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Environmental Assessment

Introduction

Assessing a child's environment is crucial to their development, as well as the relationships they make with the teachers in the classroom. Having a tool to assess a child's classroom environment to find changes can make help children be safe and have a good healthy environment to grow in. Berris and Miller, authors of the article, "How design of the physical environment impacts on early learning: Educators' and parents' perspective" discuss in depth the aspects of the physical environment and the different aspects it affects on children, as well as how to help parents and educators feel more comfortable in the environment. When looking at the impact a physical space can have on a child, authors Moor and Sugiyama (2007) suggest "Appropriate designed space, by facilitating a child's sense of competence and providing a sense of place, security and comfort, can help children form an identity and a sense of self-worth by encouraging exploration and play (as cited in Berris and Miller, 2007, pg. 103). One type of assessment is the through observation and using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System, or the CLASS. This assessment tool looks at the different types of domains that may effect the environment based on the teacher's and children's interactions in the classroom, such as the type of climate present, and the quality of feedback a teacher gives to a child.

The different types of developmental domains are greatly impacted by the environment, especially in an educational setting. A classroom must be adaptive to all the types of

developmental domains such as, physical, cognitive, social-emotional and language in the toys they have, the way the environment is actually set up, and all the various types of options children have to learning as much as they possibly can. Enriching a child's development by possible activities and learning opportunities are so important to a child growing up healthy. In order to ensure a classroom has a proper set up, an assessment must be done. The CLASS assessment focuses on more of the social-emotional domain of how the teachers' interactions on the environment impact the children in the classroom.

Methods

The environmental assessment took place on Chico State campus at the Associated Students Child Development Lab (ASCLD). Specifically, the observations took place in the Toddler room, also known as the Maple Room on February 12th. The first observations started around 9:50 am and continued on until 10:10 am, and focused on Teacher Grace. There were three teachers and six children present at the time, and they were working in the sandbox and on the climbing structure outside. The second observation started at 10:15 am until 10:30 am and focused on Teacher Daniel. He was the only adult in the area, and there were three children with him, and the children were working with the blocks and at the art table. The third observation started at 10:55 am and lasted until 11:10 am, and focused on Teacher Kori. There were two teachers present, along with three children, and they were working on cleaning up the classroom and starting circle time. The fourth observation started at 11:10am until 11:30am, and focused on Teacher Lisa. There were all seven adults and all twelve children present, as it was circle time. The fifth observation started at 11:35am and lasted until 11:50am, and focused on Teacher Leah. All seven teachers and all twelve children were present because it was lunch time. The

last observation started at 11:50 and finished at 12:05 pm, focusing on Teacher Daniel again. On average, there were about seven teachers present at all times, and about twelve children attending the school day. While observing the environment, the activities present included both structured and unstructured activities. The only unstructured activity was upon first arrival when the children were outside in the sandbox and on the climbing structure. The rest of the activities, including blocks, art activities, clean up time, circle time, lunch, potty time, reading time, and rest time, were all structured because they are activities at certain times that the children consistently participate in.

Results

The following tables are the combined results of the observational scores. Each table is titled with each person's name, as well as the names of the observers, Elana and Niki, followed by their CLASS scores. The areas that had the most disagreements between scores were the regard for child perspectives, followed by the facilitation of learning and development and negative climate.

Teacher Grace	Elana's scores	Niki's scores
Positive Climate	7	7
Negative Climate	1	1
Teacher Sensitivity	7	4
Regard for Child Perspectives	4	4
Behavior Guidance	7	7
Facilitation of Learning and Development	4	5
Quality of Feed Back	6	6
Language Modeling	7	7

Teacher Daniel	Elana's scores	Niki's scores
Positive Climate	7	7
Negative Climate	1	3
Teacher Sensitivity	6	6
Regard for Child Perspectives	7	6
Behavior Guidance	6	4
Facilitation of Learning and Development	7	7
Quality of Feed Back	6	7
Language Modeling	7	7

Teacher Lisa	Elana's scores	Niki's scores
Positive Climate	7	7
Negative Climate	1	1
Teacher Sensitivity	7	7
Regard for Child Perspectives	4	2
Behavior Guidance	7	6
Facilitation of Learning and Development	7	7
Quality of Feed Back	7	7
Language Modeling	7	4

Teacher Leah	Elana's scores	Niki's scores
Positive Climate	7	5
Negative Climate	1	1
Teacher Sensitivity	7	7
Regard for Child Perspectives	6	2
Behavior Guidance	7	6
Facilitation of Learning and Development	6	4
Quality of Feed Back	7	7
Language Modeling	7	6

