

Studying the Danielson Framework for Teaching in PreK-3rd Grade Classrooms

A White Paper of the Research and Preliminary Findings



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Introduction

The [Center for the Study of Educational Policy](#) (CSEP) at Illinois State University is conducting a study to validate *The 2013 Danielson Framework for Teaching* in early childhood classrooms (PreK-3rd grade) in Illinois, as well as developing resources for supporting the use of the Framework to evaluate the performance of PreK-3rd grade teachers. The project is a result of a new state statute - [Performance Evaluation Reform Act \(PERA\) - that requires](#) all PreK-12 teachers to be evaluated using new performance-based measures. The Danielson Framework is one of the most commonly used teacher evaluation instruments in Illinois and nationally.

Phase One: Generating PreK-3 Examples to Enhance the 2013 Danielson Framework for Teaching and Project Website

The early learning examples aligned to the 2013 Framework for Teaching are being developed through the shared efforts of early childhood teachers and coaches, school and district administrators, and early childhood policy and research groups to identify those aspects of teaching that are identified as research-based and recommended practices for early childhood educators, aligned to Danielson's 2013 Framework for Teaching domains/components and critical attributes in Preschool (3 & 4 year olds), and K-3 classrooms. The 2013 rubric with early learning examples is available on the project website at:

<http://teecc.illinoisstate.edu/observationprotocol/danielsonframeworkwithearlylearningexamples/>

Online, professional learning modules and aligned resources will be developed in fall/winter 2015-2016 to support candidates in principal preparation programs, but could also be used for in-service principals to better understand and utilize the 2013 Framework structure and levels of performance in both teacher evaluation and professional growth. The resources compiled and developed through this project can be found on the project's website at:

<http://teecc.illinoisstate.edu/> The website also contains descriptions of the Illinois PERA requirements, and student assessments.

Phase Two: Validation

Validation of Framework: Staff in CSEP have received grant funding for a validation study of the 2013 Danielson Framework for Teaching for PreK-3rd grade teachers. This study took place in several districts and additional early childhood centers throughout Illinois (Northern, Central, Southern Illinois, and Chicago) in fall 2014 involving teachers in grades PreK-3. As part of the study, the selected principals/center directors or coordinators and teachers underwent a three-day training of Framework fundamentals, best practices in planning and reflection conversations as well as formal and informal data collection practices.

Objectives or Purpose

Conducting a study of the Danielson Framework in early childhood classrooms has three purposes:

1. To ensure that the Framework provides valid and reliable data for use in high-stakes teacher performance evaluation systems for PreK-3rd grade teachers.
2. To ensure that the framework provides accurate and reliable data that PreK-3rd grade teachers and their evaluators can use to identify strengths and weaknesses, and use that data to identify appropriate professional development mechanisms to promote teachers' growth.
3. To enable early childhood teachers and their evaluators to collaboratively confirm and extend effective teaching and classroom environmental practices to support student learning based on Danielson Framework teaching practice and student growth data.

Research Questions

The study was guided by three research questions:

1. Is the Danielson Framework for Teaching a valid teacher observation instrument in early childhood classrooms (Prek through 3rd grade)?
 - a. Does the observation data and subsequent ratings correlate with indicators of student achievement?
2. Is the Danielson Framework for Teaching a reliable teacher observation instrument?
 - a. Are there consistencies in the evidence and ratings identified across observers?
3. Does the Danielson Framework align with standards of practice for early childhood classroom teachers? Where are there common areas of agreement regarding effective teaching practice? Where are there potential areas of misinterpretation or disagreement?

Sample

The principal investigators recruited 26 PreK-3rd grade teachers in eight school districts across Illinois with varying demographics related to urbanicity, free/reduced lunch, race/ethnicity, and dual language learners. School and early childhood leaders (e.g., principals and program directors) were recruited and asked to identify at least three teachers at the PreK, Kindergarten and 3rd grade levels to participate in the study with some deviation that corresponded to the program/school grade levels served.

Observation Process & Analysis

Fall 2014: After undergoing training on the observation process, the internal observers (e.g., principals or directors) conducted a formal observation with each of the identified teachers using the 2013 Danielson Framework paired with an observer external to the school (for a test of inter-rater reliability). The internal observer and teacher participated in a planning conference prior to the formal observation while being observed by the external observer. The

formal observation was a full class/lesson period followed up with a post-observation conference between the internal observer and teacher (as observed by the external observer). Observation notes and evidence were collected from internal and external observers using an electronic database system. For the formal paired observations, the internal and external observers collected observation data on 17 components and identified the critical attributes that corresponded with the observed evidence.

