Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition

The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised, or ECERS-R, is a tool used to measure how a program is meeting children’s needs and the quality of program they are providing. The ECERS is used to see whether children receive the protection, learning opportunities, and positive relationships they need for successful development. The original ECERS was published in 1980 with the ECERS-R coming out in 1998. Numerous research projects in the United States and abroad have used the ECERS to assess global quality and have discovered significant relationships between ECERS scores and child outcome measures, and between ECERS scores and teacher characteristics, teacher behaviors, and compensation. In research, a relationship has been shown between higher scores on the scale and better child development outcomes in a wide range of areas (Harms, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005).

Reliability

In order for the ECERS-R scores to be meaningful and truly representative of the quality of an early childhood program, the scale must be completed accurately, with a clear understanding of what the indicator requires. Although the ECERS-R descriptions appear to be clear upon reading, there is actually great variation in interpretation across scale users. This creates problems if the user’s interpretations are either too demanding or too accepting. Observers who are too demanding give very low scores even though a classroom might be meeting the requirements properly. Observers who are not demanding enough or give credit for the slightest evidence of an indicator, provide scores that are too high. Neither makes appropriate use of the scale (Harms, Cryer, & Riley, 1998).

Subscales, Items and Indicators

There are seven subscale categories in the ECERS-R. The subscales include: space and furnishings, personal care, language-reasoning, activities, interaction, program structure and parents and staff. Subscales provide a practical and conceptual organization for the items, which makes the scale easier to use.

There are 43 items, organized into the seven subscales of the ECERS-R. Each of the numbered items represents a dimension found in any early childhood program. Most of the items (1-37) allow the observer to examine the quality of what children actually experience in a program. These are considered most directly related to how children develop. These outcomes include items that are thought to be important for later success in school and society such as cognitive development, language, and social/emotional skills. Items 38-43 look at the quality of adult involvement in the program, the parents and staff. These deal with providing a comfortable and convenient work environment for the staff and professional development opportunities.
Communication with parents is also considered important to the child’s life in the settings of home as well as in the early childhood program.

All items are presented as a seven point scale with descriptions of what is required under 1 (inadequate), 3 (minimal), 5 (good), 7 (excellent). Each description is made up of one or more numbered indicators that must be scored when completing an observation and evaluation of a classroom. An indicator is a specific requirement that must be scored “yes” or “no” or “NA” (where indicated).

Understanding the Meaning of ECERS-R Scores

Many factors can affect the care and education that teachers provide for the children in early childhood programs. The cultural preferences or beliefs of the adults involved, the curriculum approach used, the physical conditions of the building, staffing or finance issues are some examples of variables that affect what a program is able to provide in terms of scores on the ECERS-R. Because of these variables, it is unlikely that programs will do well on all the requirements of the scale. Instead, programs will have both strengths and weaknesses in their scores, which give program staff an opportunity to consider where change is needed, and determine how to create desired improvement (Harms, Cryer, & Riley, 1998).

Strengths: Items with Scores of 5 and Above
Scores in this range are considered by the Environment Rating Scale to reflect developmentally appropriate practices ranging in quality from “Good” (5) to “Excellent” (7). These items are considered to be strengths because they promote and support positive child development.

Areas of Potential Growth: Items with scores less than 5
Items with scores below 5 are considered by the Environment Rating Scale to reflect practices that are less than developmentally appropriate. The “Areas of Potential Growth” section within each classroom report provides detailed information about the rationale for scoring certain indicators. This detail can help you understand how the observer arrived at each item in this section.

Keep in mind that it is the overall average score, not individual items, that best represents a program’s quality.

How ECERS Was Used at KCI
Thread, Alaska’s Child Care Resource and Referral agency, completed eleven evaluations in the fall and thirteen evaluations in the spring. Ashley Christopherson, KCI’s Child Development Specialist, completed nine in the fall and nine in the spring. All classrooms except two were observed in both the fall and spring.

