
Effective Learning Environments Observation Tool® (eleot®)

Environment A: Equitable Learning

Why It Matters: Most learning occurs in a social context (Vygotsky's Theory of Learning) when interactions between students and adults occur informally and formally. Since learning environments are social systems, student interactions and exchanges during conversations, discussions, and other activities greatly impact their overall learning process, social development, and respectful acceptance of others.

What to Understand

- The term, equitable, is often thought of as meaning, "the same," which is the definition of equality. An equitable learning environment describes an environment where each student's individual needs are met and he/she is valued for her or his uniqueness, not sameness (Jamieson, Roberta, 2000).
- Although students should have equal access to the learning at hand, their experiences or activities can differ depending on their prior knowledge, interests or understanding of concepts.
- The essence of this environment is concentrated on the individual student. In highly rated equitable learning environments, the individual student is progressing and learning at his own rate and showing respect toward other individuals.

What Learners Do

- Work in small groups, whole groups or individually.
- Engage in activities/experiences that are varied depending on needs or interests.
- Access resources (material, digital and human) to attain understanding of the concept(s).
- Ask questions to understand other cultures, differences and backgrounds.
- Show compassion toward their peers or convey compassion during discussions.
- Demonstrate a desire to understand others through conversations and questions.

What Observers Do

- Look for small groups of students working together to determine if they are completing the same or different activities from other groups.
- Listen for students' questions about what resource /materials they need to complete their work.
- Find out in advance of the observation if the students have playlists or pathways that give them choices for their activities.
- Listen to the words and tone students and the teacher use among each other during conversations and questions.
- Listen for words and watch for nonverbal behaviors that reflect acceptance and respectful curiosity about others' cultures, backgrounds and differences.

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Environment B: High Expectations

Why It Matters: Teachers often calibrate their expectations differently based how they perceive students, and students detect and respond to those expectations accordingly, whether they are high or low (Rosenthal & Jacobs, 1968). Successful teachers, however, work to foster high expectations for all their students (Marzano, 2010). They do this because it is “through relationships that convey high expectations [that] students learn to believe in themselves and in their futures, developing the critical resilience of self-esteem, self-efficacy, autonomy, and optimism” (Benard, 1995, p.3).

What to Understand

- This environment is about opportunity and response.
- Teachers are responsible for presenting students with rigorous work and content and for holding students to high standards.
- Students are expected to rise to meet the challenges presented by teachers and persevere through difficult work.
- In many cases, students need opportunities to work with others to complete rigorous work.

What Learners Do

- Exhibit signs of wrestling with content and learning objectives
- Extend learning by applying it to both related and seemingly disparate situations and contexts
- Overcome challenges presented by the lesson to achieve success and mastery of material
- Generate new content/materials
- Work collaboratively to solve problems and complete tasks
- Share learning objectives with others

What Observers Do

- Listen for comments and questions from students about their use of rubrics and exemplars to help them complete high-quality work.
- Listen for teachers asking complex and open-ended questions and for students asking clarifying questions and connecting their learning to diverse situations.
- Watch if students are rapidly completing each step of the learning assignment or working through tasks with deliberation and effort.
- Watch to see whether students are working through tasks with deliberation and effort or if they are rapidly completing each step of the learning assignment.
- Observe students showing their previously completed work (or work in progress) through a demonstration, descriptions of a visual, etc.

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Environment C: Supportive Learning

Why It Matters: The culture of learning in a remote classroom can have important implications for student outcomes. Aspects of classroom culture that have demonstrable effects on student achievement are student-teacher relationships, student self-concept, and the extent to which learning supports are available during instruction and application of learning (activities, assignments and tasks).

What to Understand

- Hattie (2009) found that “the most critical aspects contributed by the teacher are the quality of the teacher and the nature of teacher-student relationships.” Though important, it is not sufficient that classroom interactions are positive; the focus of classroom interactions should be productive student learning.
- Dweck (2010) recommends that educators take an active role in “creating a culture of risk-taking” that emphasizes “challenge, not success”. Intellectual risk-taking can occur within many contexts stemming from a variety of sources, but students must have opportunities for productive struggle appropriate to their own levels of need.