Spring 2015: Internal observers conducted an informal observation (not paired with an external observer). The informal observation was a 15-20 minute classroom observation on a targeted set of domain components related to student engagement (Components 2b, 3a, 3b, and 3c).

Student assessment data: Researchers from the I-STEM team collected student fall and spring assessment data for the students in the participating teachers' classrooms. These assessments primarily included tests of math and literacy.

Quantitative analyses: The observers' data was analyzed for reliability by domain and component. For validity, the observers' ratings were correlated with the student assessment data. Student assessment data was included in the analysis if the student was in the classroom for the entire school year, and if researchers were able to collect both fall (pre) and spring (post) data. The student data also included demographics.

Qualitative analysis: The researchers examined the accuracy of the observation data on a scale of four dimensions: alignment of the data to the correct Framework component, specific and low-biased data, descriptions of student engagement, and alignment to the correct critical attributes. In addition, the 2013 Danielson Framework underwent a content analysis comparing and contrasting the foci and language used to describe effective teaching against standards of effective teaching practice identified in the early childhood literature.

Preliminary Results

Quantitative Analysis Key Highlights:

- On average, internal observers tended to rate teachers higher than external evaluators on several of the domain components.
- Out of all the components, the internal observers and external evaluators agreed 92% of the time on the ratings given to teachers in Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation) Component 1a: Demonstrating knowledge of content and pedagogy.
- More variation in ratings provided by internal observers and external evaluators was observed within Domain 1 (Planning and Preparation) as a whole compared to the other domains, where generally ratings ranged between Proficient and Excellent.
- Both internal observers and external evaluators rated teachers as Excellent more frequently within Domain 2 (The Classroom Environment) compared to ratings in

the other domains.

- Internal observers tended to rate teachers as Excellent for Domain 4a (Reflecting on Teaching) compared to external evaluators, who tended to rate teachers as Proficient.

The inter-rater reliabilities across the three domains found an overall average of 67% (see Graph 1 in Appendix A). Across the 17 components observed in this study within the domains, the range was 42% to 92% (see Graphs 2-4 in Appendix A). Observers disagreed the most when making observations about:

- 1c. Setting instructional outcomes (56%),
- 1d. Teachers' knowledge of resources (50%),
- 1f. Designing student assessments (67%),
- 2a. Creating an environment of respect and rapport (54%),
- 2b. Establishing a culture for learning (45%),
- 3d. Using assessment in instruction (42%), and
- 3e. Demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness (58%).

Qualitative Analysis Key Highlights:

- The evidence provided for Domain 1: Planning and Preparation was not consistently descriptive across observations. Often, data that was to be given by the teachers in regards to the lesson plan, student information, outcomes and assessments was not included in the evidence. Or, the evidence was not at the depth needed to make a clear distinction about the teaching and learning practices and outcomes that would be observed. For instance,
 - Student outcomes often included a listing of the learning standards that were being covered without identifying or translating the standards into observable and measurable outcomes.
 - Student characteristics were often described in terms of demographics, IEP status, ELL, etc. But, this description was many times not linked to how the teaching practices, materials, and outcomes would be differentiated according to these student characteristics.
 - Internal and external observers often did not provide descriptive information about designing assessments in Domain 1 and the observation notes in Domain 3d were vague describing implementation of formative and summative assessments. For the most part, descriptions of assessment tended to be over-generalized with "checking/monitoring for understanding" as the most common descriptor.
 - Recommendation: The planning conference for the PreK-3 classroom observations is essential. Evaluators and teachers need to do the following:
 - Describe how the teacher was intentional in setting up the classroom to support desired student learning outcomes.

