

Topic: **Engage in instructional planning using data to develop and implement activities and lessons that engage all learners, provide increased feedback, and reinforce skills and concepts.**

Guo, Y., Sawyer, B. E., Justice, L. M., & Kaderavek, J. N. (2013). Quality of the literacy environment in inclusive early childhood special education classrooms. *Journal of Early Intervention, 35*, 40-60. doi: 10.1177/1053815113500343

Context

Educating children with disabilities and delays in the same classrooms with their typically developing peers in the natural early learning environment has become a commonplace practice in the field of early childhood special education (ECSE). More specifically, high-quality early learning environments have shown to benefit children's overall development (Guo et al., 2013). One specific component of high-quality includes the classroom literacy environment; however, research efforts have not provided a comprehensive assessment of the multitude of features associated with high-quality literacy environments to provide information on how to strengthen and enhance children's literacy outcomes.

Purpose of the Article

The intent of the article was to descriptively examine the quality of inclusive ECSE classrooms by (a) describing the literacy environment with respect to structural and instructional features, and (b) exploring the extent to which teacher and classroom factors relate to the literacy environment.

A total of 54 preschool teachers and 439 children were included in this study. Teachers and caregivers completed a portfolio of questionnaires specifically related to demographics and beliefs. To measure both the structural as well as instructional literacy environments of classrooms, researchers completed comprehensive observations using assessments such as The Classroom Literacy Observation Protocol (CLOP; Children's Learning Research Collaborative, 2008) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS; Pianta, La Paro, & Hamre, 2008).

Classroom Literacy Environment

Research to date has shown the importance of structural and instructional features of early learning environments on children's emergent literacy development. The structural literacy environment mostly encompasses tangible materials such as children's books, print props, and writing materials and other resources. Literacy-rich environments have shown to promote a variety of writing experiences for children with and without disabilities and delays.

The instructional literacy environment includes the specific ways the teacher interacts with children to support their emergent literacy skills. Such strategies include teaching with open-ended questions, engaging children in frequent conversations, modeling complex vocabulary, scaffolding complex thinking, and providing explicit instruction on language and literacy skills. Unfortunately, research has mostly focused on the typical early learning experiences (e.g., general education) versus inclusive environments.

Factors Associated with the ECSE Literacy Environment

Teachers, who provide learning experiences to children in inclusive settings, provide instruction and materials to a wide array of abilities and skills. Research has suggested that there are several teacher factors associated with the literacy environment: level of education, years of experience, participation in professional development opportunities, and teacher beliefs.

Further, there are classroom factors that are also associated with the literacy environment including student characteristics and skills. One specific classroom factor is the number of children who are dual language learners within inclusive early learning. Both teacher and

classroom factors warrant further investigation as they relate to the variation in the ECSE classroom literacy environment.

Findings

The authors found the structural literacy environment of ECSE classrooms to be generally of low to moderate quality. The majority of classrooms were found to have mostly narrative types of books with little variation to accommodate for the diverse interests and levels of children. Further, it was found that only a limited amount of print materials and writing materials were present in the ECSE classroom environments. Only basic print and writing resources were present.

The findings for the quality of instructional literacy environments were mostly low, which was comparable to the typical preschool learning environments. The teacher and classroom level factors that significantly predicted the quality of the literacy and instructional environment included teachers' level of education; the factors that significantly predicted the quality of the literacy environment were reports of self-efficacy and recent professional development activities. There was a negative relationship with the numbers of dual language learners within a classroom. Future research should explore these findings with a larger sample and further assess the quality of the literacy instruction within the ECSE early learning environment.

How to Use this Article

For Instructors

This article and brief could be used to introduce the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) and other types of classroom assessment tools and to demonstrate how important structural and instructional environments are to child outcomes. Instructors could have students review the brief and use the ERS or other classroom assessments to conduct an on-site observation of an ECSE classroom environment. An additional activity could include a literacy observation in both a general education early learning environment and an ECSE environment to compare the findings. Students could then review their findings and compare with the article.

For Practitioners

This article and brief can be used to inform literacy practices in the early childhood environment. Practitioners can use the information to conduct their own assessment of their literacy environments to

determine how effective they are in providing children with optimal early literacy experiences.

References

- Children's Learning Research Collaborative. (2008). *The classroom literacy observation protocol* (Unpublished measure). Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University.
- Pianta, R. C., La Paro, K. M., & Hamre, B. K. (2008). *Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)*. Baltimore, MD: Brookes.

About Research-to-Practice Briefs

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

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