

Thinking More about Program Structure



ITERS-R

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements for items found in the Program Structure subscale. The focus is primarily on indicators found at the 3, 5, and 7 level. It is important to review each item entirely to ensure that no indicator at the 1 or “inadequate” level applies to the classroom. Answering the questions and referring to the ITERS-R will build familiarity with requirements, while offering a chance to reflect on current practices and situations.

Preparation: Refer to the ITERS-R (spiral bound edition published in 2006) when completing the questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the instructions for scoring on page 6 in the ITERS-R and the definitions of common terms on pages 7-8. It will also be helpful to refer to a copy of the most current NC Additional Notes (available at ncrlap.org). There are many questions, so completing them all will likely take several reflection/review sessions.

The items included consider many aspects that relate to how the classroom structure contributes to children’s opportunities to explore, learn, and become increasingly independent. There is a focus on the ways classroom structure allows for individualized schedules, ample time for interactions with teachers and peers, and exploring materials. Also considered are provisions for smooth transitions, limited times without activities, and the inclusion of children with disabilities. These aspects provide a strong foundation for fun and enriching experiences, and strong relationships.

Tips:

- If you are confused about a question in the worksheet, look at the item in the ITERS-R and check any Notes for Clarification and/or NC Additional Notes to identify the specific indicator and requirement to which it refers.
- Describe the current practices that occur when answering the questions. Remember, this is not about a “right answer” but rather a way to build understanding about what occurs every day.
- Using the worksheet on an ongoing basis can help verify that the classroom structure is supportive and developmentally appropriate. This process also emphasizes how specific aspects of program structure support the teachers in providing experiences that are positive and enriching.
- Answering the questions with someone else (co-teachers, administrators, technical assistance specialists, etc.) promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

Date(s) completed: _____ Classroom name/age group: _____

Worksheet completed by: _____

ITEM 29 Schedule (p.50)

Consider the daily schedule. Is it flexible and does it meet the needs of each child (e.g., children play, eat, nap, and are diapered/visit the toilet based on their own needs, routine care is scheduled to occur without much crying or waiting)? **Y / N**

Does play occur outdoors, every day, weather permitting? **Y / N** **Hint:** See Terms Used Throughout the Scale on page 8 of the ITERS-R for a definition of “weather permitting” and/or refer to the Child Care Weather Watch Chart at ncrlap.org.

What conditions prevent outdoor play from occurring?

Who is involved in making decisions about when outdoor play will occur and how are the decisions made?

Are there opportunities for quiet and active play throughout the day, based on children’s needs? **Y / N**

What is done to reduce waiting or keep children engaged during longer transitions?

Does this prevent transitions where children must wait for more than 3 minutes at a time without activities? **Y / N** If **no**, what other strategies could be helpful?

ITEM 30 Free play (p. 51)

Hint: Only times when children can choose both the materials they use and peers to interact with, are considered free play.

Does free play occur indoors each day? **Y / N**

Does free play occur outdoors each day, weather permitting? **Y / N**

Does free play, both indoors and outdoors, occur for much of every day? **Hint:** Refer to the definition of “much of the day” on pg. 7-8. **Y / N**

Think about any situations when children are limited in what they can do (e.g., group times, times in infant seats/swings/exersaucers, or using an area with fewer materials at certain times of the day). Are these times consistently limited to less than 20 minutes? **Y / N**

During free play times both indoors and outdoors, consider the supervision that occurs. Does it (check all that apply):

- Protect children’s health and safety?
- Facilitate children’s play by placing materials within children’s reach, helping with use of materials, offering additional materials to support their play, etc.?
- Provide educational interactions related to their play such as by engaging in play with the children, adding words and new ideas to what children are doing, asking questions, and giving answers or encouraging toddlers to respond, etc.?

During times children are playing, are there many types of materials and equipment for them to use? **Y / N**

Is this true for both indoor and outdoor materials and equipment? **Y / N**

Are there materials to rotate or add for the children during free play times? How often is something added or rotated? _____

ITEM 31 Group play activities (p. 52)

Hint: This item considers times when small or large group activities occur, and children’s participation is expected. **Group activities are not required for infants and toddlers.** If such activities are not a part of the classroom, circle **NA** and skip to the next section.

If group activities/times occur, list the times and lengths of typical small or large group or circle time activities:

What happens if a child does not want to join or tries to leave during the activities? Describe alternate activities, accommodations, etc.: _____

Describe typical interactions with children during the activities:

Do teachers adjust group activities based on children’s interest? Describe how this is done:

The maximum number of children in a group time for this classroom is: _____

Do teachers encourage children to participate? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe: _____

Are group times set up to be successful? For example, do group times (check all that apply):

- Occur where there is enough space to prevent crowding?
- Include engaging, age-appropriate content for all children expected to participate?
- Include accommodations for individuals to help them participate with the other children?
- Continue only as long as children are interested?
- Include enough materials for all children who participate?
- Include positive interactions where children feel welcomed and appreciated?

ITEM 32 Provisions for children with disabilities (p. 53)

Only complete the questions in this section if there is a child with a diagnosed disability and completed assessment, or if there is a child receiving services, such as speech therapy. If there are multiple children with special needs, respond to the questions keeping each child in mind.

Do teachers have information from/about each child's assessment(s)? **Y / N**

Is each child able to fully participate in the classroom experiences? **Y / N**

Describe anything special teachers do to help each child participate:

If professionals recommend specific activities or experiences for the child, do teachers complete these?

Y / N If **yes**, describe: _____

Do parents and teachers exchange information about a child's special needs? **Y / N** If **yes**, what topics are discussed? _____

Are parents and teachers involved in joint goal setting for the child's classroom experiences? **Y / N**

How often does communication with parents occur informally and how is this done?

Are meetings also scheduled with parents to discuss progress, feedback, goals, etc.? **Y / N** If **yes** how often do these occur? _____

Where does therapy occur? _____

Do teachers contribute to assessments or intervention plans, or attend IFSP/IEP meetings? **Y / N**

Reflection for future planning: After completing this worksheet, it can be helpful to go back and think more about the answers. Were there any questions that were answered “no” instead of “yes?” If so, this could help identify areas to work on. It can also be helpful to break bigger topics into smaller steps so that changes and progress can be easily recognized. Hopefully this worksheet was a helpful beginning to an ongoing self-study practice and suggest continuing with an action plan after completing the reflection questions below.

List areas where strengths were noted in program structure:

List areas where improvements could be made or there are new ideas to think about:

Are there any issues you will work to change right away? Describe how so:

Are there issues that will take more time to change? What are these and what resources may be needed?

Want to find out more?

Not all ITERS-R indicators are covered in this worksheet, so review the ITERS-R carefully and seek out other resources, as needed, since relying on these questions alone to prepare for an assessment will not be sufficient. We encourage you to review other resources found on the ncrlap.org website to stay informed about any updates and continue to build your understanding of the ITERS-R and the assessment process.

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also specific ITERS-R resources. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or supplement ideas you were already considering.
- Check out the answers to Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to ncrlap@uncg.edu.
- Register for free online training webinars. Some are live webinars; others are pre-recorded and offer training credits (contact hours). Call 1-866-362-7527 or register online at ncrlap.org.

When planning for program enhancement, always consider the unique features of the classroom and facility such as ages and abilities of the children enrolled, the number of teachers in the classroom, and overall goals and/or philosophy. Programs may also seek advice from their DCDEE Child Care Consultant, local CCR&R and/or Smart Start Partnership, or other child care agencies.

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References:

Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (2006) *Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (Revised Edition)* New York, NY. Teachers College Press.

NC Additional Notes (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.ncrlap.org>.