interactions; contact with a single child for a brief time, such as patting her on the head or wiping a nose.

13 Emotional Responsiveness

This item is designed to examine *the extent to which the teacher interacts with the children in a warm and nurturing manner*. When young children experience frustration, doubt, anxiety, disappointment, or are hurt, does the teacher convey support, empathy, and understanding? Does the teacher communicate in a soothing and caring manner? For example, if a child looks at her picture and says, “I can’t draw,” the teacher who responds in a simple monotone with, “Practice makes perfect” or, “Sure you can” is not responding in a warm and nurturing manner. On the other hand, the teacher who takes the picture and says in a soft and empathetic voice, “I think this is a really pretty picture” or, “Would you like me to help you?” is displaying emotional responsiveness. Scoring reflects the frequency of warm and nurturing responses to children.

High score (5). Frequently speaking to children in a soothing tone, offering support, encouragement and understanding, and responding to the children’s emotional cues.

Low score (1). Frequently responding to the children in a detached unemotional manner or not responding to the children’s cries, screams, laughter, pouting, going off in the corner, or expressions of frustration.

14 Consistency of Interaction

This item is designed to measure the *predictability or consistency of the teacher’s responses to the children*. One facet of this item is the consistency of the teacher’s behaviors *across time*. Does the teacher respond to children with warmth and understanding during free play but seem harsh and controlling during circle time? A second facet of this item is the consistency of the teacher’s interactions *across children*. Does the teacher get upset with one child who does not listen but not with another who is doing the same thing? Does the teacher have children that seem to be his or her favorites? Scoring reflects the consistency (predictability) of responses to children.

High score (5). Treating all children the same and behaving in a consistent manner across activities or days.

Low score (1). Extremely inconsistent interactions across children and activities or days.

15 Responsiveness Toward Children’s Interest

This item is designed to capture *the extent to which the teacher’s interactions are based on the child’s interests*. Does the teacher seem to be imposing activities on children or is she building on child-initiated activities and interests? For example, if children seem to be interested in trucks, does the teacher come up with activities related to trucks and transportation. Is the teacher using the children’s observations and questions as a means to design new activities or expand on present ones or does she frequently redirect the child’s attention to unrelated activities? Scoring reflects the extent of responsiveness and the frequency of following children’s interests.

High score (5). Engaging in activities related to the children’s interests and building on activities in response to children’s questions or comments.

Low score (1). Not building on children's questions and comments or frequently redirecting the children's engagement to unrelated activities.

16 Child-Directedness

This item examines *the extent to which the teacher lets the children dictate the pace and content* of the activities. Are the activities highly structured or do the children seem to have much flexibility to explore within the activity? Are the children expected to produce a specific uniform product or are they given materials and allowed to be creative? Does the teacher allow the children to stop when they lose interest? Can they continue with an activity until they lose interest? Scoring reflects the frequency of letting children dictate the pace of activities.

High score (5). Allowing the children to choose from a wide variety of activities and materials, to make decisions on how they will use them, and to explore the activity on their own.

Low score (1). Demonstrating a need to be in charge of the activities, telling the children what activities to engage in or how to use materials, and explicitly stating what the children are to produce.

17 Tone

This item examines *the tone of the teacher's interactions* with children. Does the teacher use a bossy, controlling tone, commanding or ordering children to do things? The *tone* of the interactions is rated, not the intent. Does the teacher sound like she is bossing the children around, asserting authority over the children and their activities through her tone? The same instruction stated in different tones can cause it to sound like a helpful suggestion or a command. This item is not examining the overall positive or negative nature of the teacher's tone but specifically the amount of control implied through her tone. Scoring reflects the frequency of bossy or controlling communication.

High Score (5): Using a nonassertive tone and not sounding bossy would score on the higher end of the scale.

Low Score (1): Commanding the children to do things, bossing them around and asserting control over the children and their activities would score on the lower end of the scale.

18. Inclusion in Activities

This item is specifically examining the *participation of children with special needs in activities* with other children in the class. Is the teacher attempting to plan activities that include children with special needs? The item examines the extent to which children with special needs are present in activities and the provisions made that allow these children to fully participate in the activity. Do not score this item when there are no children with disabilities in the classroom.

High Score (5). Consistently involving children with special needs in an activity with other children in the class and helping the children with special needs to fully participate would score

on the higher end of the scale. (Merely having children with special needs present at an activity would not score at the higher end of the scale).

Low Score (1). No attempt to include children with special needs in activities with other children. Engaging in activities in which the children with special needs are not involved or unable to participate would score on the lower end of the scale.

19. Teaching Specific Skills

This item examines the extent to which teachers are *teaching specific skills to children with special needs*. Is the teacher attempting to teach the children with special needs some skill? Is the teacher trying to teach the children with special needs the same skill as the other children in the class are learning?

High Score (5). Individualizing instruction to teach skills that meet the specific needs of the exceptional child would score on the higher end of the scale.

Low Score (1). A teacher who does not seem to be instructing or teaching any specific skills to the special needs child would score on the lower end of the scale.

20. Content Appropriateness

This item examines *the extent to which content meets the developmental level* of the various children in the class. Does the teacher seem to be presenting material and interacting with children in a manner that is far above or below the children's present abilities? Are the content and activities presented at some mid range level to all the members of the class or does the level of the content seem to vary to fit the specific developmental levels of the different children in the class?

High Score (5). A teacher who often gears content towards individual developmental levels would score on the higher end of the scale.

Low Score (1). A teacher who provides activities and content well below or above the developmental level of the majority of the class would be scored on the lower end of the scale.

References

McWilliam, R. A., Scarborough, A. A., Bagby, J., H, & Sweeney, A. L. (1996). Teaching Styles Rating Scale. Unpublished Instrument. Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.