What Learners Do

- Speak and interact with peers and the teacher in constructive and meaningful ways.
- Provide support for others regarding understanding of content and expectations, as well as in accomplishing individual and/or group tasks.
- Focus attention, energy, and conversation on learning objectives, assignments, or tasks.
- Demonstrate willingness to move beyond their comfort zones to ask/answer questions or share ideas of which they are uncertain.

What Observers Do

- Take note of how students respond to the norms established, such as being on time, paying attention, and staying focused.
- Listen for comments and verbal exchanges in which students share feelings/attitudes about the remote learning environment.
- Check for ways students are challenged and supported and the role of the teacher in this process.
- Pay attention to students’ comfort level for sharing an answer or idea, even if they are not sure it is correct.

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Environment D: Active Learning

Why It Matters: Studies, as well as espoused psychological principles, strongly indicate that students learn best when they participate, have ownership in the learning, and see the relevance of what is being studied. When learners are inherently engaged or actively participating, they are more likely to refrain from “risk-involving behaviors in the learning environment” (Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, and Kindermann, 2008).

What to Understand

- **Active learning** generally means that students are highly involved and take part in activities and discussions, typically with their peers, during the learning process.
- Active learning is different from passive learning- where students listen, watch and occasionally raise their hands to respond to their teachers’ questions.
- Commonly implemented instructional strategies, such as problem-based, cooperative and collaborative learning, promote active learning (Prince, 2004).
- Discussions in which students predominate occur when the classroom culture has high expectations and is respectful, supportive, and learner-centric.
- The content/topics and flow of the discussion are driven by students (Byrd, 2008).

What Learners Do

- Ask questions, work on projects and activities.
- Act as facilitators of the discussion and take ownership of the content and topics.
- Make statements that indicate an understanding of the relevance for what is being learned; communicate or demonstrate “this is important because...”
- Seek assistance from and ask questions to their peers; share their understanding of the activity with peers.
- Work in his or her assigned role in a group (time keeper, communicator, etc.) to complete the activity or project.
- Communicate with other students about the activity, ask each other questions, and share responsibility for the completion of the task.

What Observers Do

- Observe the number of students participating in the discussion or activity.
- Listen for learners taking the lead in discussions.
- Listen for questions that students ask each other during the discussions.
- Listen for students exchanging ideas or accepting others’ opinions or perspectives.
- Determine if students are leading an exchange or discussion about a topic that is relevant to them.
- Take note of students commenting or asking questions that indicate they know why the content, activity or project is important to understand and complete.

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Environment E: Progress Monitoring & Feedback

Why It Matters: Establishing “feedback loops” within the classroom is one of the most powerful ways for teachers and students to communicate about learning taking place in the moment, thereby providing opportunities for learners to apply content correctly as defined by specified learning outcomes. The process of setting and communicating learning targets, providing aligned activities, sharing appropriate feedback, and assessing progress toward targets has a proven impact on student achievement.

What to Understand

- **Progress monitoring**, as it is used within eleot®, refers to formative activities that provide information regarding student progress toward a learning goal.
- The impact of feedback on student learning varies greatly depending on the kind and quality of feedback provided (Hattie and Timperley, 2007).
- “Teachers not only must be clear about what they want students to learn; they also must know typical student steps and missteps toward this goal” (Moss & Brookhart, 2009).

What Learners Do

- Make use of references such as rubrics and criteria lists during collaborative activities, in discussions with teachers, or as a guide while working independently.
- Ask and answer questions about lesson content as well as expectations for outcomes, including ways in which content will be assessed.
- Share peer feedback aligned to learning objectives or specific criteria from rubrics or other learning resources.
- Reflect on learning progress based on specified learning objectives or expectations.

