

Thinking More about Learning Materials and Play



ECERS-R

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements that relate to various learning materials, areas, or activities. The focus is primarily on higher level indicators at the 5 and 7 level. It is important to review the entire item to ensure that no indicators at the 1 or “inadequate” level apply to the classroom, and requirements at the 3 or “minimal” level are met. Not all ECERS-R indicators and items are covered here, so relying only on these questions to prepare for an assessment will not be sufficient.

Preparation: Refer to the ECERS-R when completing the questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the instructions for scoring on pages 5–6 in the ECERS-R and the definitions of common terms on pages 6–7. In addition, a copy of the most current NC Additional Notes (available at ncrlap.org) should be used with each item, when answering the questions. There are many questions, so it will likely take several reflection/review sessions to complete them all.

The items included here consider many aspects of the child care classroom pertaining to children’s play. The focus is specifically on required learning or play areas, the types and quantities of materials used, the amount of time dedicated to play, and the interactions that occur while children are engaged in play with learning materials. Free play with a variety of appropriate materials and choices is critically important in fostering positive developmental outcomes for young children. In addition, the language and support that teachers provide related to play activities is essential in building relationships and enhancing learning opportunities for children.

Tips:

- Using the worksheet on an ongoing basis can help verify that the required types and categories of materials are present over time, as the environment changes.
- When documenting materials in the classroom, look at what is provided for children’s independent use. Having additional materials for rotation may help meet some requirements for indicators at the highest level of quality, but these are not considered in scoring indicators that require access.
- Consider all accessible materials in the entire classroom because not all materials have to be in a single area. For example, some math materials might be with fine motor materials, and others might be included with nature/science materials. However, some areas do have specific considerations for having materials organized together, like the block and cozy areas.
- If you are confused about a question in the worksheet, look at the item and any notes to try and find the specific requirement it relates to.
- This document is likely to be used by teachers, administrators, and technical assistance specialists. Answering the questions with someone else promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

Answer the questions based on the specific schedule and materials in the classroom. Use the ECERS-R and NC Additional Notes as you go to help increase understanding of the requirements.

Date: _____ The number of children currently enrolled in the classroom is _____.

Are there younger preschoolers (2.5-3 yrs.) **Y / N** older preschoolers (4-5 yrs.) **Y / N** or both? **Y / N**

ITEM 3 Furnishings for relaxation and comfort (p. 14)

Describe the soft furnishings (other than soft toys) accessible in the classroom:

Are enough soft furnishings gathered together to create a cozy area? **Y / N** Hint: In a cozy area there should not be any materials that would promote active play

The children can use a cozy area during these times:

Total time a cozy area is accessible daily:

The classroom includes _____ soft toys for children’s use. Hint: Check the Note for clarification for the number required based on enrollment.

ITEM 5 Space for privacy (p. 16)

Describe any areas in the classroom that are limited for use by 1-2 children at a time:

How do children know which areas are spaces that can be used for privacy?

Can children using these areas be easily seen from any other part of the classroom? **Y / N**

Children can use the space(s) for privacy during these times:

Total time spaces for privacy are accessible daily:

The following activities are set up in the space(s) for privacy:

ITEM 8 Gross motor equipment (p. 20 -21)

Is gross motor equipment used for an hour or more each day? **Y / N**

List the gross motor materials currently used by the children.

| Outdoor Stationary Equipment | Outdoor Portable Equipment | Indoor Stationary Equipment | Indoor Portable Equipment |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| | | | |

The outdoor gross motor equipment provided encourages the following skills (Check to see how many are required):

What are the conditions that prevent the group from playing outdoors?

What is the program's policy on outdoor play?

If children do not play outdoors they can:

What gross motor equipment is used indoors on these days and for how long?

What skills are encouraged by the indoor gross motor equipment?

ITEM 15 Books and pictures (p. 34-35)

There are ____ children enrolled in the class. There are ____ books that the children can use independently. According to the Notes for Clarification, ____ appropriate books should be accessible.

