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EDUCATORS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY: TIME & ENVIRONMENT AS BARRIERS

This study examines the impact of accountability reforms like NCLB and ESSA on early childhood education in Oklahoma, revealing a conflict between academic rigor and play-based learning.

These reforms prioritize academic performance, leading to constraints on time and classroom environment that hinder developmentally appropriate practices.

Introduction

Through surveys, interviews, and collaborative inquiry, the research explored educators' experiences and the challenges they face within accountability reforms requirements upon them.

While play-based learning is highly valued for its developmental benefits, the time and space limitations imposed by accountability measures complicate its effective implementation.

Methods

Time constraints from lengthy assessments and rigid curriculum schedules limit educators.

Environment for early childhood educators is hindered due to curriculum-driven schedules that hinder play-based learning, educators describing their classrooms as feeling **"institutional"**.

Lack of support and flexibility in the system.

Findings

Eco-pedagogical barriers—required materials and rigid timelines—conflict with educators' philosophies, threatening the core of play-based pedagogy.

- Time, curriculum, assessments, technology, resources, & trust

Eco-Pedagogical Influences

Educators' Perspectives

Environment

Time

77% of educators reported that their confidence in their professional abilities was impacted by current accountability reforms, either most or some of the time.

On average
• 78.5% of educators spent 30 minutes or more per week administering required assessments.
• 74% of participants spent 30-60 minutes/week entering assessment data

Learning

- Learning Environment- the play-based pedagogy aspect, is only provided by the teacher, "that's all me, the state's not giving me anything to do that with, that is all me" (Audrina).
- 65% of educators report 20% or more of their time within the classroom is spent on assessment requirements and not teaching
- "I focus less on letting the students play and feel like I am shoving work at them constantly in order to produce data" (Survey, Response 14)
- "The need to constantly assess children not only stresses them out, but also the teacher" (Survey Response, 9).
- "I mean, it would, it would look like the kids in the older grades, that more of a college type, they're sitting at a desk, they're being spoken to, they're being told what to do, what to do on their papers, it's more no talking world, not talking, very quiet, um, group time, no responses from them, it's just kind of a I'm talking at them instead of with them, like high school, someone that can sit still longer than two minutes, not a kindergarten!" (Indie).

Physical

Class "we need lower class size...I think we need to come back to the point where we have aids, I know we can't find them, and we can't afford 'em. But those are just excuses... like how can you expect one teacher to be able to do small groups, whole groups, everything and test all these kids and service, you know, 20 plus first graders and give everybody equal time. It needs to be a smaller group... if it's not a smaller group, we need to have it back where we have people in our classroom to help us" and "a for real policy, not a [one] where you can just pay a fine...we just overbook it [classrooms] and then pay a fine" (Constance).

Curriculum

"We shouldn't have to adopt curriculum based on other grades....when you think about requirements of what we're asking kindergartners to learn, like, we get half our kids coming in not being able to write their name or spell their name or know the letters of their name, kindergarten is its own little bubble, we should be able to get our own unique things to teach because we are not like any other grade" (Audrina).

Educators reported low self-efficacy in providing play-based learning, noting that "the curriculum we use has many components, and it is hard to find extra time to do additional things. It can also be hard to find time to plan these activities" (Survey, Response 18)

Assessments

- "When I spend more time assessing than teaching or I spend 2wks out of every 9wks assessing then learning is lost and the assessments have lost their value for my own pedagogical stance" (Survey Response, 31).
- "CFA's and essential skill reporting helps me to form small groups and see what my students are lacking, but other state required assessments do nothing but cause grief in my classroom, both for my students and myself" (Survey Response, 21).

