ECERS-R Environmental Observation Assignment

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**Introduction**

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) is the assessment that was used in the Magnolia room on November 4th as well as the 6th, 2014. It took a total of three hours to complete all of the ratings. To successfully rate each item, the education training video was used prior to the observations. This scale is used for improving, evaluating, and measuring the quality of programs (Harms, Clifford & Cryer, 2004). The children range from 2½ to 5 years of age. There are seven subscales used in this rating scale, which include space and furnishings, personal care routine, language-reasoning activities, interaction, program structure, and parents and staff. Each of these subscales are checked yes or no and rated from one being inadequate to seven being excellent. Some requirements to keep in mind while assessing in the classroom is to not engage with the children or the staff, become familiar with the domains and rate the easier domains first, observe what is displayed and do not go into drawers or cabinets without permission, keep notes in hand at all times, and be prepared when entering into the classroom with notes and score sheets.

**Method**

On Tuesday November 4th, 2014 there were 11 children and 6 adults present at the start of the observation. Between 8:25 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. the first observation took place, and during that time, most of the domains were scored. At the beginning of the observation the easier domains were scored such as the dramatic play area, and space and furnishings. From there, most of the personal care routines were rated due to the morning schedule. On Thursday November 6th, 2014 from 8:00 a.m. to 9:45 a.m. the rest of the domains were scored. On that Thursday, there were 10 children and 5 staff present. What was observed during those times were free choice, mealtime, manipulative tables, circle time, and outside time. During free choice children engaged in many activities, which included water-coloring, building using blocks, dramatic play, puzzles, reading, and different art projects at a table.

**Results**

There were three observers who each scored all of the subscales separately based on their own view and observation of the classroom. After completing all of the score sheets, the observers came together to discuss the results and scores. “Table 1” was Observer 1’s Total and Average Score, and the second table, “Table 2” shows the three observers’ Average Scores based on the subscales and items that were observed throughout the three hours.

Table 1: Total and Average Scores:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Total Subscale Score | # of Items Scored | Average Score |
| Space and Furnishings | 52 | 8 | 6.5 |
| Personal Care | 41 | 6 | 6.83 |
| Language-Reasoning | 27 | 4 | 6.75 |
| Activities | 48 | 9 | 5.33 |
| Interaction | 35 | 5 | 7.00 |
| Program Structure | 21 | 3 | 7.00 |
| Parents and Staff | 42 | 6 | 7.00 |
| Total | 266 | 41 | 6.49 |

Table 2: Average Scores of the three observers:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Domain | Observer #1 McKenna | Observer #2 Jessica | Observer #3 Bre |
| Space and Furnishings | 6.5 | 6.5 | 6.5 |
| Personal Care | 6.83 | 6.83 | 6.83 |
| Language-Reasoning | 6.75 | 7.00 | 6.75 |
| Activities | 5.33 | 5.33 | 5.33 |
| Interaction | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Program Structure | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Parents and Staff | 7.00 | 7.00 | 7.00 |
| Total Average Score | 6.49 | 6.5 | 6.49 |

Between the three observers, the only disagreement was item number 18. Observer 1 and observer 3 scored 7.2 “No” while Observer 2 scored 7.2 “Yes”. Other than that one disagreement, all of the scores matched up.

**Discussion**

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) has a total of 7 subscales and 43 items. The subscales consist of Space and Furnishings, Personal Care Routines, Language-Reasoning, Activities, Interactions, Program Structure, and Parents and Staff. These subscales have anywhere from four to ten items that need to be scored. The items are the things that get scored and can receive a rating of one meaning inadequate all the way to a seven meaning excellent. Within the rating, the observer assigns a “Yes, No or NA (not applicable)” for each item. These scores are “based on the current situation that is observed or reported by staff, not on future plans” (Harms et al., 2004, p. 6). In this observation, the scores were based on the current situation and were not based on what was reported by the staff.

The first subscale is Space and Furnishings and this includes eight items which consist of indoor space, furniture for routing care, play and learning, furnishings for relaxation and comfort, room arrangement for play, space for privacy, child-related display, space for gross motor play, and gross motor equipment (Harms et al., 2004, p. 9). Space and furnishings is looking for natural lighting, that the furniture is convenient and soft, there are five different interest centers, as well as an area outside for gross motor activities. This subscale received a rating of 6.5 due to the lack of open windows, the use of an easel, space for privacy, and three-dimensional child-created artwork. Out of the eight items, half of the items received a score of six, and the other items received a score of seven.

Personal Care Routines is the next subscale, which includes six items consisting of greeting and departing, meals and snack, nap and rest, toileting and diapering, health practices and safety practices (Harms et al., 2004, p. 9). This subscale is looking for children to be helped when entering activities upon arrival, the availability of child-sized serving utensils, a flexible nap schedule, child-sized toilets and sinks, and the play areas being set up to avoid safety problems (Harms et al., 2004, p. 32). Personal care routines received a rating of 6.83 due to the amount of staff sitting with children during meal times. There was only one staff member sitting with the children during breakfast even when there were five other staff in the classroom at that time.

