Prelude Preschool of the Arts

Programming and Research Internship Data Collection Summary

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June 11, 2021

Observation Category Key

Engagement: EN
Empathy: EM
Expressiveness: EX
Content Application: CA
Content Connectivity: CC
Self-Efficacy: SE

Throughout the spring semester, from February to May, data was collected from the learning experiences of four students during Prelude Preschool of the Arts' Tuesday and Thursday Circle Times. These students were observed based on six categories: engagement, expression, empathy, self-efficacy, content application, and content connection. The instructors wanted to know: How and when are students engaging? What methods of instruction need restructuring or improvement? What changes made during this unprecedented year can be implemented in the physical classroom? The data collected was discussed in monthly meetings with the impartial observer, where the instructors would then alter their lesson plans to best fit the needs of the students based on weekly observations. To provide anonymity, the four students will be referred to throughout this paper as E, M, H, and J.

<u>Assessment Categories</u>

The first category used was engagement. When a student exhibits engagement, they are alert, on camera, and mostly focused on what is happening during the session. The student may offer comments or reactions during discussions or activities. The student is a participant during the activities of the class. The second category is expressiveness. The student has their own ideas about the subject or is able to convey some emotion regarding the topic. The student is using his or her own creativity to participate in art projects and is able to respond emotionally to the topic or other students.

Perhaps one of the more challenging categories to both capture and encourage was empathy. When a student expresses empathy in the class, they are able to both express and understand emotions and ideas reflecting themselves and others. They are able to respond to the emotions of other students, emotions displayed in class content, and are willing to hear the opinions or feelings of peers and teachers. Another challenging category to capture was self-efficacy, or, the ability of the student to exhibit self-control in an occasionally distracting setting and an ability to answer questions or gather materials without prompting. The two most straightforward categories of learning assessment are content application, or the use of learned concepts during class and in the context it is used, and content connectivity, or the ability of the student to make connections and use language associated with learned materials outside of the original context.

Data Collection Examples

Engagement

Engagement is the most obvious category to identify in all students observed. In general, engagement for the entirety of the class remained very high throughout the semester. For instance, every student observed exhibited some form of engagement immediately as class began, and at the beginning of each activity. One student who displayed some challenges with engagement was H. At the beginning of the semester, H exhibited only passive engagement, or, listening but not responding, which was evident when the student did not have any other observable assessment category to record during an activity. To remedy this, the instructors decided in March to allow students a few moments at the beginning of class to socialize in order to more closely reflect an in-person classroom. H immediately showed an increase in active engagement, offering their thoughts, saying hello to other students, and staying alert and on camera for the entirety of the session. As a result of this increase in engagement, all of H's other observation categories increased as well. This trend in increased engagement remained consistent for the remainder of the observation period.

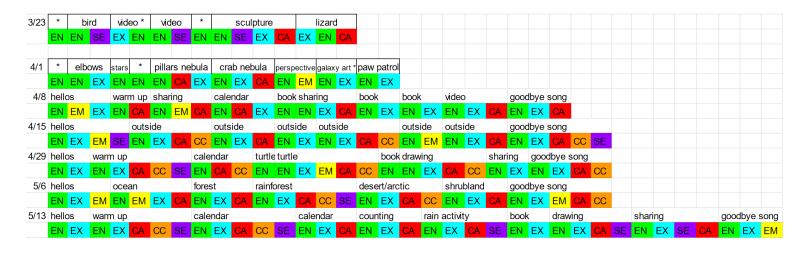| Date	Activities	Category codes
3/23	* bird / video * video * sculpture lizard	EN EN SE EX EN EN SE EN EN SE EX CA EX EN CA
4/1	* elbows stars * pillars nebula crab nebula perspective galaxy art * paw patrol	EN EN EX EN EN EN CA EX EN EX CA EN EM EN EX EN EX
4/8	hellos warm up sharing calendar book sharing book book video goodbye song	EN EM EX EN CA EN EM CA EN CA EX EN EN EX CA EN EX EN EX EN EX CA EN EX CA
4/15	hellos outside outside outside outside outside outside goodbye song	EN EX EM SE EN EX CA CC EN EX CA EN EX EN EX CA CC EN EM EN EX CA EN EX CA CC SE
4/29	hellos warm up calendar turtle turtle book drawing sharing goodbye song	EN EX EN EX CA CC SE EN CA CC EN EN EX EM CA CC EN EN EX CA CC EN EX EN EX CA CC
5/6	hellos ocean forest rainforest desert/arctic shrubland goodbye song	EN EX EM EN EM EX CA EN EX CA EN EX CA CC SE EN EX CA CC EN EX CA EN EX EM CA CC
5/13	hellos warm up calendar calendar counting rain activity book drawing sharing goodbye song	EN EX EN EX CA CC SE EN EX CA CC SE EN EX CA EN EX CA SE EN EX CA EN EX CA SE EN EX EN EX CA SE EN EX SE CA EN EX EM

