

Early Childhood Education: How Quality Affects Outcome

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Abstract

The following research project is an in-depth study in regards to the importance of quality early childhood care and its effects on childhood outcome. Three scales were chosen and applied to a specific Early Childhood Program, its curriculum, environment, administration and child developmental level and recommendations were made to promote program success.

Introduction

Participation in high quality early care and education is vital in the advancement of a child especially ages 2.9-5 years. This multidimensional research project finds the correlation between program development of an early childhood education center and the effect it has on the progress of students in the program.

Based on a review of longitudinal research findings regarding program evaluation, three assessment tools were chosen for the field-based research component of the project. The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale to analyze the program's environment, the Program Administration Scale to assess the program's administrative capacities, and the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP) is used to establish the developmental level of one child. With the empirical data to explain the validity of the three evaluation tools and the research conducted in the field, a recommendation will be made to increase a specific program's effectiveness.

The Program

Let's Play In Spanish is a total immersion preschool center focused on play-based learning. Although the main office and campus is located in Campbell, California, the focal point of this research project is located at its campus in Mountain View, California.

This campus has one classroom for 15 students daily. Let's Play In Spanish offers one to five day enrolments per child and there are a total of 31 students enrolled at the present.

Let's Play In Spanish mimics "native language acquisition." This is considered to be a natural process of learning, and it works for second language learning as well. Let's Play in Spanish uses a natural, rapid language learning program that immerses its students in a no pressure environment. According to the Let's Play in Spanish website, their curriculum includes the following:

1. Familiarity of wide variety of common vocabulary words and 2 to 4 word phrases.
 2. Reinforcement of key preschool concepts (such as counting, shapes, emotions, jobs in society, and more).
 3. An interest in learning and communicating in Spanish.
 4. Enthusiasm for wider language learning.
 5. An appreciation for other cultures and conditions and respect for common values.
- (Let's Play In Spanish Website)

This curriculum is delivered through "Musical immersion," which uses theme-based songs, repetition, rhyming, reinforcement of key concepts in the capillary, immersion, like native speakers, and interaction to teach children a second language.

Let's Play in Spanish's mission is to "offer children a learning experience that is fun and unforgettable, where through the Spanish language they will learn concepts and social fundamental skills for the interval development in the physical, social, emotional, social, and cognitive areas." (Let's Play In Spanish Website)

The philosophy at Let's Play in Spanish is that total immersion is the best way to learn another language. They believe that playing is a powerful and active process through which children learn about themselves and their world. They believe that music and puppetry are the most effective tools for teaching and children and they believe that environmental education should start an early age. "These four pillars are what has made Let's Play in Spanish and award-winning program for over a decade." (Let's Play In Spanish Website)

The Child

R is a 5-year-old male student that has been at Let's Play In Spanish for three years. He loves his family, reading about Frog and Toad and he looks up to his big sister. He plays the piano, loves math and is learning chess. Spanish is his second language although his parents are multilingual and cultural.

My Hypothesis

I hypothesize that the curriculum and environment are level with industry standard, the administration of the program is above and beyond an average score and that the child is developmentally ready for kindergarten.

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale, ECERS, was developed to evaluate the experience of children within an early childhood environment including their interactions with others, materials and activities. This process quality is evaluated through observation. (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, and Cryer, 1997).

According to a publication called "Choosing Your Child's Care" from the childaction.org website, high quality care childcare environments must provide for three basic needs that all children have: protection of their health and safety, the facilitation of building positive relationships, and opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience. Items on the ECERS measure all three of these factors.

The ECERS was developed with very close collaboration with real, field-based evaluations and have been used in numerous research studies that assess its reliability. The authors of the ECERS have offered intensive workshops to help understand the rating scales. Video training materials are available for each scale as well. While there is no specific certification available, it is necessary and important to understand completely how the ECERS is scored and the meaning of each item.