What Observers Do

- Listen for students to make statements about their use of checklists, learning targets, and/or other tools that help keep them on track.
- Pay attention to students’ questions or comments when given instructions to complete any type of an assessment.
- Listen for discussions about the content that demonstrate students’ understanding.
- Listen for student feedback on their individual or group learning targets or learning objectives.
- See if students appear clear or confused about the feedback received, expectations to improve their work, and/or purpose of the lesson.

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Environment F: Well-Managed

Why It Matters: Well-managed learning environments, with strategies that are consistently applied, enhance prosocial behavior, impact student achievement, and build students' confidence in their ability to learn and work with others (Brophy, 2006).

What to Understand

- A well-managed learning environment is characterized by a system of established expectations that are clearly communicated and consistently implemented.
- Evertson (2013) asserts that an effective and well-managed learning environment cultivates a high level of student engagement.
- A well-managed learning environment is dependent upon the teacher's understanding of each student's needs and personalities in order to establish an environment that is safe and productive for all.
- Smooth transitions from one activity to another ensure students are prepared for the next learning experience.

What Learners Do

- Speak politely to their peers and teachers and show respect while others are talking.
- Listen to and follow their teacher's directions to change or complete activities.
- Demonstrate understanding of the remote learning expectations and practices.
- Share information and/or resources, materials and understanding of the activity with other students.
- Transition quickly and orderly efficiently from one activity to the next with few redirections.
- Focus on their assignments or activities.

What Observers Do

- Listen to the tone of the verbal interactions students have with each other and with their teacher(s).
- Listen to and watch for students sharing information with each other so that established expectations, rules, and norms are upheld.
- Watch students exchange information about resources and materials and work well in groups.
- Observe how quickly students cognitively refocus after transitioning to a new activity.
- Look for students who are on task and attentive to their work and teacher(s).

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Environment G: Digital Learning

Why It Matters: Today's learners encounter digital devices from a very early age, essentially growing up with some form of technology in their hands (National Educational Technology Plan, 2004). As an ISTE white paper explains, "Future innovation in education and technology will continue to disrupt virtually every industry and enterprise, presenting challenges as well as unprecedented opportunities for economic growth and human development" (Barr & Sykora, 2015, p.4). Faced with such a future, high-quality classrooms must find innovative and authentic ways to integrate student use of technology in a way that fosters a positive and strong digital learning environment.

What to Understand

- This environment focuses on **student** use of digital tools.
- Student interaction is essential to ensure connection and collaboration with their peers and teacher(s).
- For example, the first 20 minutes are might be focused on introducing the lesson and the teacher's expectations. Therefore, students might not be engaged in critical thinking, collaborating with peers, or exploring topics that are relevant and interesting to them.
- Each Item Descriptor measures a different aspect of student use of digital tools and
 - G.1** - Basic information gathering
 - G.2** - More in-depth research, problem-solving and new learning
 - G.3** - Communication and collaboration assigned to groups, do not necessarily indicate they are collaborating.

What Learners Do

- Look up information needed to complete activities.
- Apply information and lesson content to new situations.
- Collect and synthesize information from a variety of sources to develop a deeper body of knowledge.
- Generate new content/materials.
- Work collaboratively to solve problems and complete tasks.
- Share learning objectives with others.

What Observers Do

- Listen for students' responses to questions and the format in which they respond: are their responses through discussions, demonstrations or text-based?
- Watch for students' ease of using various features of the platform or Learning Management System.
- Listen for students discussing progress and explaining their work/ learning to peers.
- Listen to discussions between and among students that indicate research, problem-solving and other critical thinking skills have been integrated in the learning activity.
- Observe students' creative artwork, charts, graphs or graphic arts that demonstrate their application of skills to enhance or support their learning.
- Pay attention to how students communicate with the teacher and/ or each other. Are they using group messaging, breakout rooms, chat rooms, and/or direct messages?