



Early Childhood: Preschool Classroom Observation

Est. Time: 4 Hours

Objective

To observe a preschool classroom and examine some of its aspects such as schedules, routines, environmental design, activities, and transitions.

Overview

Many children spend a large portion of their day in early childhood settings. Because of this, these settings should be positive learning environments where children have the opportunity to explore a variety of learning materials in a number of settings (e.g., small group, large group, inside, outside). By observing different aspects of the classroom environment such as the daily schedule, the age-appropriateness of the activities and routines, and the arrangement of the physical environment, one can often determine whether the environment is conducive to learning and whether the teachers are providing quality care.

Activity

Visit an early childhood program and examine aspects of the classroom such as schedules, routines, environmental design, activities, and transitions. During the observation, take notes using the questions below as a guide and prepare a written description.

Questions

1. List the activities you observed and what time each started and ended.
2. Describe, based only on your observation, the children in the classroom (e.g., number present, diversity, children with disabilities, English language learners). How many adults were in the classroom?
3. If you observed a large-group, teacher-directed activity, discuss:
 - a. Activities that occurred during the large group
 - b. What the teacher did to engage the children
 - c. How engaged the children were



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Questions [Cont.]

4. If you observed a “center time,” describe:
 - a. The organization of the center
 - b. The centers that were available
 - c. Whether the children had choices about what centers to play in and what to do when they were in the centers
 - d. Whether children were allowed to move between centers as they wanted
 - e. Whether children were engaged with materials, peers, and/or adults
5. What other activities did you observe? Describe the activity, what the children were doing, and what the teachers were doing.
6. Describe the physical environment. Include a sketch of how the classroom was arranged. Describe what was hanging on the walls. Was evidence of children’s work displayed in the classroom?
7. Was a schedule posted? If so, include it. Was it illustrated with photos or line drawings that would make it useful to children? Where was it posted?
8. Were classroom rules or expectations posted? If so, include them.
9. Were visual cues available in the classroom (e.g., picture schedules, choice boards, markings on floor about where children sit or line up, steps of an activity)? Describe what visual cue systems were available, where they were located, and what they looked like (e.g., photographs, line drawings)
10. What type of instruction did you observe?
11. Did you observe challenging behavior? If so, describe the behavior and how the adults responded to it.
12. Describe transitions. What type of support was provided to children during transitions? Were the transitions generally smooth or chaotic?
13. Overall, what was your impression of the classroom? Consider the following:
 - a. Were children actively engaged in classroom activities?
 - b. Were teachers actively engaged with children?
 - c. Did children seem to know what to do?
 - d. Did children receive support and feedback from adults? Was feedback generally positive or negative, specific or general?
14. What was one thing you really liked about the classroom? What was one thing you would change? Explain your answers.