The scale is divided into indicators, items, subscales and total scores. In order to score the ECERS, it is necessary to read the entire scale carefully to be as accurate as possible. The ECERS determines a rating of 1 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent) for the following subscales:

- Space and Furnishings:
- Personal Care
- Language-Reasoning
- Activities
- Interaction
- Program Structure
- Parents and Staff

Per item, the assessor begins with the indicators under the first column and continues from left to right, up/down writing Y (yes) N (no) or (NA) for each indicator. From there, a score is determined per item based on the following rules:

- A score of 1 is given if any indicator under the 1 column is rated Y (yes).
- A score of 2 is given when all indicators under 1 are rated N (no) and at least half of the indicators under 3 are rated Y (yes).
- A score of 3 is given when all indicators under 1 are rated N (no) and all indicators under 3 are rated Y (yes).
- A score of 4 is given when all indicators under 1 are rated N (no), all indicators under 3 are rated Y (yes) and at least half of the indicators under 5 are rated Y (yes).
- A score of 5 is given when all indicators under 1 are rated N (no) and all indicators under 5 are rated Y (yes).
- A score of 6 is given when all indicators under 1 are rated N (no), all indicators under 5 are rated Y (yes) and at least half of the indicators under 7 are rated Y (yes).
- A score of 7 is given when all indicators under 1 are rated N (no) and all indicators under 7 are rated Y (yes). (ECERS Guide Book)

Results of Let's Play in Spanish's ECERS score

Let's Play In Spanish received an average ECERS score of 4.44.

Space and Furnishings: 4.00

Personal Care Routines: 5.75

Language and Reasoning: 5.25

Activities: 4.33

Interaction: 6.60

Program Structure: 4.67

Parents and Staff: 1.83

Two numbers were very extreme. The 6.60 in interaction is high but not as high as it could be. Part-time care centers tend to score lower than full day centers in this area even though this is a language program. Another number to mention is the 1.83 for the Parents and Staff area. Let's Play in Spanish scored low because they lack staff and teacher development and care. There are no possibilities for growth and high turnover.

Program Administration Scale

The Program Administration Scale, PAS, is an easy tool to measure the quality of the administration of an early childhood education program. It can also be used as a guide to help programs improve. To create the scale, a review of successful administrative and management practices in early childhood education centers was conducted. Successful practices “foster collaboration, diversity, cultural sensitivity and social justice.” This scale helps the program administration affirm values, set goals, define a vision (and help act on that vision) and clarify organizational structure.

The PAS can be applied to improve the program, for training, research and evaluation purposes and public awareness.

Much like the ECERS, the scale is divided into subscales, each with its own items and indicators measuring leadership and management functions. These indicators are quantifiable from 1 (inadequate) to 7 (excellent) and therefore can easily be altered to improve program and administrative goals. The subscales are as follows:

- Human Resource Development: questions regarding staff orientation, staff development, opportunities for supervision and support and performance evaluation.
- Personnel Cost and Allocation: assessment in regards to salary scale, annual salary increases, benefits, children to staff ratios and paid planning time.
- Center Operations: looks at health and safety of facility, whether the center has a risk management plan, Space advocacy, frequency and quality of communication, Staff meetings and its dispute resolution.
- Child assessment: evaluates screening procedures for identifying children with special needs, type and frequency of child assessments to determine child outcomes, and you said of results in curriculum planning and program evaluation.
- Fiscal management: annual budget planning process, paying time of payroll and other expenses, and usage of standard accounting procedures.

- Program planning and evaluation: assesses written mission and vision statement and involvement of staff and parents in the evaluation of program practices and strategic planning engagements.
- Family partnerships: Communication with parents, involvement levels, and the amount of support provided to parents.
- Marketing and public relations: evaluates external communication tools responsiveness in local community and the administrator's involvement in various organizations.
- Technology: types of technological resources the center provides, level of use of different software applications and of the Internet by administrative and teaching staff.
- Staff qualifications: education, training, and job experience of program administrator and teaching staff
- Parents and Staff

Like the ECERS, each of these subscales has specific items that need to be scored. The indicators are scored Y (yes), N (no) or NA (not applicable), which is permitted only as noted for selected indicators. Based on the rating of the indicators, the items are scored 1 (adequate) through 7 (excellent) and NA (not applicable). Adding the item scores together generates the Total PAS Score. An Item Summary Form is then used to determine the average PAS item score.