Children can use the books during these times:

Total time books
are accessible daily:

The books in the classroom include the following topics:

Does informal reading occur daily? **Y / N**

Do any books relate to current classroom interests, themes, or activities? **Y / N**

ITEM 19 Fine motor (p. 39)

List the fine motor materials for each category that the children can currently use. The required number of materials can be found in the ECERS-R.

| Small building | Art materials | Manipulatives | Puzzles |
|----------------|---------------|---------------|---------|
| | | | |

Children can use the fine motor materials during these times:

Total time fine motor
materials are accessible
daily:

ITEM 20 Art (p. 40–41)

Are the children able to choose art materials and use them in their own way? **Y / N**

How often do art activities occur when children follow a plan, with required participation? _____

List the art materials for each category that the children can currently use. The required number of materials can be found in the ECERS-R.

| Drawing | Paints | Three-dimensional | Collage | Tools |
|---------|--------|-------------------|---------|-------|
| | | | | |

Children can use art materials during these times:

Total time art materials are accessible daily:

Art activities are connected to classroom topics or other themes in the following ways:

ITEM 21 Music/movement (p. 42–43)

The following music materials are out and can be used by the children:

Are music materials accessible for an hour or more each day? **Y / N**

If the majority of children are 4 years (or older), is there a way for them to play music independently? **Y / N**

Types of music used on a regular basis:

Music activities are planned _____ times a week. Some examples of music activities include:

More special music activities also occur, such as:

How often do special music activities occur? _____

ITEM 22 Blocks (p. 44–45)

Hint: Remember that this item considers blocks that are the size of unit blocks and larger. Smaller blocks and interlocking building materials of any size are considered only in the fine motor item.

Types and numbers of blocks:

Types of block accessories:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
|-------------------|-------------------|

How much open floor space is available for block play? _____

Children can use blocks during these times:

Total time blocks are accessible daily:

Are there any materials/activities in the block area or traffic patterns that deter block play? **Y / N**

ITEM 23 Sand/water (p. 46–47)

Describe the provisions for each type of sand/water play, the frequency, and types of accessories.

Indoor sand play:

Outdoor sand play:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
|-------------------|-------------------|

Indoor water play:

Outdoor water play:

| | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
|-------------------|-------------------|

How often do activities vary for sand and water play and what are some examples?

ITEM 24 Dramatic play (p. 48–49)

List dramatic play materials indoors:

Children can use the dramatic play materials during these times:

Total time dramatic play materials are accessible daily:

Are materials rotated to offer a variety of different dramatic play themes? **Y / N**

Dramatic play is enhanced in the following ways:

ITEM 25 Nature/science (p. 50–51)

List the nature/science materials for each category that the children can currently use. The required number of materials can be found in the ECERS-R.

| Natural objects | Living things | Books, games, toys | Activities |
|-----------------|---------------|--------------------|------------|
| | | | |

Children can use nature/science materials during these times:

Total time science/nature materials are accessible daily:

Everyday events are used to teach about nature and science in the following ways:

Nature/science activities are planned and implemented. Some examples include:

How often? _____

ITEM 26 Math/number (p. 52-53)

List the math/number materials for each category that the children can currently use. The required number of materials can be found in the ECERS-R.

| Counting | Measuring | Comparing Quantities | Recognizing Shapes | Written Number |
|----------|-----------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------|
| | | | | |

Children can use math/number materials during these times:

Total time math/number materials are accessible daily:

Practical, daily events are used to teach about math/numbers in the following ways:

Math/number activities are planned and implemented. Some examples include:

How often? _____

ITEM 27 Use of TV, video, and/or computers (p. 54–55)

The use of TV, videos, or computers is optional but not required. If none of these are used this item is marked as Not Applicable (N/A).

Television/video programs used:

Computer, tablet, smart board programs used:

The total amount of time children can watch/use these programs is:

TV/video _____ Computer _____ Tablet _____ Smart Board _____

While having screen time, children participate in the following ways:

TV/video:

Computer/tablet/Smart Board:

Children who are not interested can:

How is children's screen time facilitated?

Screen time is connected to other classroom activities or themes in the following ways:

ITEM 28 Promoting acceptance of diversity (p. 56–57)

Diversity is incorporated into daily routines and play activities in the following ways:

Special activities are planned and implemented to promote diversity such as:

How often? _____

Circle the categories of diversity that are present in each column. Hint: The required number of materials can be found in the ECERS-R. It may be helpful to list specific examples in the open space to verify that enough are accessible.

| Accessible <u>books</u> show diverse people, including different: | <u>Pictures and/or other displayed materials</u> show diverse people, including different: | <u>Various play materials</u> show diverse people, including different: |
|--|--|--|
| <p>Races</p> <p>Cultures</p> <p>Ages (infant-elderly)</p> <p>Abilities</p> <p>Non-stereotypical male and female gender roles</p> | <p>Races</p> <p>Cultures</p> <p>Ages (infant-elderly)</p> <p>Abilities</p> <p>Non-stereotypical male and female gender roles</p> | <p>Races</p> <p>Cultures</p> <p>Ages (infant-elderly)</p> <p>Abilities</p> <p>Non-stereotypical male and female gender roles</p> |

Diversity is promoted in dramatic play in the following ways:

Other Considerations:

What topics are the children in the group most interested in? In what ways can these interests be connected to their play experiences in the various activity areas?

