

Thinking More about Activities



ECERS-3

Purpose: This document addresses many of the requirements for items found in the Learning Activities subscale. The focus is primarily on indicators at the 3, 5, and 7 levels. It is important to review each item entirely to ensure that no indicators at the 1 or “inadequate” level apply to the classroom. Answering the questions and referring to the ECERS-3 will build familiarity with requirements, while reflecting on current practices and situations.

Preparation: Refer to the ECERS-3 (spiral binding on the top, published in 2015) when completing questions. To better understand the scale format and structure, review the Scoring System on page 9. 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.

This subscale considers children’s play and learning activities. The focus is on the time dedicated to open-ended exploration in play areas and interest centers, interactions that occur while children are engaged in play with learning materials, and the types and quantities of materials used. Free play with a variety of appropriate materials and choices fosters positive developmental outcomes for young children. In addition, the language and support that teachers provide during play activities is essential in building relationships and enhancing learning.

Tips:

- If you are confused about a question, look at the Item in the ECERS-3 and check any Notes for Clarification and/or NC Additional Notes to identify the specific indicator and requirement to which it refers.
- Describe current practices when answering 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 required types and categories of materials are accessible over time, as the environment changes, and that interactions to promote learning occur throughout each day.
- Answering the questions with someone else (co-teachers, administrators, technical assistance specialists, health consultants, etc.) promotes sharing of perspectives and may draw attention to different details.

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

Worksheet completed by: _____

Accessibility and time requirements: these concepts are extremely important and affect many items.

For NCRLAP assessments, the ECERS-3 observation is 3 hours and typically occurs in the morning. A member of the scheduling team will help determine the specific observation time based on information provided about the daily schedule, including when children arrive, and times for snack/breakfast, outdoor play, and lunch.

The term “**accessible**” is defined on page 10 of the ECERS-3. Indicators that include this term consider whether children can reach and use the materials, furnishings, and equipment specified independently. There are time requirements for accessibility during the 3-hour observation, but it is important to recognize the benefits of allowing children to use materials at many other times throughout the day. For the ECERS-3:

The 3-level indicators generally require at least **25 minutes** of access during the observation

The 5-level indicators generally require at least **1 hour** of access during the observation

The current time scheduled for free play in the classroom during the period when the 3-hour observation would take place is: _____

Hint: See page 7 of the ECERS-3 for more information about the observation.

The ECERS-3 observation is a time-sample intended to represent children’s typical experiences at the program, so it is important to think about the entire day and not only the 3-hour observation window. When thinking about the entire day and developmentally appropriate scheduling, this means children will have access to materials for much more than an hour in the morning (e.g., at least 1/3 of the entire time the program is open). **When completing this worksheet, consider both the times that materials, furnishings, and equipment are accessible throughout the whole day, as well as during the 3-hour observation.**

To document times that children can use the different types of materials in each item, for play periods throughout the day, write down when play begins for every child (e.g., last child transitions into play) and when it ends (e.g., the clean up transition starts). Remember, only times when all children can use materials should be included.

Item 17 Fine Motor (p. 46-47)

Do teachers encourage the use of fine motor materials and interact with children using them frequently throughout each day? **Y / N**

List the fine motor materials for each category currently accessible in the classroom. **Hint:** The required number of materials can be found in the Notes for Clarification for indicator 5.1.

Interlocking building materials	Art materials	Manipulatives	Puzzles

Children can use fine motor materials during these times throughout the day:

Total time fine motor materials are accessible during the 3-hour observation:

Are fine motor materials well-organized with labeled containers and/or labeled shelves? **Y / N**

Do teachers frequently talk with children about their use of fine motor materials, asking questions and participating when appropriate. **Y / N** If **yes**, list two recent examples for different children: _____

Do these interactions include expanding on vocabulary, concepts, or written language in relation to fine motor play? **Y / N** If **yes**, list a few recent examples: _____

Item 18 Art (p. 48-49)

Do teachers encourage the use of art materials and interact with children using them frequently throughout each day? **Y / N**

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

Do most art activities allow for children’s individual expression and creative use of art materials? **Hint:** Look at the classroom artwork display and the lesson plan. **Y / N**

List the art materials for each category currently accessible in the classroom. **Hint:** The required number of materials can be found in indicator 5.1.

Drawing	Paints	Three-dimensional	Collage	Tools

Children can use art materials during these times throughout the day:

Total time art materials are accessible during the 3-hour observation:

Are some of the art activities related to current themes or interests? **Y / N**

Consider teachers’ interactions with children while they use art materials. Check all that apply:

- Teachers ask children questions to encourage talking about their work
- Teachers provide more complex art materials and teach children how to use them
- Teachers write what children say about their art or help older children write it themselves

Item 19 Music and movement (p. 50-51)

When recorded music is used, is it in a way that does not interfere with any other activities? **Hint:** Is music always turned off when the music activity or routine ends versus playing in the background as other activities occur? **Y / N**

Do the teachers engage in informal singing or dancing during free play? **Y / N** If **yes**, how often? _____

List the accessible music materials. **Hint:** When thinking about accessibility to music materials, consider storage and how children know they can use materials. The required number of materials can be found in the Notes for Clarification for indicator 5.1.