Let's Play In Spanish's PAS Score

These results are unfortunately based on observation and not on analysis. The program decided not to engage my questions late in the game. Using what I knew from administrative principles and the scale, I was able to observe the following results:

Let's Play In Spanish received an average PAS score of 3.73.

Human Resources: 1.00

Personal Cost and Allocation: 2.67

Center Operations: 2.67

Child Assessment: 4.00

Fiscal Management: n/a

Program Planning and Evaluation: n/a

Family Partnerships: 4.00

Marketing and Public Relations: 5.00

Technology: 7.00

Staff Qualifications: Teacher: 7.00/ Aide: 5.00/ Administrator: n/a

The subscale of Human Resource Development that includes items such as staff orientation, supervision and performance appraisal and staff development received a 1 because there is a lack of written orientation procedures and the staff is not consistently implemented. Written annual performance appraisal is not conducted for teaching staff and the teaching staff is not observed as part of the performance process. There is a genuine lack of staff development and no provisions are made.

The total PAS score came out to a 71. There were 19 items scored giving Let's Play in Spanish an average PAS item score of 3.73.

Desired Results Developmental Profile

The Desired Results Developmental Profile, DRDP, was created to aide in the improvement of quality in programs and services provided to children, birth through 12 years of age, enrolled in early childhood care and education programs, before/after school programs and their families. The DRDP is one of three assessment tools developed by the California Department of Education, Childhood Development Division to help identify the "desired results" of children in these programs. "Desired Results are defined as conditions of well-being for children and their families. Each Desired Result defines an overall outcome." (DRDP-IT, 2010) According to the DRDP handbook, there are six desired results (DR) for children and their families:

- Children are personally and socially competent.
- Children are effective learners
- Children show physical and motor competence.
- Children are safe and healthy.
- Families support their child's learning and development.
- Families achieve their goals

California is one of the only states in the nation to have its own specific assessment tool for measuring a child's progress in achieving these desired results. This assessment tool is in synch with the standards found in early childhood education in three ways. First, foundational domains such as self and social development, language and literacy

development, English language development, cognitive development, mathematical development, physical development, and health are how the DRDP is organized. Second, each measure is based on the same continuum as the corresponding foundation. Third, the DRDP is based on the empirical research of the foundations and standards. This test can be used to assess the level of the individual development of each child.

The DRDP is divided into domains and measures. A domain represents a crucial area of learning and development for young children:

- Self and Social Development
- Language and Literacy Development
- English Language Development
- Cognitive Development
- Mathematical Development
- Physical Development
- Health

A measure focuses on a specific competency.

Each measure is assigned a developmental level. Each level specifies a point along the developmental continuum. The four levels are:

- Exploring
- Developing
- Building
- Integrating

DRDP Results

In the domain of Self and Social Development, the child was integrating in seven measures, building in four measures and developing in one measure. That measure is conflict negotiation. He seeks an adult to tell them that a child won't give them a turn with the marker instead of finding a solution with the other child.

In Language and Literacy Development, the child was integrating in five measures, building four measures, and developing in one measure. He was developing in interest in literacy. He responds to questions about books he has read but would rather play with dinosaurs than read a book.

In Cognitive Development, the child was integrating in three measures and building in two. In Mathematical Development, the child was integrating in four measures and building in two measures. In the Health domain he fully integrated in all three measures. The child was fully integrated in all three measures. He has amazing dance abilities; he runs, jumps, throws and participates in extended and integrated physical activity. He can balance a beanbag; hop like a rabbit and can cut on a dotted line with accuracy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, my hypothesis was wrong, in the areas I could observe. The ECERS measures the environment, the PAS analyzes administrative capacities and the DRDP assesses developmental levels of child. While none of these scales' scores were what I thought they would be and based on data and observation, here are the recommendations I would make to Let's Play In Spanish:

Let's Play in Spanish should create motivational environments for their teachers. It will help the teachers want to continue supporting the program and it will also help the environment and curriculum.

Although the child is ready for kindergarten, it is important to strengthen the domains of the program. This is a language program and it should benefit the children and program to help spark more interest in literacy.

Let's Play in Spanish should use the ECERS and PAS as guides in order to acknowledge what things this program administration and environment need. They should be used as self I assessment tools to see what the school can do to be better and to be open to the possibility of change.

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