Early Head Start
Classroom Observation
and
Creative Curriculum
Fidelity Tool

Site:_____ Classroom: _____

Teaching Team: _____

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Ages of Children:_____ Number of Children: _____

Number of Adults: _____ Number of Volunteers: _____

Name of Observer: _____

NOTE TO USERS:

This observation instrument was designed for use only in infant and toddler classrooms at Mid-America Head Start. The indicators in the left column of each page were drawn from the references below. Observers should write comments in the space provided to evidence whether indicators are met.

REFERENCES:

Baker, H., Seagraves, E., & Mosley, J. (2016). *The fidelity tool for administrators: The creative curriculum for infants, toddlers, & twos.* Bethesda, MD: Teaching Strategies, LLC.

Trister Dodge, D., Berke, K., Rudick, S., & Baker, H. (2015). *The creative curriculum for Infants, toddlers, & twos. Vol. 1: The foundation.* (3rd Ed.) Bethesda, MD: Teaching Strategies, LLC.

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. (2016). *Head Start program performance standards and other regulations.* Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start. (2015). *The Head Start early learning outcomes framework: Ages Birth to Five.* Washington, DC: Administration for Children and Families.

Table of Contents

ENVIRONMENT	Page 5
DAILY ROUTINE	Page 6
APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Self-Regulation / Behavior Guidance	Page 7
APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Initiative & Curiosity	Page 8
APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Creativity	Page 9
SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Relationships	Page 10
SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Emotional Functioning / Sense of Identity & Belonging	Page 11
LANGUAGE & LITERACY: Language & Communication	Page 12
LANGUAGE & LITERACY: Emergent Literacy	Page 13
COGNITION	Page 14
COGNITION: Emergent Mathematical Thinking	Page 15
PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: Perception / Gross & Fine Motor	Page 16
PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: Health / Safety / Nutrition	Page 17
FOUR TYPES OF PLAY	Page 18
INFANT/TODDLER PLAY EXPERIENCES OFFERED	Page 19
THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS, & TWOS	Page 20

ENVIRONMENT

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(a) Teaching and the learning environment. A center-based program must ensure teachers and other relevant staff provide…an organized learning environment that promotes healthy development of children's skill growth aligned with the *Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework: Ages Birth to Five,* including children with disabilities • 1302.31(b) Materials and space for learning. A program must provide age-appropriate equipment, materials, supplies and physical space for indoor and outdoor learning environments, including functional space. The equipment, materials and supplies must include any necessary accommodations and the space must be accessible to children with disabilities. Programs must change materials intentionally and periodically to support children's interests, development, and learning. **Creative Curriculum** • The classroom is organized to provide a responsive environment that addresses the needs and growing abilities of young children. o Classroom areas are conveniently located and organized to accommodate routines o Classroom areas for experiences provide space for children to move safely and include defined, protected spaces as well as clear pathways for moving around the room o Spaces and materials are age-appropriate and updated to accommodate children's developmental needs, abilities, and interests o Classroom areas are arranged in such a way that noisier play areas and materials are located away from relatively quiet areas o The classroom environment includes comfortable places for adults o The classroom is arranged so that all children can be seen at all times with no areas obstructed from view o Classroom areas are comfortable and designed to welcome families o Materials for children are labeled with pictures and words and stored on low, open shelves where the children can reach them easily o Materials are mounted on the wall at varying heights for children to explore o Physical modifications are made to accommodate children's special requirements when appropriate o Classroom clutter does not interfere with routines and experiences.	

DAILY ROUTINE

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(c) Learning Environments. A program must ensure teachers implement well organized learning environments with developmentally appropriate schedules, lesson plans, and indoor and outdoor learning experiences that provide adequate opportunities for choice, play, exploration, and experimentation among a variety of learning, sensory, and motor experiences. For infants and toddlers, promote relational learning and include individualized and small group activities that integrate appropriate daily routines into a flexible schedule of learning experiences. **Creative Curriculum** • The daily schedules and weekly plans are flexible and include a balance of types of experiences and settings. o Routines and experiences take place at an unhurried, child-directed pace. o Sufficient time is allowed for routines, play experiences, and transitions. o Active and quiet times are balanced throughout the day. o Children have opportunities to be alone (although supervised) or with a families' teacher. o Opportunities exist for children to spend time in small groups of two to three children. o Children go outdoors twice a day in full-day programs. • Individual and small group experiences are planned flexibly to address the individual strengths, needs, and interests of children. o The teacher offers planned experiences as appropriate (e.g., facilitates individual and very small group experiences when appropriate. o Accommodation is made for children who choose not to participate. • Transitions between routines and experiences are smooth and used as opportunities to connect and engage with children. o Transition times are planned and organized (e.g., infant's diapering supplies are prepared prior to bringing the child to the changing table, children's food is ready to serve prior to children sitting at the table, toys and activities are set up to be inviting and appealing to children prior to their arrival in the classroom, etc.). o Special attention is paid to difficult transitions, such as at the beginning and end of the day or waking from a nap. o Familiar signals are used to let children know when it is time to transition from one experience to another (e.g., singing the same song each time you are preparing to go outside). o Children are guided through transitions patiently and lovingly.	

APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Self-Regulation / Behavior Guidance

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards o 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions, and environments that promote behavioral development. **Creative Curriculum** • The teacher guides children's behavior in positive, effective ways. The teacher: o States expectations clearly in a positive way (e.g., "It's time to put the trucks on the shelf."). o Uses positive guidance when responding to challenging behaviors (e.g., redirects children from unacceptable to acceptable behavior, actively listens and allows child to express her feelings, offers choices, etc.) o Attends to challenging behaviors quickly and avoids letting them escalate. o Positions self for good visual supervision, even when working with individuals or very small groups (e.g., sits or stands facing most of the children, visually scans the room, looks toward loud or unusual sounds or cries, moves around the room as needed). • Outdoor spaces are safe and arranged so that children can be seen and supervised from all vantage points.	

APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Initiative & Curiosity

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions, and environments that promote behavioral development; provide supportive feedback for learning; motivate continued effort; and support all children's engagement in learning experiences and activities.
Creative Curriculum
• Individual and small-group experiences are planned flexible to address the individual strengths, needs, and interests of children.
  ○ Experiences are planned based on children's interests.
  ○ Materials in the classroom reflect children's preferences.
• The teacher uses effective strategies for guiding children's learning. The teacher:
  ○ Adapts and individualizes experiences to include all children.
  ○ Helps children make choices.
  ○ Ensures that children are engaged (e.g., making eye contact and communicating with a teacher, focusing on a toy, etc.).	

APPROACHES TO LEARNING: Creativity

Indicators	Comments
Head Start Program Performance Standards • 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in creative arts. **Creative Curriculum** • The teacher offers opportunities for children to explore the arts. The teacher: ○ Provides opportunities for both planned and spontaneous exploration of the arts (e.g., creating art, connecting with music and movement, etc.). • Music with lyrics in the children's home language(s) is included when appropriate. • The music and movement area allows for open space for dancing and moving and includes carpet and/or cushions; comfortable adult seating; device for playing music that is out of children's reach; use of outdoor spaces for music and movement experiences; sound-making toys and materials (e.g., balls with bells inside for young infants and shakers, tambourines, and drums for mobile infants, toddlers, and twos); and duplicates of materials. • The art area includes a variety of materials that correspond to children's interests and abilities: bare floor space or child-size table for mobile infants and young toddlers or a protected art space for older toddlers and twos; materials that invite exploration and experimentation (e.g., fabric scraps for young infants, jumbo crayons and chalk for mobile infants and toddlers, and specific tools for art creation for twos); and uncluttered displays of children's artwork.	

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT: Relationships

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions, and environments that promote social development.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in social development.
Creative Curriculum
• Classroom areas support consistent and responsive care.
  o The hellos and good-byes area includes photos of children and families as well as a quiet, comfortable place for saying good-bye and supporting children during their transition to the classroom.
  o The hellos and good-byes area includes objects or materials for children to explore when they enter the room.
• The teachers establish a positive classroom climate. The teachers:
  o Maintains a nurturing and positive affect (e.g., smiles, laughs, hugs, uses a calm voice, shows enthusiasm).
  o Demonstrates warmth and respect toward children (e.g., handles children gently, makes eye contact, offers full attention).
  o Shows caring and affection toward children in the classroom.
  o Promotes a sense of classroom community, interacts with individual and very small groups of children, includes opportunities for children to group and regroup themselves naturally.
  o Refrains from negative interactions.
• Teachers engage children in interactive experiences (e.g., music and movement, pretend play, etc.).	

SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT:
Emotional Functioning / Sense of Identity & Belonging

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote emotional development.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in emotional development and social studies.
Creative Curriculum
• The environment reflects the family backgrounds, home cultures, and exceptionalities of the children in the classroom.
  ○ Images and materials are non-stereotypical, and authentic depictions of children and families are displayed (e.g., photos of classroom children and their families, photos showing other cultures or ethnicities, etc.
  ○ Images of children with disabilities are included in the materials and displays.
• The teacher establishes a positive classroom climate. The teacher:
  ○ Gives encouragement and positive feedback about children's interests, needs, efforts, and/or accomplishments.
  ○ Listens attentively to each child and responds respectfully and appropriately (e.g., gives the child time to express his feelings, then verbally acknowledges his feelings and offers support.
  ○ Shows sensitivity to the children's feelings.	

LANGUAGE & LITERACY: Language & Communication

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote language development.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in language development.
• 1302.31(b)(2) For dual language learners, a program must recognize bilingualism and biliteracy as strengths and implement research-based teaching practices that support their development:
• (i) For an infant or toddler dual language learner, include teaching practices that focus on the development of the home language, when there is a teacher with appropriate language competency, and experiences that expose the child to English.
Creative Curriculum
• The teacher uses effective strategies for guiding children's learning. The teacher:
  ○ Talks with children during play to help them build receptive and expressive language skills and learn to have conversations.
  ○ Engages in positive back-and-forth exchanges with children.
  ○ Uses a range of teaching strategies.
  ○ Observes, acknowledges, and describes children's learning (e.g., "Your car rolled away, and it is too far for you to reach. I see that you are sad that you don't have your car. Can I move you a little closer so that you can reach it?").
  ○ Uses "self-talk" to describe actions (e.g., "I'm going to hold the book in my lap so you can help me turn the pages." or "I think I'll warm your bottle a little more before feeding you.").
  ○ Speaks with children respectfully (e.g., states intention before picking up infant to change her diaper, asks children how they are feeling, uses positive language).
• The teacher effectively promotes the English language acquisition of children who are English- and dual-language learners. The teacher:
  ○ Uses gestures and other visual cues when speaking
  ○ Repeats words and phrases
  ○ Speaks slowly
  ○ Responds to children's efforts to communicate in English or their home language.	

LANGUAGE & LITERACY: Emergent Literacy

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote literacy development.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in literacy development.
Creative Curriculum
• The stories and books area includes comfortable furnishings; high-quality books that respect diversity and promote inclusion; age-appropriate books (e.g., board books or cloth books for young infants, simple stories with repetitive language for mobile infants, alphabet books with simple illustrations for toddlers, and books with detailed characters for twos); a collection of favorite books as well as a consistent rotation of new books.
• The teacher uses both child-initiated and teacher-planned experiences to effectively guide children's literacy learning. The teacher:
  ○ Uses songs, stories games, and rhymes that play with language (e.g., replaces words in songs with new or silly words, incorporates actions into songs and stories, etc.).
  ○ Promotes phonemic awareness by drawing children's attention to the sounds of language (e.g., emphasizing rhyming words when sharing stories; claps to the beat during chants, rhymes, and songs; imitates infant's babbles, etc.).
  ○ Reads to individual children and to very small groups of children two to three times daily, interacting with children while reading.
  ○ Encourages development of writing skills (e.g., draws attention to writing, points out print in the environment, offers experiences with writing and drawing tools, etc.).
• Books and other classroom materials (e.g., labels and schedules) are written in children's home language(s) when appropriate.
• The teacher effectively promotes the English language acquisition of children who are English- and dual-language learners. The teacher:
  ○ Reads simple books in English with repetitive text and rhyme.
  ○ Reads to children in small groups and/or individually.	

COGNITION

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote critical thinking and problem-solving.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in science and social studies.
Creative Curriculum
• The sand and water play area includes props and toys organized and grouped together by type; individual trays or tubs used to reduce the spread of germs; and outdoor sandboxes that are covered.
• The teacher offers opportunities for children to explore the physical and natural world. The teacher:
  ○ Offers experiences for children to explore the physical properties of objects and materials, using all the senses.
  ○ Shows appreciation and enthusiasm for what children are doing.
  ○ Provides natural materials for display and exploration (e.g., an aquarium, small garden, pinecones, feathers, etc.).
• There is no screen time for infants and toddlers
• The imitating and pretending area includes materials that encourage sensorimotor activity and pretend play (e.g., toys that rattle when shaken for young infants, wheeled toys for mobile infants, toy household items for toddlers and twos) and a limited number of props and toys.
• The teacher offers opportunities for children to explore the social world. The teacher:
  ○ Engages with children during imitating and pretending experiences.	

