Individual Child Assessment

Nicolette A. Peterson

April 26, 2015

Over the last ten weeks I had the privilege of spending my time in an early childhood development classroom at Chesapeake College Early Childhood Development Center. This classroom contained a mixed age group of four to five year olds. All in this class will be leaving the center at the end of the summer and entering some type of public school kindergarten program. Within this classroom I chose to observe AF (abbreviated for privacy purposes). AF is a five year old boy, born October 2009.

AF is a very driven and athletic young child who has demonstrated, on more than one occasion, his ability to learn by physical involvement, known as a kinesthetic learner. He shows more interest and excels mentally and physically when able to be physically engaged in an activity. While he is very active and thrives during physical activity, he also has a very competitive temperament.

The competiveness he displays does have its weaknesses. AF will be very engaged, until he loses—whether it be a race, completing a math problem, or continuing to fail at something, such as learning to tie his shoes. Some behaviors he displays demonstrates a need for more social and emotional development. The behaviors not only make him distant from others, he also becomes very hard on himself. I constantly observed his defeated behaviors when trying to teach or guide him on how to tie his shoes. Not only was it difficult to hold his attention on this activity, but he became very self-hating with statements such as: “I can’t do it,” “I’m stupid,” “I’m never going to get it.” While I believe this is a weakness, when not in “competition” AF does show good social skills, demonstrating empathy and encouraging friends too: “Yay for CC!” When learning across the room that his friend had received “Super Friend” status.

AF has many strengths, and when looking across the board at all the different learning categories, he does exceptionally well in cognitive learning, especially Math. While his competitive traits may take over and cause him more frustration than help, when he can keep his emotions in control, he demonstrates great math skills. Another area I believe is an equal strength is his physical development, specifically gross motors. As previously stated, he is very active and not only excels in physical activity, but also surpasses many of his friends (other children in class).

After reviewing all my observations and reflecting through this paper, I definitely believe AF’s needs, at this point in time, are specific to social emotional. AF needs to become more aware of how to deal with his feelings of frustration when he doesn’t excel or “win.” However, he also needs direction to understand that he cannot win everything, and that while winning is great, you also need to learn how to lose, and lose gracefully.

While AF would definitely benefit from some one-on-one and individual lesson plans specific to social emotional behaviors; there is no reason these lesson plans can’t be done with the whole class, in a large group setting as well. I would first start with the basics: feelings, what are they and how we manage them. I would then continue and execute these feelings into dramatic play, taking them into social skills. This would be a progression of continually adding in more complex feelings and how we continue to manage same. Then I would focus on social settings and dilemmas, such as sportsmanship.

Children learn and develop through all types of theories and practices. There is, and never will be, one “right way” to guide a child. Each child is unique and learns not only their own way, but in their own time. My time spent in the classroom and with AF gave me the opportunity to try and observe many theories in an actual classroom setting. A theory I used often, as did other teachers in the classroom, was scaffolding. This theory leads the children to a conclusion, by giving them the foundation, and guiding them with hints to the answer or conclusion. AF responded to this technique about eighty-five percent of the time. When he wasn’t able to answer the question even after scaffolding, I realized that he honestly didn’t know. How can he answer the question when he didn’t even have the foundation? This was helpful, because it allowed me to understand that I needed to step back and teach the basics. This included teaching him the foundation in order for him to build up to what exactly I wanted him to know and demonstrate.

Another theory I was able to see a connection within the classroom was Jean Paiget’s, and his stages of development. AF is five, so he would fall into the preoperational stage, also known as the egocentric stage. While I believe AF was very self-evolved at times, I was able to observe that he could understand when his friends felt and had different feelings and thoughts other than his own. An example would be when he told me his favorite color was purple because of the Baltimore Ravens. When I then asked him what GG’s favorite color was, his response was, “I don’t know, maybe pink or something.” Being able to make connections between these theories in the classroom was very helpful.

When observing in a classroom, the first and most important thing you must decide is the method you will use to take accurate observation records. The method I used was a file folder with index cards located inside to divide up each learning category. This method definitely worked great for me, specific to the purpose of observing only one child. With that being said, it may not translate well when having to observe numerous children. Carrying individual folders around for each child can be very inconvenient and not as easily accessible as with just one. Perhaps, modifying this system by having only one or two note cards for each child in one file folder, could be more realistic and manageable. I would change out cards, putting them into another filing system to keep track of all progress. As you can see, this can become a very complex system and can easily become overwhelming, especially if you have twenty children in one class.

I spent but only a glimpse in this classroom, and am far from fully understanding the daily challenges of observing children a classroom setting. Identifying all the different techniques and being able to successfully capture daily observations is definitely a huge task and responsibility. Being able to understand what works best for you and your class, which may vary by year, is only half the battle. The other half is finding and managing your time in the classroom so you can actually document the information you see, hear and collect. Remembering to use all your resources and becoming creative on how you collect the information will continue to assist in this process.