Achieving and measuring quality: an international perspective


Linda Harrison
Professor of Early Childhood Education
Charles Sturt University – Bathurst Campus
email: lharrison@csu.edu.au
Determinants of quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC)

International research – characteristics of early learning programs that make a difference for children

Government policies and quality assurance systems

Describing and measuring quality in ECEC

International standards for rating quality

Self-assessment and rating in the Australian NQS

Achieving quality in ECEC

What makes quality happen for educators and families?
Research findings: characteristics of effective early childhood learning programs

- achieving quality requires an integration of care and education
- programs that are effective in promoting children’s development are underpinned by regulatory standards and systems for QA.
  - structural features and professional standards provide the underlying conditions to support quality assurance processes essential to the achievement of high quality early childhood programs
- educators are more effective in promoting children’s learning and development when overall service quality is higher
- the quality of early learning programs is reflected in children’s day-to-day experiences and the organisational features of the setting
- have educators who are qualified, well-resourced and supported
  - exemplifies approaches to curriculum that value and rely on professional knowledge and competence in interpreting principles and learning goals for the local context and children’s individual needs
Research findings

• high quality programs are informed by a pedagogical framework that guides educators’ curriculum planning and practice

• children benefit from effective teachers
  • construct an enthusiastic respectful atmosphere for learning; engage in sustained shared thinking; use questioning to solve problems

• program quality is improved through professional development, training, mentoring and coaching

• programs that support parents, families and communities are able to produce a wider range of effects
  • family-centred practice; collaborative partnerships

• effective early childhood services for Indigenous families and children provide a culturally safe environment
Early Childhood Policy Agenda

Governments are invested in the provision of good quality ECEC services for strong economic reasons: to increase parents’ ability to engage in paid work (immediate benefit) and to provide a good start for lifelong learning for all children (future benefit).

ECEC is seen in particular as a way to improve opportunities for children at risk of poor adjustment to school and low achievement.

The basic aim of federal and state/territory governments is to ensure that all Australian families and children have access to affordable ECEC, as needed by parents and before the first year of school.

Australian reforms since 2008 have focused on a national approach to quality improvement in preschool and childcare settings.

New directions will focus on flexibility and affordability, and quality.
Quality assurance systems

The National Quality Framework (NQF) and National Quality Standard (NQS) are applied to all licensed/government funded education and care programs – preschool, child care centres, family day care. This includes improved staff-child ratios.

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia or Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework is part of the NQS Assessment and Rating system, bring a new focus on children’s learning outcomes, assessment for learning, collaborative approaches to assessment, equity, and reflective practice.

Workforce reform, building a qualified workforce (requiring minimum qualification of a Certificate III in child care; centres must have a proportion of Diploma and Degree qualified educators)

Universal access to preschool for 4-5 year olds in the year before school delivered by a 4-year university qualified EC teacher
What has changed? Will we see improvements?

Australia has a long history of positive policies for ECEC, including the Quality Accreditation and Improvement System, staffing by university qualified EC specialists, and higher than average quality

National approach rather than separate / different State/Territory regs

Includes all licensed/government funded ECEC services – preschool, child care centres, family day care.

Focus on outcomes (learning) rather than inputs (activities, materials); curriculum rather than programming; and support for transition to school, making for better alignment with school (K-6) curricula

Reflective, informed educators who apply professional judgement

Collaborative approaches, involving families and other professionals in gathering information and planning for children’s learning
Describing and measuring quality: international early childhood rating scales

External observation measure that **assesses global quality at the level of the room**, by matching provisions for learning and staff-child interactions against observable criteria

Comprises 7 subscales, each with 5 or more items, total of ~40 items for whole scale, but can use fewer (minimum of 12)

- Space and furnishing
- Language-reasoning
- Interactions
- Parents and staff
- Personal care routines
- Activities
- Program structure

Item ratings: 1 inadequate; 3 minimal; 5 good; 7 excellent

Ratings are highly inter-correlated, are usually combined to generate an overall mean score between 1 (min) and 7 (max)
International studies using ECERS and/or ITERS
EC Ratings by Australian State and Care Type

Fenech et al. (2010) NSW long day care centres (0-3 and 3-5) and preschool

Ishimine et al. (2010) NSW long day care centres (3-5)

Skouteris et al. (2007) Victorian long day care centres (0-2)
Quality effects are driven by the bottom end of the distribution – inadequate to minimal quality

NSW ratings for 3-5 year old centres

United States ratings for 3-5 year olds

Mean = 4.3
Std. Dev. = 1.4
N = 186
EC Ratings by State and Care Type

Tayler et al. (2013) QLD & VIC long day care centres (3-5), preschool, family day care (3-5); Bowes et al. (2009) NSW family day care; Davis et al. (2013) VIC family care
Questions?

