Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale Revised Observation Assignment

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**Introduction**

When it comes to running a successful classroom/program, there should be a large emphasis placed on the implementation and practice of a positive classroom environment. According to the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale Revised* (ITERS-R), classroom environment is defined as “A broad definition of environment including organization of space, interactions, activities, schedules, and provisions for parents and staff” (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 1). In order to determine whether an infant/toddler classroom should be considered as high quality, the classroom environment itself must me assessed by highly trained observers. Within this paper the classroom environment assessment that will be discussed is the *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale Revised* (ITERS-R).

 The ITERS-R is an assessment that measures a broad definition of classroom environment, and can be used as a “scale in your own classroom for self-assessment or as an outside observer for program monitoring, program evaluation, program improvement, or research” (Harms, Cryer, & Clifford, 5). The ITERS-R is designed to assess classroom environments for classrooms that educate children ranging from birth to 30 months of age. Observers using the ITERS-R must have participated in extensive training, implemented at least two practice observations, and have a detailed understanding of the 7 subscales, 39 items, and 467 indicators that are examined during assessment observations. The 7 subscales that are examined can also be expressed as what ITERS-S constitutes as classroom environment: space and furnishings, personal care routines, listening and talking, activities, interactions, program structure, and parents and staff. The ITERS-R can examine these subscales in both inclusive and noninclusive classroom, which is very important due to the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Findings discovered, after the implementation of the ITERS-R, suggest “Within a large sample, inclusive classrooms are higher in quality than noninclusive classrooms. The four factors of quality confirmed in this study suggest that differences are not due to the activities or material in the classroom, but instead are based on differences in language/interactions, safety/organization, and parent/staff variables. It is also clear that teacher education and staff/child ratios are key predictors of high quality programs” (Hestenes, Cassidy, Hedge, & Lower, 82).

**Methods**

 The observation took place on the college campus of California State University, Chico. On this campus there is an Early Childhood Education Program, known as the Associated Students Child Development Lab (ASCDL), which enrolls children ranging from birth to the age of five within four differing classrooms. On the date of November 4th, 2014 a four hour long observation, 7:40am-11:00am, took place within the observation booth of the ASCDL Willow Room (Infant Classroom). During this observation there were a total of five student staff teachers, one head teacher, Lauren Refe, and a total of 10 infants/toddlers ranging from 10 months to 23 months of age.

 Though the observation took place in the morning, the sun was up, and the weather permitted for both inside and outside activities and interactions. The three observers, who used the ITERS-R within the Willow Room to assess for the quality of classroom environment, witnessed a variety of interactions, activities, and routines take place among the infants/toddlers and the staff/parents. Some examples include infants/toddlers engaging in stimulating fine motor activities (drawing with markers, holding their breakfast/snack cups and silverware, etc.) and gross motor activities (running, jumping, dancing, etc.), social-emotional group interactions (dramatic play dress up, dramatic play cooking, classroom mealtime, etc.), cognitive development experiences (reading books with teachers, placing shapes within a shape sorters, etc.), and staff/parent interactions (greetings, drop-offs, pick-ups, staff discussions on floor, etc.).

**Results**

Within the following pages of this results section, there will be a total of two tables that express the data collected. Table 1 is a data table that represents the comparison among the three separate observers in regards to their individual quality scores for each of the 39 items examined in the observation. Table 2 is a data table that represents the comparison among the three separate observers in regards to their quality scores for each of the 7 subscales examined in the observation. There were no disagreements among the observers, which demonstrated an inter-rater reliability of 1.00.

Table 1

ITERS-R Individual Item Scores Comparison

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Item Name** | **Observer #1** | **Observer #2** | **Observer #3** |
| **1. Indoor Space** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **2. Furniture for Routine Care and Play** | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| **3. Provision for relaxation and comfort** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **4. Room Arrangement**  | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **5. Display for Children** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **6. Greeting/Departing** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **7. Meals/Snacks** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **8. Nap** | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **9.Diapering/Toileting** | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| **10. Health Practices** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **11. Safety Practices** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **12. Helping Children Understand Language** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **13. Helping Children Use Language** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **14. Using Books** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **15. Fine Motor** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **16. Active Physical Play** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **17. Art** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **18. Music and Movement** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **19. Blocks** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **20. Dramatic Play** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **21. Sand and Water Play** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **22. Nature/Science** | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| **23. Use of TV, Video, and/or Computers** | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| **24. Promoting Acceptance of Diversity** | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| **25. Supervision of Play and Learning** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **26. Peer Interactions** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **27. Staff-Child Interaction** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **28. Discipline** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **29. Schedule** | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| **30. Free Play** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **31. Group Play Activities** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **32. Provisions for Children with Disabilities** | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| **33. Provisions for Parents** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **34. Provisions for Personal Needs of Staff** | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| **35. Provisions for Professional Needs of Staff** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **36. Staff Interactions and Cooperation**  | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **37. Staff Continuity** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **38. Supervision and Evaluation of Staff** | 7 | 7 | 7 |
| **39. Opportunities for Professional Growth** | 7 | 7 | 7 |