Table 1: Student H Engagement (EN) without any other category suggests only passive engagement. EN coupled with other categories shows engagement that resulted in active participation in the activity.

Content Application

The face and body warm up offered an opportunity to observe content application in every student. This daily activity included facial and body movement exploration, movements

based on weekly themes, or dancing. Every student observed was able to accurately follow along or predict this morning routine. Another opportunity for this category was calendar time. On several occasions, students were asked to recite the days of the week, say the current month while clapping the syllables, and count to the day of the month. Student E, an English Language Learner, was often unable to both sing and clap the Days of the Week song. As the end of the year neared, however, they were beginning to both sing and clap, showing an increase in content application. With the instructors' encouragement, their growing comfort level, and the increased empathy and engagement from all students, E became much more confident and consistent in observable content application. By the end of the assessment, E was able to both sing and clap the Days of the Week song, accurately answer questions regarding the month, and use corresponding vocabulary more confidently. In addition, as H's engagement became more active, their responses to the calendar were more consistent and reflected their growing levels of content application and connectivity. Before April 8th, H's engagement during calendar time was almost entirely passive. However, on and after April 8th, H exhibited more content application by not only participating during calendar time, but also by being able to predict the next activity, clap the correct number of syllables, and sing the correct names of days and months.

<u>Empathy</u>

Of all assessment categories, empathy was perhaps the most difficult quality not only to observe through a virtual lens, but also to quantify. Every student observed had different and subtle ways of exhibiting empathy, whether that was through saying hello to others, wishing others well on birthdays or sick days, or simply responding with empathetic responses to emotional stimuli. The question was how to engage students in a way that promoted empathetic responses not just when it is asked of them, but also to enhance social learning and natural engagement with others. Student H often exhibited empathy even when not directly exhibiting content application or connectivity. H was often the first or only student to greet others without prompting or to comment on another student's clothing or apparel. This presented a challenge to the instructors: how do they engage other students in a way to reflect this empathy without direct prompting? After discussing, it was decided to take notes on when students did not exhibit empathy, especially when it may have been expected, to add images of facial expressions to materials, and to promote student relationships in a virtual environment by pointing out sick days

and asking about feelings each morning. When these changes were implemented beginning on March 11ᵗʰ, the students gradually became more aware and empathetic towards one another. On March 18ᵗʰ, student E greeted others by name for the first time since the observation began. Student J began to say "good morning" to both teachers and students, and students M and H often showed clothing or toys to others. Although subtle, these demonstrations of empathy allowed both teachers and students to more effectively communicate and learn together. When empathy was increased, positive and meaningful engagement was visibly increased in all assessment categories. In other words, it can be assumed that empathy affects all aspects of a child's learning.