Music materials/instruments

Children can use music materials during these times throughout the day:

Total time music materials are accessible during the 3-hour observation:
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Do movement/dance activities occur? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe teacher interactions to encourage children to participate: _____

If children are not interested in a group music activity, they can: **Hint:** Is there more than one alternative activity? _____

During music activities (either formal or informal), does the teacher:
Point out rhyming words, repeat sounds, or encourage children to use gestures or actions to act out the song? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Encourage children to identify rhymes or think of new rhymes? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Item 20 Blocks (p. 52-53)

Do teachers encourage the use of blocks and interact with children using them frequently throughout each day? **Y / N**

Hint: Remember that this item considers blocks that are the size of unit blocks or larger. Smaller blocks and interlocking building materials are considered only in the fine motor item. Specific details about block quantities and space required can be found in the NC Additional Notes.

Total number of unit-sized blocks		Total number of larger hollow/cardboard/plastic blocks	
Small people	Vehicles	Animals	Other block accessories

How large is the space used for block play? **Hint:** See the NC Additional Note for requirements. _____

Consider storage:

Are blocks and accessories organized by type on open, labeled shelves? **Y / N**

Does unit block storage include outlines/images of each shape? **Y / N**

Are the only materials in the block interest center blocks and block accessories? **Hint:** See p. 11 for the definition of an interest center. **Y / N** If **no**, can other materials be moved to different areas of the room, so they do not interfere with block play (e.g., doll house moved elsewhere, floor puzzles or train tracks moved to fine motor or group time area)? **Y / N**

Children can use blocks during these times throughout the day:

Total time blocks are accessible during the 3-hour observation:

While children play with blocks, does the teacher:

Engage in many conversations about children’s block play? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe two recent examples: _____

Link children’s language in writing to their block play. **Hint:** See the indicator for examples. **Y / N**
 Point out math concepts using blocks? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Item 21 Dramatic play (p. 54-55)

Do teachers encourage the use of dramatic play materials and interact with children using them frequently throughout each day? **Y / N**

List dramatic play materials indoors. **Hint:** The Notes for Clarification for indicator 5.1 describe specific requirements and examples:

Dolls	Children’s play furniture	Play foods and Cooking/eating equipment	Dress up clothes	Other
			general: male: female:	

Are the following themes represented? Different kinds of work_____ Fantasy_____ Leisure_____

Are there at least 4 materials representing diversity? **Hint:** See the indicator for examples. List them:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____

Children can use the dramatic play center during these times throughout the day:

Total time dramatic play is accessible during the 3-hour observation period:
--

Are all the items listed organized in a dramatic play interest center? **Hint:** See p. 11 for the definition of an interest center. **Y / N**

While children play in dramatic play, does the teacher:

Engage in many conversations about children’s play? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe two recent examples:

Talk about printed words or numbers in the interest center? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Item 22 Nature/science (p. 56-57)

Do teachers encourage the use of nature/science materials and interact with children using them frequently throughout each day? **Y / N**

List the nature/science materials for each category currently accessible in the room. **Hint:** The required number of materials can be found in indicator 5.1.

Living things	Natural objects	Books and games	Tools	Sand/water with appropriate toys

Children can use nature/science materials during these times throughout the day:

Total time nature/science materials are accessible during the 3-hour observation:

Sand or water is used during these times throughout the day:

Total time sand or water is accessible during the 3-hour observation (indoors and outdoors):

Are all the items listed above (except sand/water play) in a nature/science interest center? **Hint:** See p. 11 for the definition of an interest center. **Y / N**

Throughout the day, do teachers:

Talk about nature/science? **Y / N** Talk about and use nature/science materials? **Y / N**

How often do these interactions occur? _____

Are pets or plants easily experienced daily by children and talked about by teachers? **Y / N**

Do teachers show or talk to the children about caring for the environment? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Does this occur daily? **Y / N**

Are there daily activities that use nature/science materials for measuring/comparing/sorting? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe two recent examples: _____

Item 23 Math materials and activities (p. 58-59)

Do teachers encourage the use of math/number materials and interact with children using them frequently throughout each day? **Y / N**

List the math/number materials for each category currently accessible in the classroom. **Hint:** More about types and the required number of materials can be found in the Notes for Clarification and indicator 5.1.

Counting/comparing quantities	Measuring/comparing sizes and fractions	Shapes

Children can use math/number materials at the following times throughout the day:

Total time math/number materials are accessible during the 3-hour observation:

While children use math/number materials, do teachers often join in and give information or ask questions? **Y / N** Do math-related questions encourage reasoning (comparing, cause/effect, etc.) **Y / N** If **yes**, describe three recent examples: _____

Do teachers encourage children to use their fingers to represent numbers? **Y / N** If **yes**, how often does this occur? _____

Do some planned math activities include teacher input (e.g., multi-step, or more complex than materials for free play, etc.)? **Y / N**

Describe ways math activities or materials are connected to current topics of interest: _____

How often does this occur: _____

Item 24 Math in daily events (p. 60-61)

Do teachers incorporate math/numbers into transitions and daily personal care routines? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe two recent examples for each.