- Discuss how the teaching and learning that the evaluator will observe is situated within the planned curriculum and intentionally designed for the students in the classroom.
 - PreK and Kindergarten classrooms can vary in their schedules (e.g., ½ day vs full-day) and in the range of student abilities, which requires that the evaluator and teacher be very intentional in choosing when the teacher and evaluator schedules the observation. The observation should be coordinated in such a way that the evaluator will see the desired teaching and learning practices in action.
 - Describe the role of play-based learning strategies and other developmentally appropriate, inquiry-based practices chosen to support the desired student learning outcomes. Lesson planning may be unique at the early childhood level as content areas are more likely to be integrated, student learning can have a larger range of ability levels, and early childhood teachers seize on teachable moments that arise during inquiry-based learning experiences.
 - Utilize teaching expertise when collecting data on Domain 1: Planning and Preparation. Evaluators need to listen and ask good questions so that they are clear about what they can expect to see when they enter the classroom for observations, what the desired teaching and learning outcomes are for that period of learning, and what the teacher’s goals are for growing his/her teaching practice.
- The observation data on Domain 2: The Classroom Environment were often conflated with the Domain 3: Instruction components, particularly 2a. Respect and Rapport and 2b. Culture for Learning. In addition, the descriptions about classroom procedures and physical space often did not get to the level where the researchers could see the link between the classroom environment and the desired student outcomes such as the link between student groupings, materials and supplies used, and the arrangement of the classroom furniture and resources with the learning standards, planned activities and outcomes.
 - Recommendation: Because student-enabled learning environments in early childhood classrooms are an essential learning priority, evaluators should see an intentional link between standards, outcomes, and the learning environment that include:
 - Academic learning and other domains of learning and development (e.g., social-emotional, language, cognition, and physical).
 - Interactions between the teacher and students including,
 - Teacher-child proximity (e.g., teacher gets down on the student’s level, comes close to the student, puts hand on student’s arm, makes eye contact)
 - Respect and rapport (e.g., teacher asks about students’ interests, students’ family; teacher uses an appropriate tone of voice; teacher asks for students’ input)

- In an analysis of the alignment of the observation evidence with the identification of critical attributes, there was often a misalignment between the observation evidence provided and the critical attributes chosen. This was often due to one of the following problems:
 - Observation evidence was not accurately sorted into the proper domain component, and/or
 - Observation evidence was missing or not specific enough to support the critical attributes chosen.
 - **Recommendation:** Specific and descriptive evidence is key for more accurate and reliable feedback in all domains.
 - It is fundamental that there is correspondence between the evidence collected and the critical attributes and performance ratings chosen.
 - Create a “story” of the teaching and learning process through descriptive evidence so that the data makes sense to the evaluator as well as the teacher.

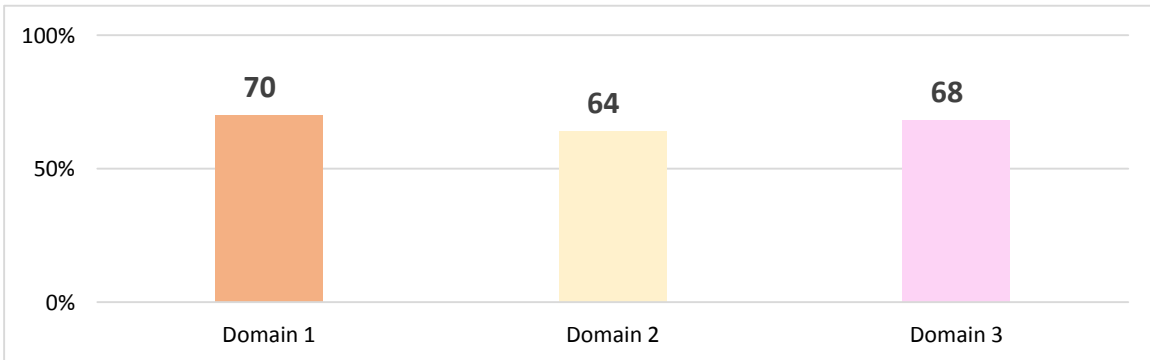
Next Steps

The analysis of the data is still ongoing, particularly in relation to the correlation of the observation data with the student assessment data. A final report with the full study findings will be available in late fall 2015 and will be available on the project website. In order to enhance the understanding and use of the 2013 Framework in PreK-3rd grade classrooms by both teachers and evaluators, CSEP researchers are working with a variety of early childhood stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators, coaches, faculty) to develop early learning examples and other resources to enhance the use of the framework at the early childhood level. This focus on early learning will provide the unique opportunity to engage in productive conversations about what are the common practices of **Good Teaching for All Kids** (regardless of grade level) as well as understanding critical aspects of **Good Teaching for Early Learners**.