Why are we seeing lower quality in QLD and VIC services for 3-5 year olds than in NSW?

What might account for the consistently lower ratings in home-based family day care services compared to centre-based services?

Can the implementation of the NQF and the NQS Assessment and Rating system remove these differences?
Self-assessment and rating: NQS scores

The National Quality Standard comprises seven quality areas:
  Educational program and practice, Children’s health and safety, Physical environment, Staffing arrangements, Relationships with children, Partnerships with families and communities, Leadership and service management

Performance is assessed and rated on a 5-point scale:
  Significant Improvement Required, Working Towards NQS, Meeting NQS, Exceeding NQS, Excellent

It is a process that seeks to support continuous quality improvement.

ACECQA Nov 2013 report, 25% (3441) of services had completed the NQS, of whom more than half are rated as Meeting NQS (34%) or Exceeding NQS (24%). The rest are rated as Working Towards NQS (42%).

The spread of ratings is similar for family day care services and centre-based services.
NQS ratings by State

- NSW (1290)
- QLD (666)
- VIC (1030)
- SA (139)
- WA (86)
- TAS (54)
- ACT (91)
- NT (85)

- Working Towards
- Meeting
- Exceeding
What might explain the different findings between observed ERS ratings and NQS ratings?

Why are we seeing lower quality in NSW services compared to QLD and VIC and SA services?

Also why are ratings lower in WA, NT, ACT and TAS?

On average 44% of family day care services were rated as Working Towards, 31% Meeting, and 24% Exceeding NQS compared to 42%, 34% and 23% for centre-based services. Why are the NQS results different to observed ERS ratings?

What processes and practices within services contribute to higher ratings?

How do improvement and high quality happen?
"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

SCHOOL OF TEACHER EDUCATION
What makes quality happen for educators and families?

**Investigating Quality** project

Aim was to uncover and describe key elements that contribute to consistently high ratings on standardised ERS observation ratings through in-depth qualitative case studies.

- 6 centres in regional and metropolitan NSW that achieved high scores on the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale and QIAS over 5 years.

- Data included in-depth interviews with centre directors, focus group discussions with educators and parents, video footage of centre practices, parent surveys, and centre documents.

  Quality for these staff is *“like a tangle of ribbons. It is complex, made up of intersecting and multiple strands, all of which are equally important”* (Lina, early childhood teacher).
Achieving quality in ECEC through internal and external organisational capacity and processes

analyses identified six elements, describing approaches and practices that staff and parents perceived were fundamental to making quality happen

1. **Adult work environment**
   - Autonomy, Job satisfaction, Learning community, Staff relations (eg, collegial, team ethic), Wages and working conditions

2. **Leadership and management**
   - Director’s attributes (eg, advocate, involved, committed, mentors); Distributed leadership
     “a reference point for staff”.
     “we are a community with mutual rights and responsibilities who need to work together in caring and educating your child”
   - Director’s managing of the centre and its staff; Support from management; Organisational structure
Achieving quality in ECEC through internal and external organisational capacity and processes

3. Philosophy

• Owned and shared by staff and actively promoted to parents; Child as capable; Child-centred;
  “It’s all about the children”

• Authentic experiences; Community; Family-centred;
  “We enrol the whole family, not just the child”

• Respect; Rights and responsibilities; Social justice; Sustainability; Life-long learning – sense of making a difference

4. Processes and practices

• Aesthetically pleasing, calm; Community/family/‘homey’ feel; Documentation; Natural environment; Fun;

• Programming (active learning, anti-bias, challenging; child-centred and emergent; holistic approach; intentional; play-based; life-long learning, theory-based; preparation for school);
Achieving quality – what works?

4. Processes and practices

• Relationships with the wider community; Relationships and interactions with the children (consistent, genuine, intimate, respectful);

“We know the children.” “We want to share our lives with the kids too so what we do… they get as interested in us as we do in them”

• Relationships between children; Relationships and interactions with parents (family-centred, open door policy, new parents, parent education, involvement, communication, partnerships, social activities, support)

“we will work with you”

• Time for the children and for parents is critical

“Actively being in the moment with a child fills them up with love and attention. The child knows they are valued and feels safe.”
5. Structures

- Environment; Health and hygiene; Materials and resources; Ratios; Group size; Qualifications

6. Staff

- Accountable; Advocates/activists; High calibre; Committed; Calm and caring; Diverse; Experienced; Reflective; Diverse; Stable; Team work

The collaboration makes it exciting because you have an audience for your thinking. I do think you need an audience for your thinking, for it to flourish, because you can have thoughts alone and you can put it down on paper but that might be where it stops. But if someone’s saying that’s a great idea, maybe we could do - . There are more possibilities when you share ... And you mightn’t like that someone doesn’t like it [your idea] but I think that’s all part of that grist of coming and going and thinking it through. (Carol, Director)
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