

Seeds of Partnership Website Video Descriptive Text Transcription

High Quality Early Learning Environment, HQELE

Key Element: Spaces

Teacher Insight

http://www.seedsofpartnership.org/hqele/video/spaces_teacher_insight.html

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

In the classroom, we think a lot about space and when a child walks into a space they know that they're in a new area and that there's something to do here and they almost know what to do there and we do that by defining the spaces in different ways. We might use shelves as a way to define a space and tables and things like that but also, even things like area rugs could provide a visual cue to children. "I'm in a new place here. This is what I'm doing over here." And you can see children almost just flow from area to area. They know where to go because things are grouped in similar ways and that's really important. Also, as far as space goes even just within those interest areas having space for the materials with labels for example,

(Descriptor: Shelf containing materials with pictures and labels of materials)

on the shelves where children even know this is a space where I put this back and these kinds of materials go on this shelf. That, I think, can be very helpful and make children more successful in what they do because I don't think

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

that children always, some know what they want to do when they come to school, but some children come to school that might walk around and, "I don't know where I want to play, what do I want to do", but I think when they do that here they will walk around areas and they'll say, "Oh, this is where I can do this." And they'll get engaged and start using the materials in ways that are appropriate because they know this is where I do art because I see all these art things and they're labeled I know what to do with these materials. And it makes them really successful. And as far as grouping is concerned, we have...a lot of it could depend on your group. If you have a larger group and a lot of them love to do artwork you might need a larger art table in your classroom in maybe another group, you need you wouldn't need as much of an art table space and maybe they like working on the floor sometimes.

(Descriptor: Child sitting on floor painting a picture)

Or maybe you need a bigger easel. So I think you have to be flexible with your spaces and know your group and know your children to make those spaces successful.

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

And keeping in mind the children who are here a lot and most of the day need places they can go to be alone, in individual places I think is really critical. Even just the flexibility with spaces sometimes, maybe for our gathering area, we have to push the shelf so we have a little more room for something because we're going to move their bodies so being able to have flexibility I think is also really critical because as a teacher you need sometimes to just change things up a little bit, and if you are stuck in a certain way it might make it really difficult to be successful with some activities that you do with them. So even just the table size or what you put on the table in the morning might get two children working on something because you want them to work in pairs. We definitely take that a lot into consideration. You might want some tables where children can all look at each other and others where that's not as important. They may sit next to each other but they're working more independently. So considering what kinds of configurations you have within those space, I think, is really critical.

(Descriptor: Teacher Sarah sitting on couch in classroom)

We have several different interest areas in our classroom and we determine what interest areas we should have based on tools like the ECERS, the Environmental Rating Scale and the DRDP, the assessment tool that we use for children.

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

We have the Desired Results Developmental Profile some of the different measures on the shelf. So when we're planning for what we put onto the shelves, in the areas of the classroom, we can look at those and see that we have materials that would hit different areas for children and also when we're there observing children like if I'm sitting at the manipulative table with different children,

(Descriptor: Children working together on a puzzle)

I can look over and see, "Oh, they're doing this that's really important, I'll make a note of that." We use that a lot to plan our spaces as well and what we put out for children in the classroom.

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

So when you look in the classroom, it's very cohesive. You can see it's one classroom it's similar throughout and there's a lot of things that make it look like a classroom "I play here and I learn here, I feel good here", but each area also has it's own personality in a way maybe just a different color rug or what have you. It's still kind of separate but cohesive in that they can see different spaces and areas I think is really, really important.

(Descriptor: Teacher Sarah sitting on couch in classroom)

There's an art space and that I believe in the ECERS tools, it says that you need to have three different mediums at all times, so we make sure that we do that so that children have the exposure to three different mediums of art. So that's really simple. We have two shelves and we'll put play dough with tools they can add to the play dough like rocks or small branches for sculpture So that is an introduction to sculpture and clay and that whole art medium. And then we'll have paper and crayons and pencils and markers

(Descriptor: Shelves and table containing paper, crayons, pencils, markers, and scissors)

so that they can have the drawing aspect. And then we'll have paint. We actually have beyond that right now, we have collaging materials

(Descriptor: Wall displaying children's pictures and collogues)

so that's an easy way to make the ECERS come to life in that space. In terms of science,

(Descriptor: Teacher Sarah sitting on couch in classroom)

this is an area that we wanted to put a lot of emphasis on because I know that parents feel concerns for things like science and math in terms of school readiness. But ours is so hands on, we have things that the children have shown interest in: we have shells in a variety of sizes with sorting and magnifying glasses so they can look at science concepts like that.