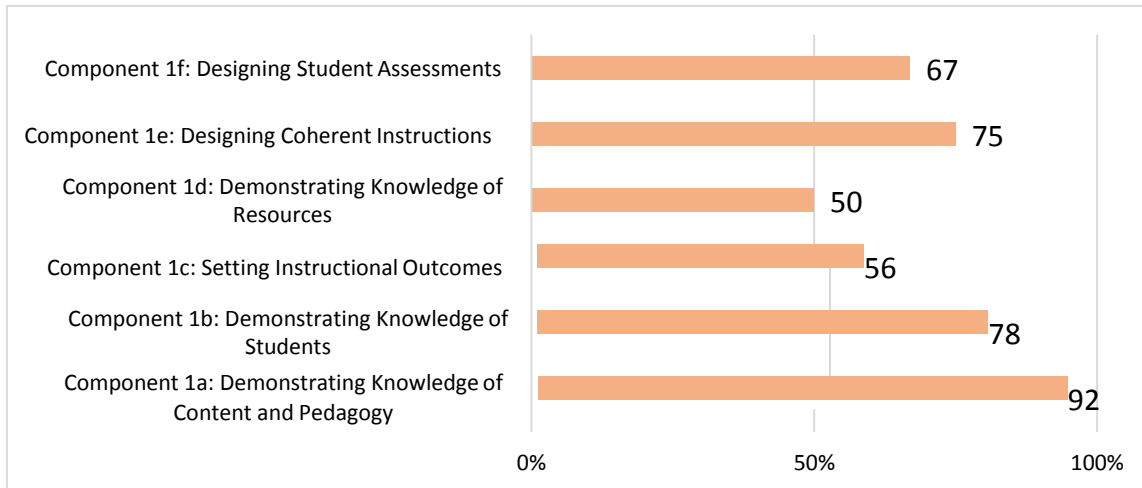
For more information about this project and our resources, please contact Lisa Hood at lhood@ilstu.edu and consult our project website at: <http://teecc.illinoisstate.edu/>

Appendix A: Graphical Representation of the Table Data Findings

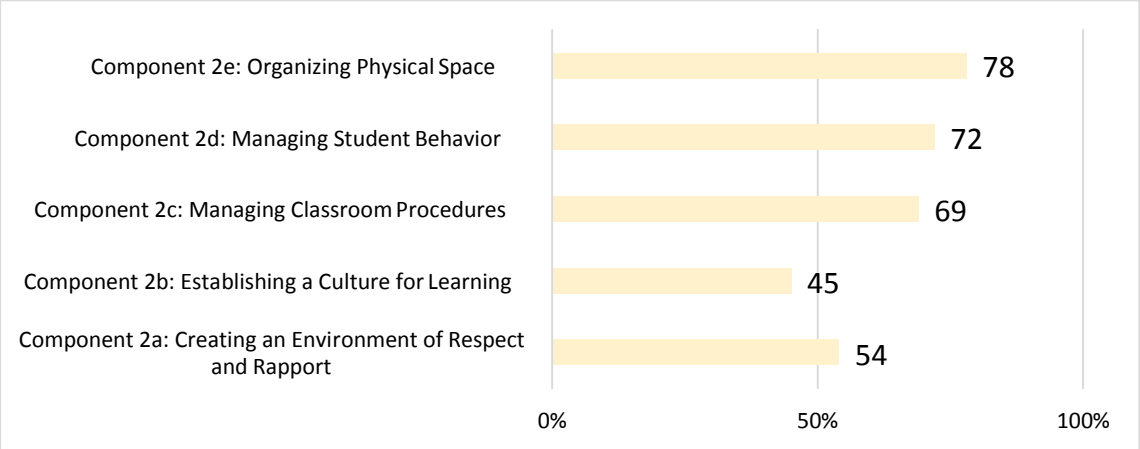
Graph 1: Internal and External Domain Agreement (Average = 67%)



Graph 2: Overall Internal and External Evaluator Agreement, Domain 1



Graph 3: Overall Internal and External Evaluator Agreement, Domain 2



Graph 4: Overall Internal and External Evaluator Agreement, Domain 3