Teacher Kori	Elana's scores	Niki's scores
Positive Climate	7	7
Negative Climate	1	2
Teacher Sensitivity	7	7
Regard for Child Perspectives	4	7
Behavior Guidance	7	7
Facilitation of Learning and Development	4	7
Quality of Feed Back	7	6
Language Modeling	7	6

Teacher Daniel (second time)	Elana's scores	Niki's scores
Positive Climate	7	7
Negative Climate	1	4
Teacher Sensitivity	6	6
Regard for Child Perspectives	6	5
Behavior Guidance	7	7
Facilitation of Learning and Development	7	7
Quality of Feed Back	7	7
Language Modeling	7	7

Discussion

1. For the toddler CLASS rating, there were eight different rating options which a teacher could be rated on. The first being positive climate, followed by negative climate, teacher sensitivity, regard for child perspectives, behavior guidance, facilitation of learning and

development, quality of feedback, and language modeling. Each section was given a score from one to seven, with one and two being low scores, three, four, and five being middle scores, and six and seven being high scores. The positive climate section looked for relationships, respect, and positive affect the teachers had for the children. The negative climate focused on the negative affect, punitive control, and teacher and child negativity in the interactions between the teachers and children. Teacher sensitivity focused on the teacher's awareness and responsiveness to children, while also looking at how much they comforted the children when needed. The regard for child perspectives paid attention to the child's focus, how flexible a teacher could be, and if there was any support for a child's independence while participating in an activity. The behavior guidance looked at if the teachers were proactive in their guidance, supported positive behavior, and if there was any problem behavior presented. The facilitation of learning and development paid attention to if there was active facilitation presented by the teachers, an expansion of cognition, and if the teachers actively engaged the children during activities. The quality of feedback looked at if scaffolding was seen, what information was provided to the children, and if there was encouragement and affirmation given by the teachers. Lastly, language modeling focused on the supporting language used by the teachers, if there was repetition and extension of language, if the teacher participated in self and/or parallel talk, and if any advanced language was used when speaking to the children.

2. The domains where my partner and I disagreed on most was the regard for child perspectives, followed by the facilitation of learning and development, and negative climate. The regard for child perspectives had different ratings for five of the six observations, with

my partner rating lower than my own on four out of the five different ratings. This is most likely due to the fact that I have previously worked as an intern in the toddler room we were observing, while my partner had not, allowing me to previously have more knowledge on the environment. Another factor into the differences in scores may be due to a difference in understanding the teachers' roles of participation in the classroom. For example, under the section child focus, a mid range score suggested that, "some activities are teacher directed, but at other times children determine the direction of an activity," and each person observing the teachers at the time may have different interpretations of this meaning (CLASS Dimensions Overview, Toddler). The other rating sections, including negative climate and facilitation of learning and development, each had three different scores, with the scores ranging closer together. This may be due to simply differences in a person's opinion in what a negative climate may look like, as well as how much a teacher is actually facilitating an activity. These were the only areas of varying scores in the entire assessment.

As mentioned above, there is some personal bias to these observations because I had worked in the toddler room previously with many of the same teachers I had observed. This, in turn, is probably the reason why the ratings are mostly higher than Niki's, because I have experience in the classroom, and know the teachers do a thorough job when working at the ASCLD. I also have experience in another classroom in the program, one of the preschool classrooms. This most likely gave me an even more bias because I know plenty about the program and how the teachers are supposed to work, based on the philosophy of the program. What might of improved our reliability on our scores is if I did not have so much observational bias to begin with. My partner, Niki, most likely had less bias in the

observations, however, I felt like her scores were more based on specific instances rather than the teacher's work as a whole. For example, on one of the negative climates, she expressed how a teacher had to remind children a specific area was closed due to clean up, and to me, that does not seem like a negative affect, rather a reminder to help children clean up. In the end, there would not be too many things to change at this point on the observation reliability.

3. After participating in the environmental observation assignment, I realized how much information I have actually learned. I was not aware of the CLASS dimension overview and all the detailed information it could provide to assessing an environment, and how the teachers and children interact in the classroom. This information has opened my eyes as an observer to pay attention to the small details of an interaction, and how it can effect a child or the environment itself. I do believe that his tool was helpful in becoming away of these distinctions. Any professional who has to perform an observation should be exposed to this manual to help guide them in what to look for in the classroom to help support the environment and the children in them.

References

Hamre, B.K., La Paro, K.M., and Pianta, R.C., (2012). Classroom assessment scoring system. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brooks Publishing Co.

Berris, R., & Miller, E. (2011). How design of the physical environment impacts on early learning: Educators' and parents' perspectives. *Australasian Journal Of Early Childhood*, 36(4), 102-110.