Which areas are the most popular? Why?

Are there areas that children tend not to use as often? **Y / N** If Y, which ones and why? What changes could be made to make these areas more interesting to the children?

Are there ways the organization or arrangement in any of the learning and play areas could be adjusted to help with any concerns or challenges? For example, think about how well-defined or organized areas are, and if they are spacious enough for the intended activities.

Substantial Portion of the Day (SPOD)

Center operating hours _____ A.M. to _____ P.M. Total hours of operation _____ hrs. _____ mins.

Based on the chart on page 12 of the ECERS-R scoresheet (at the very end of the scale), the total amount of time needed to meet Substantial Portion of the Day (SPOD) is _____ hrs. and _____ mins.

Look back at the total times you listed for the items below. Is there enough time for each activity area or type of material and are all of the required materials accessible during the times that were counted for SPOD? **Y / N**

Did you make sure not to include transitions, routines, and group times for times counted for SPOD? **Y / N**

| Item Number | Total Time Area Can Be Used |
|--|------------------------------|
| Item 3: Furnishings for relaxation and comfort | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 5: Space for privacy | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 15: Books and pictures | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 19: Fine motor | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 20: Art | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 22: Blocks | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 24: Dramatic play | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 25: Nature/science | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |
| Item 26: Math/number | _____ hrs. and _____ minutes |

Hint: Take a look at your notes about times for the items above, and your daily schedule. For each chunk of time, write down when play actually begins (e.g., children can use materials, choose centers, etc.) and also when it ends (e.g., the clean-up transition starts). Add up the times again and see if this reduces any that were initially considered. Remember only times when children can actually use the specific materials are counted!

In addition to the materials/areas noted above, children should have play opportunities and free play for a substantial portion of the day. Please review items 34 and 35 for specifics.

The lead teacher's usual work hours are _____ A.M. to _____ P.M.

If applicable, what happens in the AM and PM when the children are with different teachers or in a different classroom? Hint: Remember SPOD applies to the entire operating hours, so talking with other teachers to understand what occurs at different times of the day is very important.

Which rooms are they in, who are their teachers at these times, and what is the schedule or what activities occur?

What materials are available in alternate classrooms and is this enough to be counted towards SPOD for the different items?

Outdoor Materials:

Does the group spend a lot of time outdoors or would you like to spend more time outdoors? That's great! There are so many benefits to staying outside longer such as, fresh air and high levels of physical activity, increased awareness of the natural world, opportunities to extend all areas of learning and play in bigger, louder, and messier ways, etc.

In addition, if you would like outdoor time to count towards the SPOD requirements, check the ECERS-R Notes for Clarification and NC Additional Notes for the required number of materials needed outdoors. Hint: Children need to play outside each day, weather permitting for outdoor materials to be counted toward SPOD. Remember that outdoor time should always be focused on gross motor play, but other types of materials can enhance the outdoor learning environment. Some of the materials or areas listed below are easier to offer outdoors than others. For example, it can be more difficult to have a special block area or a cozy area outdoors, as compared to offering a variety of books and fine motor materials.

The following materials or areas are provided outdoors each day, weather permitting:

Cozy area:

Space for privacy:

Books:

Fine motor:

Art:

Block area:

Outdoor materials, continued:

Dramatic play:

Nature/science:

Math/number:

Want to find out more?

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 ECERS-R and the assessment process.

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also specific ECERS-R resources. For example, there are videos with accompanying supplements, the NC Additional Notes, and many documents and webcasts about different topics. 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 by clicking on "Training" tab and then "Register for an event." Select the event and enter your information. You will receive instructions via email before the event.

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 Partnerships, or other child care agencies.



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Resources:

Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (2005). Early childhood environment rating scale. (Revised edition). New York, NY. Teachers College Press.

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