COGNITION: Emergent Mathematical Thinking

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1) Effective teaching practices must emphasize nurturing and responsive interactions and environments that promote critical thinking and problem-solving.
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in mathematics.
Creative Curriculum
• The playing with toys area includes duplicates of the most often used toys: materials that children can explore with all their senses (e.g., cuddly toys, balls, stacking rings, activity boxes, age-appropriate blocks, etc.); space for children to play near one another comfortably; and a small number of toys available at a time.
• The teacher uses both child-initiated and teacher-planned experiences to actively introduce mathematical concepts. The teacher:
  ○ Plans appropriate mathematics experiences (e.g., counts blocks as the child builds a tower, provides plush shapes for infants to explore, etc.).
  ○ Makes connections and encourages children to connect mathematical ideas to everyday experiences.
  ○ Interacts with children to support their understanding of number concepts; patterns and relationships; geometry and spatial relationships; and sorting and classifying.	

PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: Perception / Gross & Fine Motor

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(b)(1)(iv) Include developmentally appropriate learning experiences in physical development.
• 1302.31(e)(4) A program must recognize physical activity as important to learning and integrate intentional movement and physical activity into curricular activities and daily routines in ways that support health… A program must not use physical activity as reward or punishment.
Creative Curriculum
• The outdoor (or indoor gross motor) area includes developmentally appropriate equipment designed to match the sizes and skills of infants, toddlers, and twos, including having duplicates of favorite outdoor toys (e.g., riding toys, balls, beanbags, low balance beams, foam paddles or bats, baskets or buckets).
• Various developmentally appropriate gross motor experiences are offered. For example:
  ○ Young infants have the opportunity to explore movement while lying on their stomachs and backs.
  ○ Mobile infants are encouraged to move by crawling, creeping, scooting, or cruising by the teacher pointing out fun toys to travel toward.
  ○ Toddlers have the opportunity to play with push toys.
  ○ Twos are provided riding toys to push with their feet.
• The playing with toys area includes duplicates of the most often used toys: materials that children can manipulate (e.g., snap beads, stacking rings, activity boxes, age-appropriate blocks, etc.).
• Various developmentally appropriate fine motor experiences are offered. For example:
  ○ Infants are offered toys such as rings and rattles to grasp.
  ○ Toddlers have the opportunity to feed themselves and scribble on paper.
  ○ Twos have the opportunity to handle playdough, tear paper, and use items such as squirt bottles, clothespins, and tongs.	

PERCEPTUAL, MOTOR, & PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT: Health / Safety / Nutrition

Indicators	Comments

Head Start Program Performance Standards
• 1302.31(e) (1) A program must implement an intentional, age-appropriate approach to accommodate children's need to nap or rest, and that, for preschool age children in a program that operates for 6 hours or longer per day provides a regular time every day at which preschool age children are encouraged but not forced to rest or nap. A program must provide alternative quiet learning activities for children who do not need or want to rest or nap.
• (2) A program must implement snack and meal times in ways that support development and learning. Snack and meal times must be structured and used as learning opportunities that support teaching staff-child interactions and foster communication and conversations that contribute to a child's learning, development, and socialization. Programs are encouraged to meet this requirement with family style meals when developmentally appropriate. A program must also provide sufficient time for children to eat, not use food as reward or punishment, and not force children to finish their food.
• (3) A program must approach routines, such as hand washing, and transitions between activities, as opportunities for strengthening development, learning, and skill growth.
• 1302.43 Oral health practices. A program must promote effective oral health hygiene by ensuring all children with teeth are assistant by appropriate staff, or volunteers, if available, in brushing their teeth
Mid-America Head Start
• Follows "We're on the CASE" procedures.
Creative Curriculum
• Classroom areas support consistent and responsive care and children's learning and development.
  ○ The diapering and toileting area has materials to keep the area safe and sanitary.
  ○ The eating and mealtimes area is separated from the diapering and toileting area.
  ○ The sleeping and nap time area is a peaceful space that limits light and noise stimulation.
  ○ The getting dressed area includes labeled, individual storage for each child's belongings that is easily accessible.
  ○ The tasting and preparing food area includes a child-size table and chairs, if needed; safe cooking tools and utensils stored in low cabinets; and nontoxic clean-up supplies within easy reach.	