(Descriptor: Children playing at table with science materials and microscope)

We introduce also small clip boards with provocations in the middle of the table so that they can take observations. In the fall, when we had pumpkins we put pumpkins and different gourds out for them to sit and take notes on and the children took notes in the science area, which was really neat.

(Descriptor: Teacher Sarah sitting on couch in classroom)

The children in our classroom were really young three's when they came in and we didn't want to put too much pressure on them to be writing their names if they weren't interested in it so we want to wait until the children show us that they're ready for that. So children come in and start saying, "Oh, I can spell my name. A-V-I, that's my name." When they are showing that interest or when they're picking up the pen or the pencil or the paper in the science area when there's a provocation in there taking notes. Those are the times that we can start to encourage them to write their names. But we don't, it's not something that happens until they show us that they want to work on it. And when that comes,

(Descriptor: Child using pencil to write on paper)

we don't sit down and teach them, "This is how you draw an 'A.' You start at the top and then go down." It's completely up to them to write however they want and we accept it and value whatever they do.

(Descriptor: Teacher Sarah sitting on couch in classroom)

It's important that we have spaces for children to go and express themselves and their personal needs in appropriate ways so we have the jumping mat in our room for a child who needs the sensory experience of being able to jump or kick or roll in a safe space inside. We also have the slide and children can slide up or down or run up or down, however they see fit. And we try to make different areas for every child to be able to have those sensory experiences. We have the sensory tub, which is the most basic way that you can introduce that. You can change that every day, every week. It can be sand or water, it can be goop, it can be any number of things that gives them a hands-on sensory experience but that may only help so many children whereas having a thing like a slide or a jumping mat can help those children that have those really strong needs and have a hard time regulating their behavior inside.

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

We have blocks and constructions kinds of materials, we might have different kinds of props over there for children, to encourage them to do different things with building. We have manipulatives, which would be math types of things, games, things that might involve social interaction to at some level. We have also the dramatic play area. We actually have kind of two in this classroom, two dramatic play areas.

(Descriptor: Children playing in dramatic play area loft)

We have a loft, which defines space quite a bit. Upstairs and downstairs, the loft is all dramatic play and a lot of that again speaks to the group of children some children are really involved in that and that's an important aspect of their play. So we have a lot of opportunity for the dramatic play.

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

We have a music and movement area, which is pretty sizable with a piano and all kinds of fun things they can just move their bodies try different instruments and their library area, I think, is really critical. And as a part of library, I think is really interesting because a lot of times you think libraries are just books but we notice that children like to come to library area also

(Descriptor: Library area with couch and pillows, floor rug, shelving, and book shelf)

to do large floor puzzles together or play games together because it's kind of a quieter area where they won't get disturbed. So we've put some of that into it too. You can be flexible with space as well. You really take everything into consideration

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

even our bathroom, we think about: What we have in the restroom for children? How they might feel being in there? Because they're in there quite a bit

(Descriptor: Photo of children's bathroom)

so it's not like just an, oh, they go there and whatever it looks like. We want to make sure that they're successful there too and it's an important part of their day. We also have, which is really important,

(Descriptor: Teacher Laura sitting on couch in classroom)

a welcoming sort of an area for our classroom. We think about as families come in with their children, where are they transitioning into the classroom? And what does that look like and how does that feel? That's really important.

(Descriptor: Program Specialist Katie sitting on couch in classroom)

And I can't tell you how many times I see the morning transition a child, who's struggling with leaving their parents, curl up on the couch with the parent, sit there, read a story, adjust to the new situation, feel, "OK, I'm here. I'm in a new place. This is my transition. I can do this." And the parent then being able to have

(Descriptor: Mother and child hugging each other in welcome area)

this peaceful goodbye and then leave. That chair, right when you walk into Laura's room, there's always a parent sitting in that chair in the morning reading to their child and helping them to transition into their day.

(Descriptor: Parent and child hugging each other in welcome area)

Helps the parent to leave and feel like, "OK, I've had that time to connect." And they can move on. The environment, in fact,

(Descriptor: Center Director seated in front of a large window)

reflects your core beliefs about kids. Look at your room,

(Descriptor: Panorama of classroom)

is this a reflection of what you believe about children? That there are intra-centers that still reflect

(Descriptor: Center Director seated in front of a large window)

the core areas of the curriculum. Whether defined as social studies or language and literacy or mathematics or science. Within those area though, that's where the choice of materials and the provocations come in. And for us, a simple place to start would be the foundations, the Preschool Foundations,

(Descriptor: Children at art table using colored paper)

because they give us a set of boundaries and roadmaps to begin to define outcomes.