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Professional Interview Report

This assignment is based off of two separate interviews with two separate professionals. We chose to interview Sheri Conn a first-grade teacher at Lyons Elementary School in Lansing and Marisa Diaz an infant room lead teacher at the Michigan State University Child Development Center. Mrs. Conn has been teaching for thirty years. She spent twenty-two years in special education, and eight years ago made the switch to general education. Mr. Diaz has been working in public and private educational and childcare settings for sixteen years. She is most interested in creating a trusting, respectful and nurturing learning environment for children, working with infants and their families, and supporting a home/school connection. We asked both teachers the same set of questions and overall, we hoped to learn about the assessment process and get insight on things we learn in class and how to apply the topics to real world situation. Because we are interviewing two different professionals, from different grades, and different school districts, we are also hoping to gain multiple perspectives on assessments in the classroom

Children in Mrs. Conn’s classroom go through a wide variety of assessments:  DRA (developmental reading assessment), AIMSweb, behavior observations, chapter assessments (GoMath), spelling assessments, and progress monitoring on phoneme segmentation and nonsense words.

Both the DRA and AIMSweb are taken four and fives times per year respectively. Spelling and progress monitoring assessments take place weekly, usually on Fridays. Math assessments take place at the end of a chapter, which usually takes about a month. Behavior observations occur on a daily basis.

The most beneficial assessments are the DRA and AIMSweb. They both provide valuable information about student academic progress which helps Mrs. Conn plan future lessons for her students. Mrs. Conn is happy with the assessments that her district uses and wouldn’t change anything if she had the opportunity.

Mrs. Conn uses the information she gathers from assessment to promote her students to the next grade level. She also uses it to prepare students for the next grade level an set them up for success. If students are not socially or academically ready, they cannot go on to the next grade level. She uses assessment to help pace her curriculum and make sure it’s appropriate for all of the students.

Assessment information is shared at parent teacher conferences which happen twice a year. They are shown assessment results as well as work samples. Mrs. Conn also sends out bi-weekly progress reports, so parents are always caught up to speed. She believes open communication is key to working with parents. A weekly parent letter is also sent out, recapping the week before and informing of the upcoming events in the classroom.

Technology is used for some of the assessments in this classroom. Children take the DRA on iPads. They also participate in the I Read program three times a week for fifteen minutes at a time. The classroom has a smart board which is used for spelling tests.

Mrs. Conn is assessed as a professional twice annually. Lansing schools uses the MARZANO Teacher Evaluation method. Also the principal of Lyons will walk through her classroom four times throughout the year randomly. There are twenty-three elements to cover. There is also a mid-term evaluation. All of the results are sent to human resources.

The biggest challenge in assessments in Mrs. Conn’s classroom is the time. Each student can take twenty-to-thirty minutes one-on-one. She also said that any behavior problems can affect student results.

Finally, I asked Mrs. Conn how she motivated children through the assessment process. She said that building self-esteem throughout the year is beneficial. She really wants the students to feel like they’re capable. She also tells them that everyone has to do this, and it helps her become a better teacher. They also sing songs and exercise before and after.

Children in Mrs. Diaz’s classroom go through an online assessment called Core Advantage, an online assessment tool. Teachers take anecdotal records while observing children and plug those into different categories using this tool. The children in Mrs. Diaz’s classroom are assessed daily to use this type of tool. Then they get scored online too, based on what is observed in the classroom. This assessment shows the teacher developmentally where the child is. Then from their the teachers can plan what is next or how to scaffold what is next for the child in the classroom. Because this tool is online you are able to see where a typical child is at for different age groups and compare it to the observations seen in class. This lets teachers see what things may need to be worked on in the classroom when making new objectives for the children in the classroom.

Another online assessment that is given to the children in the classroom is called Ages and Stages, this is only for when children first enter the classroom. This is just a screener and it shows if there might be delays and it’s a nice tool to focus on specific domains if needed, but it does not say for sure if a child is delayed, it is just a screener and acts as a little red flag for a teacher to watch children in certain delays.