Table 2

ITERS-R Subscale Domains Comparison

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Subscale Name** | **Observer #1** | **Observer #2** | **Observer #3** |
| **1. Space and Furnishing** | 6.40 | 6.40 | 6.40 |
| **2. Personal Care Routines** | 5.17 | 5.17 | 5.17 |
| **3. Listening and Talking** | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| **4. Activities** | 6.20 | 6.20 | 6.20 |
| **5. Interactions**  | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| **6. Program Structure**  | 6.00 | 6.00 | 6.00 |
| **7. Parents and Staff** | 6.86 | 6.86 | 6.86 |

**Discussion**

Though the results section consisted of all of the data collected during the observation, the discussion will focus solely on Table 2. Only Table 2 will be discussed due to the fact that Table 1 is simply just a more detailed explanation for the relationship present between observers’ ratings of individual items within each of the subscales present in Table 2. When examining the data results it is important to recognize that the highest score possible, for each of the seven subscales, is a rating of 7.00. Out of all seven subscales, six of the seven subscales received at least 6.00 - 7.00, and only one of the subscales scored a low of 5.17. By receiving a high score for six out of the seven subscales, with a low score of only a 5.17, data suggests that the ASCDL Willow Room constitutes as a high quality classroom/program according to the ITERS-R Assessment. It was established within the observation that subscale 3. (listening and talking) and subscale 5. (interactions) expressed the highest quality of classroom environmental strengths within the Willow Room, where as a weakness, subscale 2. (personal care routines), received the lowest rating for the quality of classroom environment.

 Though there are a variety of numbers and large words present to explain the findings discovered within this infant/toddler classroom environment observation, the main take away message is that the ASCDL Willow Room demonstrates the characteristics necessary to be considered a high quality school/program. Out of all of the requirements that were examined, the Willow Room scored high on all of them and received only one mediocre score. The observers were able to witness positive qualities within the classroom such as having furniture and decorations that met the needs of the infants/toddlers, teachers engaging in a large amount of back-and-forth communication with their students, and the teachers provided an abundance of opportunities for the infants/toddlers to engage in fun activities and interactions with their peers as well as teachers and parents. An area that the Willow Room could work on improving would be the role of personal care routines within the classroom. Some adjustments that could be implemented could include providing more space between cribs and cots at naptime, and being more consistent with sanitizing the sink after every use. Though there is room for improvement, the Willow Room should be very proud of its overall high quality in classroom environment for an infant/toddler classroom.

 Though it is important to discuss where observers differ, in regards to the scores they provided for the rating of each of the 467 indicators, it is shocking to admit that all three of our group members agreed on the quality rating scores for each of the 39 items. Looking back over these results I was definitely a little bit concerned because I was unaware that this was even a possible situation. Though I was a little bit concerned, I completely understand why we would all score each item the same. Unlike other assessments where personal biases can get in the way of making objective observations, the ITERS-R was a very objective assessment. When scoring each indicator for all 39 items, the indicator was either within the classroom or it was not within the classroom. The indicators were black and white, a yes or no response, which left no real room for bias judgments. There was either ‘student artwork on the walls’ or there was not, there was either ‘children playing in a water and/or sand sensory table’ or there were no water and/or sand sensory table activities available. I hypothesize that the reason our group had such strong reliability is largely impacted on the fact that all of the indicators and items being observed were provided to us in a very straightforward and objective manner.

 In conclusion, I truly did enjoy taking part in this environmental observation assignment because I felt as if I was able to take all of what I have learned within this course, as well as other child development courses, and bring it to life. I was able to actually implement an assessment that I one day will most likely be implementing in a potential future career. It was also a very feasible and accessible assessment to implement. It did not cost too much money to purchase, and by simply spending some time carefully reading the manual it was easy to understand. Though I did enjoy using the ITERS-R I think that even if it may holds the possibility of obtaining high reliability among observers, I am a little weary that it may not be the most valid classroom environmental assessment that could be implemented. I am worrisome due to the fact that it has a driving focus on what is present within the physical environment and lacks the emphasis of the role of relationships within the classroom. If there is simply a mobile hanging from the ceiling does that mean it constitutes for having high quality displays for the infants? I would personally have to say no. A mobile hanging from the ceiling has no benefit for an infant/toddler if it is just dangling from the ceiling motionless.

I have learned that there will be benefits and drawbacks with any assessment, so it is not about picking a perfect assessment, but rather about picking an assessment that examines your definition of what exactly is being assessed. Just like every assessment is unique in their own way, so our peoples’ definitions of what an educational environment should consist of. Some individuals might believe that textbooks, school supplies, toys, and physical materials are the make it or break it for the best possible educational environment. Others might believe that students need to be outside in nature in order to learn in an educationally rich learning environment. I myself believe that it is the building of relationships that are the heart and soul of a classroom environment. How can we expect students to learn in a classroom where they do not feel that their teachers want to take the time to get to know each and every one of them as the unique student that they are? It is not what physical items are sitting within the walls of your classroom, but rather what you do with those items. In my opinion the job of every teacher is not to be a passive facilitator of the materials within the classroom environment, but rather to be a magician and bring their classroom as a whole to life.

References

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*edition.* New York: Teachers College Press.

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noninclusive infant and toddler classrooms. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education, 22*, 69-84.