The third subscale is language reasoning, which includes four items consisting of books and pictures, encouraging children to communicate, using language to develop reasoning skills, and the informal use of language (Harms et al., 2004, p. 9). To receive an adequate score on this subscale it needs to have books and language materials, and staff needs to balance listening and talking and encourage children to reason throughout the day. Language reasoning received a rating of 6.75 due to the lack of staff asking the children certain questions to “encourage them to give longer and more complex answers” (Harms et al., 2004, p. 38). Many of the staff would ask a child a question about something they were building and after the child answered them, the staff would nod and smile and continue observing the child.

Activities is the fourth subscale, which includes ten items consisting of fine motor, art, music and movement, blocks, sand and water, dramatic play area, nature and science, math and numbers, the use of television, video and computers, and promoting acceptance of diversity (Harms et al., 2004, p. 9). Activities is looking for materials being rotated, two different types of blocks, props provided to represent diversity, math and number activities available, and the inclusion of diversity. This subscale received a rating of 5.33 due to the lack of access to music materials, the different activities done with sand and water, and games, materials or activities for nature or science. Music was used during circle time with a teacher who was promoting and managing it, but there were no music materials out for children to engage with while it was free time. Also, there was no use of television, video, and computers, which then received a score of NA.

The fifth subscale is Interactions, which includes five items consisting of supervision of gross motor activities, general supervision of children, discipline, staff-child interactions, and interactions among children (Harms et al., 2004, p. 9). To receive an adequate rating for interactions, staff help to enhance the children’s play by using resources, staff discuss with children ideas about their play, staff encourage children to solve their problems with others, staff seem happy to be around the children, and interactions among peers are mostly positive. This subscale received a score of 7 due to each of the things discussed previously being met in the classroom. Many of these interactions involved teachers or staff with the children, but doing it to guide them in the right ways rather than doing it for them.

Program Structure is the sixth subscale, which includes four items consisting of schedule, free play, group time, and provisions of children with disabilities (Harms et al., 2004, p. 9). This subscale receives an adequate score by having smooth transitions, adding new materials for free play, allowing children to be a part of self selected small groups, and integrating children with disabilities into the group. Program structure received a rating of 7 due to all of these items being met. The item, provision for children with disabilities received a NA due to the absence of children with disabilities in the classroom.

The last subscale is Parents and Staff, which includes six items provisions for parents, provisions for personal needs of staff, provisions for professional needs of staff, staff interaction and cooperation, supervision and evaluation of staff, and the opportunities for professional growth (Harms et al., 2004, p. 9). This subscale receives an adequate rating based on parents being involved in decision-making, the availability of adult furniture, a well-equipped office space, the responsibilities are defined for staff members, there is feedback given, and there is support available for staff. Parents and staff received a rating of 7 due to all of the things stated previously being met.

As stated previously, between the three observers, the only disagreement was item number 18. Observer 1 and observer 3 scored 7.2 “No” while Observer 2 scored 7.2 “Yes”. The difference came down to Observer 2’s observation that “children are asked questions to encourage them to give longer and more complex answers” (Harms et al., 2004, p. 38). It was unaware to Observer 1 and Observer 3 that this occurred between staff and children. From observing at a distance, some items were harder to observe than others. The disagreement in scores between Observer 1 and 3 and Observer 2 made the Total Average Scores off by .01. Other than that one disagreement, all of the scores matched up.

In regards to a personal bias, I do not think that would have changed my ratings due to the assignment being strictly based on observation and what was in the classroom. This assignment did not have any room for opinion or biases, which makes it such a successful rating scale. I have a lot of experience with other childcare facilities, which includes my internship in the Lilac Room as well as my job at Bidwell Academy, which is a preschool. There is a large difference between these facilities because of the amount of staff in each. The ratios are different, and I think that plays a huge role in the classrooms. The challenge when using this rating scale is the large amount of questions with the short amount of time. Also, it was difficult observing from afar and not being able to walk around the classroom as well as not being able to interview Jill or Shannon. Another challenge was having one of my peers being familiar with the classroom, which made it difficult when we did not see something, she would remember what was in there. In the book it says the scoring is based on what you see and for me I could not see certain things that she knew was in there.

I have learned a lot from this assignment. I have learned how many items there are regarding an adequate classroom setting and have learned ones that I never thought about; one item being the amount of space between mats when the children are sleeping. I never knew that was important, and now at my job I make sure that there is a wide space between the mats. I think it is important to be able to learn information and bring it to your daily life or schedule in other settings. I definitely have done so with this assignment. Every preschool should be required to have this book to help improve their program. Although this was my first time using ECERS-R, I believe that this tool was helpful and valid. It was helpful because all an observer had to do was mark yes or no regarding the scores of one to seven. It is valid because it is measuring what it says it is measuring, and in this case the measurement is used to help improve the program, evaluate and measure the quality of programs.

**References**

Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (2004). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised edition* (*ECERS-R)*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.