Mrs. Diaz is able to share information about the children in her classroom during parent teacher conferences. These take place two to three times a year, and sometimes when children are transitioning to another classroom parents ask for an exit conference. During these conferences Mrs. Diaz shares the anecdotal notes with the parents and talks about any of the red flags that they may have seen during the Ages and Stages screening. In the past Mrs. Diaz has had two children who were developing a little bit slower in the language domain. She let parents know that the adults in the classroom are watching this to see if it does progress with a little bit of time, and then they would make their decisions later for the next steps. In both cases both children did improve with a little bit of patience and time, so no further resources were needed. Mrs. Diaz relies on her strong relationships with parents made immediately when children enter her classroom, to have these conversations with parents. She explained that because she has relationships with each and every guardian, it does make it easier to talk to them because they trust her. She is extremely objective with parents and shows her evidence, anecdotal notes, to parents. She also always reminds parents that time is everything, even a month difference can make a world difference, so she encourages parents not to compare their children to others in the classroom.

Mrs. Diaz is assessed yearly from her boss/administration through the MSU Child Development Center. They evaluate her and talk about her progress, and goals that she wants for her future. Also, what goals they have for her. She states that the program is always changing, and everyone is a team. They listen to her ideas and goals and she listens to them. She loves to get the feedback to know what the future expectations are for her classroom. She also gets evaluated from different accreditations at the Child Development Center, one is the NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children. They look at her portfolios for the classroom, they also come into the classroom and observe. Finally, they do an interview with her and ask questions about the classroom. She also is assessed by the preschool quality program, PQA, and then licensing also comes into the Child Development Center to evaluate the classroom and the interactions with children. They make sure that the teachers are following policies and procedure.

The biggest challenge Mrs. Diaz has faced in her classroom, is finding the time to assess children. The assessments use a semester’s worth of anecdotal notes, so it is a lot of information to keep together and to collect. With students from MSU and parents coming into the classroom so often, it is hard to find time to sit time and observe and watch the children for the assessments. Another challenge she finds is that the Core Advantage assessment is already split up into certain categories, and sometimes children do or say things that don’t quite fit into categories.

Informal assessments in the classroom occur when Mrs. Diaz talks to her co leader about the goals and objectives for specific domains for the children. Another informal assessment is Ages and Stages because it is just a screener. A formal piece of assessment used in the classroom is the Core Advantage assessment explained earlier.

If Mrs. Diaz could change one thing about assessments she would add more categories to the assessment Core Advantage. She believes that children are able to reach so many tiny and big milestones that should be recorded, but some don’t fit into the specific categories. She wants to make sure that all the children are given credit to everything that they are able to accomplish.

Mrs. Diaz makes sure that all of her assessments are authentic because she believes that observing is the best kind of assessment. This is because as an observer you are not taking children out of their classroom element, just watching and taking notes.

There are many different similarities and differences between assessments in an infant room and a first-grade room. Mrs. Conn’s classroom uses a plethora of assessments that have to do with many different subject areas. The children are assessed quite frequently, even once or twice a week. Whereas the children in Mrs. Diaz’s room are evaluated by observations and they do not necessarily know when they are being observed. There is a similarity, Mrs. Diaz doesn’t asses them on subjects but a wide variety of domains, which is like how Mrs. Conn assesses students over different subjects. Both teachers gather information for the better of the children. They are using this information to make the classroom better and to make the learning environments better so that all children can succeed. Both teachers also are able to talk to parents about assessments during parent teacher conferences. Technology is also used for both classrooms, but it is the only type of assessment used for Mrs. Diaz’s class and in Mrs. Conn’s class there are other types too. Both teachers are assessed annually based on a set of criteria. Both teachers also agree that time is the biggest challenge in the classroom, and they wish they had more time.

Morgan was surprised to learn that Mrs. Conn wouldn’t change anything about the assessment process. For a public-school teacher, many assessments are out of your control and it’s often up to the district how and when you assess your students, and I was surprised to see that she was okay with everything. One of my biggest apprehensions with assessments is how so much of the process is out of as someone who wants to be a school teacher one day, I found it very helpful to learn about motivating students through difficult assessments. I also learned more about how to communicate assessment results with parents. I learned that assessment plays a critical role in a child’s future and should be taken very seriously by the teacher. Overall Emily learned that the assessment process is time consuming but very valuable. In order to make the classroom authentic for children it is most important to observe them in order to make the next steps decisions. We both liked to see the difference and similarities between the two teachers even though they teach at two completely different places with two completely different aged children.