Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Programs

Michal Perlman, Ph.D.
Atkinson Centre, OISE/UT
Good Early Childhood Education programs are good for children and families. **

** Most research in this area is based on samples of children from deprived backgrounds.
Increasing numbers of children are attending Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) Programs. Public spending on ECEC programs is increasing.
Context: Canada

Provincial/Territorial budget allocations for regulated childcare by year.

Figures taken from ECEC in Canada 2008.
Full-day JK & SK comes with a large price tag

It will change the lives of thousands and thousands of children and their families.
Good ECEC programs provide children with:

- Warm and nurturing environments.
- Activities and materials that children can interact with and that have been selected by staff to further specific educational goals.
- Useful and supportive feedback about their own performance.
Good ECEC programs:

- Meet the needs of children from diverse backgrounds with different learning needs.
- Facilitate the connection between home and the early childhood education program.
- Provide good adult:child ratios with low staff turnover.
- Have experienced staff who have trained in early childhood education.
What do we know about the current quality of our ECEC programs?
ECERS data across Canada.

ECERS-R data from 116 randomly selected child care centre classrooms in Toronto.

Context:
So, what do we know about the current quality of our ECEC programs?

- Not a whole lot.
- What we do know suggests there is lots of room for improvement.
We have virtually no information about the quality of...

- Junior and Senior Kindergarten classrooms.
- Programs for infants and toddlers.

Whether we will need to think about the quality of “wrap-around” services remains to be seen.
Herein lies the reason for today’s meeting:

We’re spending more and more money and increasing children’s exposure to ECEC programs…

Yet we know very little about the quality of these programs!
Monitoring Quality: Why?

- Quality Improvement.
- Accountability.
- Public Education.
Rating systems are used as part of accountability systems to drive improvement.

Test scores have consequences associated with them.
Monitoring Quality: Why?

Quality improvement, accountability, public education

- Quality Improvement Strategies
- Funding
- Parent Choice
- Incentives: Funding, Parent Choice
- Assessment Quality Ratings
- Disseminate Assessment Information
- Quality Improvement Strategies

Program Characteristics
Many states are using QRIS’s in centres, preschools and pre-kindergarten programs
Monitoring Quality: **How?**

**Quality measures must be:**

- Fair.
Monitoring Quality:  **How?**

**Quality measures must be:**

- **Fair.**
  - **Valid.**

  *(The measure actually tests what it’s supposed to measure.)*
Monitoring Quality:  How?

Quality measures must be:

• Fair.
  • Valid.
  • Reliable.

(The measure must be applied objectively.)
Monitoring Quality: How?

Reliability across observers, time & location.
Quality measures must be:

- **Fair**.
  - Valid.
  - Reliable.
- **Include objective measures.**
Quality measures must be:

• **Fair.**
  • Valid.
  • Reliable.

• **Include objective measures.**
  • Reduce self-presentation bias.
Monitor Quality: How?

Quality measures must be:

• Fair.
  • Valid.
  • Reliable.

• Include objective measures.
  • Reduce self-presentation bias.
  • Provide rich feedback.
Quality measures must be:

- **Fair.**
  - Valid.
  - Reliable.

- **Include objective measures.**
  - Reduce self-presentation bias.
  - Provide rich feedback.

- **Efficient.**
Monitoring Quality:  How?

Quality measures must be:

• **Fair.**
  • Valid.
  • Reliable.

• **Include objective measures.**
  • Reduce self-presentation bias.
  • Provide rich feedback.

• **Efficient.**
  • Cost of monitoring must be minimized.
Quality measures must be:

- Fair.
- Include objective measures.
- Efficient.

To achieve these standards quality monitoring must be empirically based.
Monitoring Quality: Which measures?

- **Operating Criteria** – Valid and efficient.
  (about one hour per room)

- **Classroom Assessment Scoring System** – Valid and provides rich feedback.
  (about 3 hours per room)

- **Caregiver Interaction Scale** – Valid and provides general feedback.
  (5-minutes per staff, but must be in the room for 45 minutes)

- **Ratios & Staff Training / Education**
All types of ECEC programs need to be assessed using the same standards.

A four-year-old child has the same developmental needs regardless of program type.
Monitoring Quality: When?

• On an ongoing basis.
  – Annually?
    *(Schedule should be determined empirically.)*

• In *school* classrooms.

• In *child care centre* classrooms.
Any evaluation of the impact of Ontario’s Full Day Early Learning initiative should include measures of child outcomes.

But today we’re focusing on program quality…
Monitoring Quality: Barriers?

Culture
We need to break down silos based on precedent and logistics.

Cost
Not so large when we keep the magnitude of spending in mind.
Conclusions:

We have a fantastic opportunity to redesign the system in a way that supports program quality:

• For example, with a small increase of resources allocated to licensing of childcare centres, we can get much deeper information on program quality.

• This is a naturalistic experiment that will provide a once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunity.
Conclusions:

- Monitoring quality is hard but doable.
- Make decisions based on data where it exists.
- Collect data where it is needed.
- Let’s learn from other localities.
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