Thinking More about
Program Structure

ECERS-R

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements 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 ECERS-R will build familiarity with requirements, while offering a chance to reflect on current practices and situations.

Preparation: Refer to the ECERS-R (spiral bound edition published in 2005) 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. 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 related 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 creates a predictable sequence of events that include regular routines, significant opportunities for complex play, smooth transitions, ample time for interactions with adults and peers, responsive group activities, and 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 ECERS-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: _____

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ITEM 34 Schedule (p. 63)

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Do children experience a familiar daily schedule? **Y / N**

Is there a written schedule posted in the classroom? **Y / N**

Does play occur for at least one hour <u>indoors</u> every day? **Y / N**

Does play occur for at least one hour <u>outdoors,</u> every day, weather permitting? **Y / N** **Hint**: See Terms Used Throughout the Scale on page 7 of the ECERS-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 decisions made?

_____

_____

_____

Is there active gross motor play every day, including <u>indoors</u> when weather prevents outdoor play? **Y / N**

Does the daily schedule include both teacher-led and child-initiated play activities? **Y / N** If **yes**, give a few examples of each type of play.

Teacher-led: Child-initiated:

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

What is the total amount of time that some type of play occurs each day? _____

     Is this at least one-third of the program's operating hours? **Y / N**

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

_____

_____

_____

Is there any flexibility in the schedule? When and what does this look like? _____

_____

_____

_____

Is the schedule flexible to accommodate a child's individual needs? **Y / N**   If **yes**, give two examples of when this occurs (e.g., child allowed to leave or given more time during play, an activity, or routine):

_____

_____

_____

ITEM 35 Free play (p. 64)

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

How long does free play last indoors? _____ Outdoors (weather permitting)? _____

  When combined, are these times at least one-third of the program's daily operating hours? **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 helping with use of materials, offering additional materials to support their play, etc.?
- ☐ Provide educational interactions related to their play such as problem solving, adding information and new ideas, encouraging children to talk more about their activities?

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 all classroom centers or areas of the playground always open during play times? **Y / N**   If **no**, for what reason are they closed and for how long?

  _____

  _____

  _____

  _____

Are there play and learning materials to rotate or add during free play times? **Y / N**

  How often is something added or rotated? _____

  Do any of the rotated materials (newly purchased or homemade) relate to current themes or children's interests or classroom themes?   **Y / N**   If **yes**, give two examples: _____

  _____

  _____

ITEM 36 Group time (p. 65)

Hint: This item considers large and small group teacher-directed activities, self-selected small group play, individual play, and routine care.

List the times and lengths of typical whole-group or circle time activities:

_____   _____
_____   _____
_____   _____

What types of activities are used during group times? _____
_____
_____
_____

Is the length of group time based on children's interest and engagement? **Y / N** If children are not interested, how is this handled?_____
_____
_____
_____

Are there plans for individual and small group play times each day, in addition to planned large group times? **Y / N**

Regarding play activities, are these primarily done individually or with small groups? **Y / N**

   Do children generally choose who they want to play with? **Y / N**

   Are there educational interactions with children as they play individually or in small groups? **Y / N**

Does routine care occur in small groups or individually, or some of both? _____

Throughout the day, is there variety in the types of activities and groupings offered to children to help provide a change of pace? **Y / N**

ITEM 37 Provisions for children with disabilities (p. 66)

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 implement 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 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 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 ECERS-R indicators are covered in this worksheet, so review the ECERS-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 ECERS-R and the assessment process. For example:

- Look for general information about the assessment process and also specific ECERS-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 Partnerships, or other child care agencies.

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References:

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.