

ECS: Tips for Observing Teaching and Learning

Together, learner-centered and learner-driven play = playful learning. Adult-initiated GSRP classroom activities include large group, small group and transition times. During these portions of the daily routine, adults select concepts, activities and materials based on children's strengths and interests. Adults plan possible scaffolding strategies for children at emergent, middle and later developmental stages. Adults comment on what children are doing/saying, imitate and add to children's actions, use materials with children and support children as leaders. Children are engaged as active, participatory learners during adult-initiated activities. Children contribute their own ideas and are involved at their own developmental levels. Children have the highest level of control during uninterrupted child-initiated play, where children make many choices about where and how to use materials and carry out their activities.

In this portion of the day, adults are partners in children's play; they observe and listen before entering play, assume roles as suggested by children, follow children's cues about content and direction, imitate children, encourage children to talk about what they are doing, use children's words and comment specifically on children's activities.

This is truly the "heart and soul" of any classroom. It is especially important that ECS regularly observes a range of interactions that happen throughout the day. Consider what adults are doing and saying, how children respond during interactions with adults, and how adults in turn respond to children's statements, observations and questions.

- The ECS should learn if teaching teams work with consistent groups of children for planning time, recall time, small-group time and home visiting, as this tends to strengthen relationships and home-school partnering for child development.
- During regular observations the ECS documents what adults are doing and saying throughout the day. A 'rule of thumb' for analyzing specific interactions: to be considered highest quality, there should be at least three examples positively illustrating the indicator and no negative indicators.
- Be sure to regularly observe all staff. If Teacher A has appropriate interactions consistently and Teacher B does not, the result may be lower quality classroom practices.
- Regularly observe the types of questions the adults ask to determine if questions relate to what the child is doing and are open-ended or if there is a pattern of adults asking many questions or questions with predetermined correct answers.
- Regularly observe when adults make comments to determine if children are consistently encouraged to interact with each other and to determine if children's individual efforts are acknowledged and supported.

Curriculum Planning and Assessment

- In high quality team teaching, an observer would have difficulty discerning the Lead Teacher from the Associate Teacher. All adults conduct and participate in children's activities; there is not a pattern of one adult leading and another adult playing minor, nonteaching roles such as sweeping floors or wiping tables.
- Similarly, in a quality classroom, curriculum and authentic assessment are seamlessly interwoven, so that children's classroom activities are not interrupted for direct assessment.
- The ECS examines teacher resources for curriculum planning and assessment at the teacher's planning area/desk as well as on shelving and in file cabinets. Curriculum will be visible in the room arrangement, words for the areas of the room, portions of the daily routine, lesson plan/daily activities, Parent Handbook, etc. Note that 'using' the comprehensive curriculum and authentic child observation tool are key; having resources 'available' is insufficient to document high-quality practice.