FOUR TYPES OF PLAY

Type	Indicators	Comments
Sensory-Motor Play (Sometimes called Functional or Practice Play)	Children engage in sensory and motor exploration of toys, materials, spaces and people in order to learn about them. Sensory-Motor Play is more physical play like experimenting with the world through senses, manipulating objects, and crawling, rolling, running, and jumping.	
Constructive Play (Sometimes called Productive Play)	Children manipulate objects in order to create something. In Constructive Play, children play with toys and other objects and materials to accomplish a goal. Examples: • Using wooden blocks to build a tower, • Using playdough or clay to model an insect, or • Using art materials to represent a flower.	
Socio-Dramatic Play (Sometimes called Pretend, Dramatic or Symbolic Play)	Children pretend to be other than what they are and use actions, objects, or words to represent things or situations OR use small toys to play out themes. During Socio-Dramatic Play, children pretend, take on roles, and act out sequences of events. They can role play real characters and events such as mom and dad, store worker, dog and cat, or police officer. The play can also be fantasy themed—wizards, fairies, princesses, or superheroes. During Dramatic Play, children use small toy people, animals, vehicles, etc. to act out roles and sequences	
Games with Rules	In solitary or group play, children recognize and follow rules that conform to the expectations and goals of the game in order to sustain play. Games with Rules can be movement games, board games, card games, or social games. Types of games include aiming, racing, chasing, hiding, guessing, card, board, and games involving verbal commands.	

INFANT/TODDLER PLAY EXPERIENCES OFFERED

Experience	Examples	Comments
Teacher-Guided "Play-Like" Experiences **Teachers initiate**, plan, and facilitate experiences based on specific curriculum objectives. Some elements of play are present—e.g., joyful, engaged, interactive, hands-on materials provided.	• Teachers provide materials such as masking tape or tissue boxes filled with scraps of fabric and guide children's exploration. • Teachers bring out toy phones and make pretend phone calls with the children. • Teachers guide *Baby Doll Circle Time.* • Teachers invite children to finger paint at the table. • Teachers lead a game of *I'll Find You*--hiding a teddy bear for children to find. • Teachers bury attribute blocks in sand for children to uncover and explore. • Teachers set up simple obstacle courses and use spatial words as children go in, out, under, over, and through.	
Free Play Teachers provide blocks of time and set up inviting indoor and outdoor environments to encourage **child-initiated** play.	• Children choose toys, objects, loose parts to explore with all their senses. • Children engage in child-initiated sensory-motor play in the gym or on the playground. • Children explore drawing, painting, modeling, and building materials. • Children imitate others in socio-dramatic play—pretend to talk on phone, stir food, feed baby, ride in the bus. • Children initiate and play simple games such as Peek-A-Boo and Chase.	
Teacher-Supported Play After observing children at play, **teachers respond** to them and provide intentional and individualized support for play and learning.	• After children visit the mobile medical unit, teachers provide doctor's office props and join doctor's office play. • When they notice children's interest in water during handwashing, teachers add soap to water in the sensory table. • The teacher joins a child in building block towers, knocking them down, and rebuilding them safely. • After observing children play with food containers in classroom, teachers bring toy food and grocery cart outside. Children and teachers play picnic or grocery shopping themes together. • In response to children tearing book pages, teachers provide paper for children to tear with their hands or snip with toddler scissors.	

THE CREATIVE CURRICULUM FOR INFANTS, TODDLERS, & TWOS

Indicators	Comments
Creative Curriculum • The teacher uses *Intentional Teaching Cards* for teacher-guided, planned experiences and to individualize instruction OR the teacher plans experiences for children based on the guidance from *The Creative Curriculum for Infants, Toddlers, & Twos, Volumes 1-3.* The teacher uses strategies such as: o Has needed materials readily available o Follows guidance *on Intentional Teaching Cards* regularly and adjusts when appropriate OR follows teaching team's plan for an experience and adjusts when appropriate. o Makes adaptations for English- or dual-language learners and for children with special needs when appropriate o Individualizes instructions by using teaching sequences. • The teacher uses *Mighty Minutes* effectively to facilitate learning during transitions OR uses transition activities planned by the teaching team. The teacher: o Uses *Mighty Minutes* or other transition activities flexibly throughout the day (e.g., when a toddler needs extra time during toileting, when an infant is overly tired and struggles to fall asleep, etc.) o Plans for Mighty Minutes or other transition activities o Is knowledgeable and comfortable with words to songs, chants, and rhymes; and o Follows appropriate guidance on *Mighty Minutes* cards. • The teacher follows guidance on *Book Conversation Cards* related to Highlights Hello OR plans other book conversations. The teacher: o Reads Highlights Hellos or other books flexibly o Introduces Highlights Hello by showing the front cover and talking about the illustrations o Follows guidance on Book Conversation Cards regularly and adjusts when appropriate; and o Refers to the Book Conversation Cards guidance for subsequent reading.	