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ECE 1414  

Program Quality Assessment

The learning environment I preformed a Program Quality Assessment (PQA) at was the Lowry Center for Early Education. The program’s setting is located in a College facility building at Oakland University and is offered to the OU Staff & students first, than the surrounding community second. The room I observed was a full day preschool room, children aged 3-4. The room has two official Lowry staff, 1-2 students’ assistants rotating throughout the week, and an additional helper. The classroom is fully enrolled with 18 kids in the room. I believe that the environment is appropriate for children in all areas including: learning, daily routine, adult-child interactions, and curriculum planning and assessment. Each element will be discussed further into strengths and weaknesses of the program.

The Learning environment at the Lowry center is based on the High scope curriculum. The classroom has multiple key areas for learning including: art, house, block, music, discovery, writing, group rug, and manipulative. The positive aspects of this environment were the options and choices available for children, and the content within each area. This was evident through the children’s play; most of the children were busy playing in areas of learning. They were not aimlessly walking around the room looking for something to work with. The content also available to the child was varying and offered a wide selection of materials to all the children in the room. The house area for example was being utilized by the boys and girls expressing their social and emotional development, playing restaurant or work with the multiple options of materials available to them. A few negative aspects of this classroom were the sensory area and the congested tight spaces. The sensory area was a sand table, that was only open from what I observed as a before class work choice. What brought this to my attention was the amount of children swarmed around the table while it was open in the morning. The crowded table was a little chaotic with sand spilling everywhere, and children scooting their way through to get their hands in there. This chaos then would lead to stress of the teacher, explain rules of keeping the sand in the table to multiple nonlistening children. Sarcastically, a great way to start both the child’s and teacher’s day. The congested tight areas were also areas brought to
my attention by the children. Once it was time to meet at the rug for large group; children had to squeeze through an area between the couch and book/house area. Children eager to get to the rug were than halted by a traffic jam of children through the 3 foot space. Children would than get frustrated or start to push to get to the common area of the room. Some accidents would occur but other times it seemed that the kids didn’t enjoy having to wait to access the area. My suggestions for the learning environment would start with addressing the negatives. The sensory table should be available to the child as needed. It being opened freely gives the child the choice and option to discovery as they please. With it being the major attraction and difficult to access, it may turn kids away from the area of learning. Also in addition to sand, change the sensory stimuli to encourage different senses from the children. To address the tight areas, which I’m surprised has not been noticed by the teachers, would be to space things out more, and to look at all contents in the areas surrounding the congested areas and thin out things to provide more space. I think that opening the entrance up to the group rug would make group time more inviting and desirable for the child.

The Daily routine at Lowry also reflects that of which a Highscope curriculum routine would be. They engage in large/small group, free choice or play, planning and recall, outdoor or gross motor play. The positive of their daily routine was the consistency of each activity in order. Each day was the same sequence of events. This consistency I believe is great for a child, they know what to expect in each part of their day, and should reduce the anxiety of children not knowing what is next. Negative aspects of this daily routine were the transitions and the sense of urgency from a teacher. Transitions were where I observed some behavior problems surface of a few children. When it was time to clean up and transition, one child would cry every time she was instructed to clean up, another would walk around avoiding having to do any cleaning up, getting away with not doing it at all. While the sense of urgency I felt from one of the teachers made me feel uneasy, which I could only compare to what a child might be feeling. One teacher would suggest something last minute, halting the actions of the other to think about the suggestion and how to apply or quickly dismissing the idea. My suggestions for improvement of the daily routine would to being with the negatives first. Children crying and avoiding at clean up or transitions, needs to be addressed. A few prevention strategies could
come into play here with these children, helping them learn to do something about the negative feelings they are having. Another suggestion would be to slow down and not push for so much in so little time. If something doesn’t get done that day it can be saved for another day, the urgency to get something complete puts pressure on the class and the children to complete it, which I feel doesn’t allow the child to fully engage in what’s being presented.

The Adult child interaction is a key ingredient in the high scope wheel of learning. Adults are encouraged to engage in the child’s play, taking an active role in the play allows for scaffolding of the child and helps build positive relationships. The Positive of adult child interaction in the room was the teacher’s availability to the child. If a child was hurt or distressed they would go to a teacher to be comforted. A few negative aspects in the adult child interaction were the inconsistency of teachers throughout the week. The classroom has two official teachers in the room, with rotating 2-4 students throughout the week assisting the leaders, which also changes every 4-5 months. This was a negative in my eyes because a child essentially starts building a trusting relationship with a student assistant and than that assistant isn’t there the next day. This inconsistency for the child I believe, gives them an uncertainty feeling of who will answer their needs. A trusting relationship is the foundation I believe for learning, and when a child trust that their needs will be answered and that they are safe in their environment, they feel freer to explore. Another negative was the interaction of the teachers with the children. In small and large group the teacher interacted well, but during Childs free play, it often wasn’t noticed that the teachers were fully engaging in the Childs play. Teachers were often preparing for something else, or addressing another need of the classroom. Also, on day of PQA, the student assistant observed was strict and authoritative to the children. My suggestions for improvement of the adult-child interaction, would be to begin with settling out the student assistants, changing it to some more consistent schedule of them for the children. Also with the student assistants, address their harsh ways of teaching with suggestions of comforting ways to divert children’s learning beyond snapping in their face. I think also to improve the interaction, the leads should engage more with the children in their play. Fully taking a role and interest in the Childs discovery and learning.
Planning and Assessment in the Highscope curriculum includes the plan do review sequence for the child. The teachers at Lowry meet three times a week to discuss activities and plan for group times. The positive aspect I saw of the planning in this room was the eagerness one of the teachers had to plan developmentally appropriate activities for the children. She was making comments on things done or said by children and suggestions on how to further their ideas into activities. The variety in their lessons also showed that they put thought into the daily activities of the child, providing multiple ways to fully engage each child. A negative aspect I observed was during recall, the teacher was flustered with getting all information from the child on what they were recalling. She would often take much time writing down anecdotal notes of every child, which began to bring a dead space during recall time, where children started to get antsy. My suggestion of the planning and assessment of the classroom would be to slow down. Rushing to provide experiences and retrieving all the information from children is overwhelming and could cause stress. Go with the flow of the child; look to them for the next move.

The information I’ve learned from performing a PQA at the Lowry center will further help in my education of early childhood. The observations and interactions I have had with the children and the curriculum help me to better understand each. Every interaction with a child I have I keep, to reflect and build upon. This experience is one that will help me with all children I have in the future. I am able to see the strengths and weaknesses of areas and where I would improve on each or create similar ones in my learning environment. All of my experiences will help me become more aware of children’s needs, so I will be able to better access them in the future.