It can be demonstrated in the information presented above that for the fall 2010 ECERS-R evaluations for Kids’ Corps, Inc. that the average overall agency score was a 4.12. The average overall score for spring was 5.35. This score is considered “Good” by the Environment Rating Scale.
The center averages in the fall ranged from 2.6 to 5.57. In the spring scores ranged from 3.98 to 6.48.

Of the twenty classrooms observed in the fall 2010 ECERS-R observations nine rooms had overall scores above "good" and eleven classrooms had scores below. In the spring twelve classrooms had scores above "good" and ten had scores below.

Of the seven subscales, personal care had the overall lowest average score in both fall and spring, with scores of 3.34 (minimal) in fall and 3.65 in spring. The most common reasons for low scores were items 10 (Meals and Snacks), 12 (Toileting and Diapering), and 13 (Health Practices) with the majority of centers not meeting the "minimal" indicator, a 3, in each of these. Hand washing and sanitation procedures were reviewed throughout the year at all centers and with all staff but teachers and directors need to ensure that those procedures are being followed correctly daily. Sinks that are used for both toileting and meals need to be sanitized with bleach between each use.

Space and furnishings had the second lowest average in the fall, with a rating of 3.92. Space and furnishings includes the items; indoor space, furniture for routine play and learning, furnishings for relaxation and comfort, room arrangement for play, space for privacy, child related display, space for gross motor, and gross motor equipment. The majority of classrooms did not receive high marks on these items due to poor visualization in room arrangement as well as during outside times. Rooms also scored poorly in this area due to inadequate space for gross motor play and poor quality in equipment. These low scores indicate a need for more quality materials gross motor equipment for children. Some of the low marks on these items are the result of a lack of space or factors that can’t be changed, such as the centers lay out and outside space available. These factors can make it impossible for classrooms to receive a high rating under this item. To increase these scores classrooms need to be conscious of the location of centers in their room, make sure children have space for privacy and relaxation, display children’s art in an appropriate fashion (at their eye level and in a positive way) and constantly check the safety of all equipment and materials. It is important to note that some playgrounds did not have proper drop zones by the outdoor equipment, safe materials, or was not easily accessible. In the spring this score increased to 4.78, an increase of .86 on average but still below "good."

In the spring, all scores excluding personal care received average scores above 5. Interactions had the greatest increase in score, moving from a 4.95 to a 5.85. Activities, language reasoning and program structure all also improved from fall to receive scores above 5 in the spring.

The 2010-2011 ECERS-R results for the Ki ds’ Corp, Inc. Head Start program demonstrate significant improvement and an overall rating of "good" in the spring according to the Environment Rating Scale. The majority of classrooms, 80%, had their scores increase from fall to spring. However, 20% of the classrooms had scores that decreased. This could be due to changes in staffing, materials, and in some instances due to whom the scoring was completed by. Some improvements could be made, particularly in the categories of space and furnishings and
personal care. Consultations could help increase these scores. The two classrooms that thread did twenty hours of consultation in the fall had the two highest scores in the spring. The majority of all other classrooms that had Quality Improvement Plans in place as well as consultation by thread also increased their scores in the spring.

By making small adjustments in each classroom, following through with proper hand washing and sanitation procedures, and providing more one on one consultations for classroom staff on ECERS the KCI Head Start program could soon have all twenty-two classrooms rated at “good” or better.

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**Kids' Corps, Inc.**

**ECERS Subscale Averages**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale</th>
<th>Fall 2010</th>
<th>Spring 2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Space and Furnishings</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Care</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language-Reasoning</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>5.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>4.61</td>
<td>5.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interactions</td>
<td>4.95</td>
<td>5.85</td>
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<tr>
<td>Program Structure</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>5.44</td>
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<td>Parents and Staff</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>4.69</td>
<td>5.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results are for 20 classes. 18 classes were observed in the fall and spring. 2 classes were observed in the spring only.