<u>Expressiveness</u>

This preschool class had no lack of expression, and each student exhibited this quality in their own unique way. Perhaps the simplest category to identify, and easiest for students to exhibit on their own, this category was one of the most numerous. However, like empathy, this category expanded as students were given time to freely interact. Student M often began sessions by sharing a costume or toy with others. Student H also grew in this category as they explored interactions with other students. Allowing the students to freely express emotions at the beginning of each class allowed them to be more expressive throughout the entirety of each session. Other examples of expressiveness included responses to questions posed by instructors. When asked about the colors of an image from a book, student J responded with the colors they saw, and what those colors meant in the context of the picture. J was not asked about what the colors meant, but they used their own vocabulary and expressiveness to convey their ideas. Art activities offered many opportunities for expressiveness, although at the beginning of observations, not every student was willing or comfortable sharing their work with the camera, most notably student J. By May, however, every student voluntarily showed and explained their work at the end of each session. Instructors promoted expressiveness through planned questions, images, and art activities, and each student grew in this category by the end of the semester.

<u>Self-Efficacy</u>

Self-efficacy was exhibited in subtle ways unique to each student. One demonstration of self-efficacy that was universal, however, was the students' ability to be engaged for the entirety of each session. Virtual programming presents a number of challenges, including the unknown

variables of home environments. Each student observed was able to almost completely ignore outside distractions and focus solely on the class. Student M exhibited perhaps the most self-efficacy by the end of the semester, answering indirect questions and gathering materials without prompting from instructors or in-home adults.

Content Connectivity

Throughout the course of observations, each student grew in this area. Some students made connections during videos by asking questions after. On April 27th, the class watched a video on jellyfish. After viewing, J asked many questions about the animal based on their own observations. They stated that perhaps jellyfish stings feel like getting a shot, and even assessed that some do not sting, and instead use their tentacles to gather food. On May 13th, H made the connection that the letter "M" and "Y" of the month May are also in the word "Mickey." H had not made sound and letter connections previously, suggesting a growth in content connectivity towards the end of the semester.

On April 8th, M made many connections between letters and pictures in a book that was read in class. They made the statement that the letter "x" is usually only found at the ends of words, and that the ox in the picture was an example. They also shared the letter that each image in the picture started with ("b" for barn, "t" for turtle, etc…). In addition, M would often share the number of sounds in words without prompting. For example, they stated that the word May had two sounds (/m/ /ā/), one syllable, and three letters. This content connectivity shows that not only could students understand concepts in their original context, but also on their own and with their own assessments of the world around them.

Reflections and Conclusions

When asked to reflect on the results of observations, teaching artist Gabriela Micchia stated that she would definitely bring the changes due to this observation from this semester into the classroom. She highlights the growth students gained from reflecting both independently and with others, as well as space to develop conversation and social skills as a valuable teaching tool. Rebecca Storozuk stated that, although engagement comes naturally in an in-person learning environment, integrating the arts into everyday learning is unique to Prelude. "In-person teaching naturally allows students space to socialize and chat and grow in empathy, but the high level of

engagement I saw with incorporating the arts in meaningful ways will definitely be carried into the in-person classroom. It was amazing to be able to watch each kiddo enthralled by visual art, movement, and music. I don't think the program would have been as engaging without these components." Ms. Storozuk also stated that she and the other instructors often changed lesson plans to "integrate more opportunities for social-emotional and empathetic experiences" (Storozuk).

Throughout the course of observations, it is clear that both instructors and students at Prelude have emerged from a difficult year not just successful, but thriving. Teaching artists, who are already adept with creating flexible lesson plans, have become experts at assessing student needs, even when they are not directly stated. They have encouraged a comfortable, safe, and fun learning space for their students where they have acquired the skill of learning through empathy and shared experiences. Growth through observation and assessment has been the theme of this semester, and the instructors at Prelude are careful to self-assess and make changes based on both student and program needs. Utilizing arts integration allows for unique opportunities for student social-emotional growth. Each student observed grew in every assessment category, however, perhaps the most impactful thing to witness for the observer was the growth in empathy. Each student grew in empathy in their own way, and as a result, came away from a difficult year with an increased aptitude for content application, self-efficacy, engagement, content application, and expressiveness

1. Rebecca Storozuk, *Assessment Data.* 2021.

Assessment Data is based on observation notes recorded by the author.