Transitions 1. _____ 2. _____

Daily routines 1. _____ 2. _____

Consider the daily use of math during children’s play with **non-math materials** (outside the block or math interest center):

Are children encouraged to talk about math during play with non-math materials? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe two recent examples:

Do teachers encourage children to use reasoning concepts with non-math materials? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example:

Is math incorporated during **group times**? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Do teachers talk about the function or practical use of printed numbers and/or shapes in the environment? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a few recent examples: _____

If children 4 and older are enrolled, are they asked to complete more challenging math tasks? **Y / N / NA** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Item 25 Understanding written numbers (p. 62-63)

Consider all the printed numbers in the classroom. List them below. **Hint:** Requirements can be found in indicators 5.1 and 7.1.

Printed numbers with corresponding pictures in classroom display	Printed numbers with corresponding pictures in classroom materials	Printed numbers without pictures on classroom materials

Are there at least 5 examples of materials with corresponding pictures in the middle column? **Y / N**

Children can use these materials at the following times throughout the day:

Total time these materials are accessible during the 3-hour observation:
--

While children use materials with written numbers:

Do teachers point out and talk about the numbers? **Y / N**

Do teachers help children count their matching quantity? **Y / N**

Do teachers talk about their use or meaning? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe two recent examples:

Do teachers show or ask children to show corresponding numbers on their fingers in relation to printed numbers in the classroom? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Item 26 Promoting acceptance of diversity (p. 64-65)

List the items showing diversity currently in the classroom.

Books	Pictures or other display	Play materials (other than the dramatic play materials counted in indicator 5.1)

Children can use these materials at the following times throughout the day:

Total time these materials are accessible during the 3-hour observation:
--

Circle the categories represented across the three columns you documented above. **Hint:** Requirements are found in indicator 5.3 on page 65.

- Race Culture Ages (incl. elderly) Ability Non-traditional gender roles

Are children allowed to play with all materials without gender stereotyping? **Y / N**

The classroom includes the following dramatic play materials of different races/cultures: _____

Do children learn about diversity during daily activities? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Are there frequent conversations with children about similarities and differences between people and the benefits of diversity? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe recent examples: _____

Item 27 Appropriate use of technology (p. 66-67)

The use of technology is optional, **not required**. Only answer these questions if it is used and check the time limits for screen time in indicators 3.2 and 5.2.

List any television/video/internet/smart board use: _____

Daily: The total time children can use technology is:

TV or videos _____ Other electronic media _____

Total time children can use technology during the 3-hour observation: _____

Rather than passive watching, do these materials encourage problem-solving? **Y / N** Creativity? **Y / N**
Vigorous movement? **Y / N**

Is technology used during free play times? **Y / N / NA** If **yes**, are there many other activities to choose from in addition to the technology? **Y / N**

While children use technology, are teachers involved? **Y / N** If **yes**, describe a recent example: _____

Is the use of technology connected to classroom themes or children’s interests? **Y / N**

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 most popular? Why? _____

Are there areas that children do not use as often? **Y / N** If **yes**, which ones and what changes could be made to increase their use? _____

Are there ways the organization or arrangement in any of the play and interest centers 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. _____

Accessibility and time requirements

Look back at the times listed for each item for the entire day and add the total time to the items below. Remember to include access throughout the day, including in classrooms used in the early morning or later afternoon (as shown on the chart for tracking Secondary Spaces on the next page).

Item	Total time area/materials can be used throughout the day
Item 17 Fine motor	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 18 Art	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 19 Music	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 20 Blocks	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 21 Dramatic play	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 22 Nature/science	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 23 Math materials and activities	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 25 Understanding written numbers	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 26 Promoting acceptance of diversity	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes

Did you make sure to only count time children are playing and not include clean up times, other transitions, routines, or group times? **Y / N**

Are these areas and materials used at different times throughout the day, **including at least an hour in the observation period?** **Y / N**

In addition to the materials/areas noted above, children should have free play opportunities throughout the day. Three items included in the Space and Furnishings subscale and one item in the Language and Literacy subscale also require access for specific time periods; please note the total times these are accessible throughout the day:

Item 2 Furnishings for care, play, and learning (soft furnishings)	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 3 Room arrangement (interest centers, including cozy area)	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 4 Space for privacy	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes
Item 15 Encouraging children's use of books (books)	_____ hrs. and _____ minutes

Are the cozy area, interest centers, space(s) for privacy, and books used at different times throughout the day, **including at least an hour during the observation period?** **Y / N**

Secondary Spaces and Different Staff

If applicable, what happens in the AM and PM when the children are with different teachers or in a different classroom? Asking other staff responsible for children can help make sure children have free play at various times throughout the day.

AM location(s)*:	PM location(s)*:
AM teacher(s):	PM teacher(s):
AM schedule/materials:	PM schedule/materials

*If the classroom(s) used are for a different age group, consider whether all materials are appropriate and safe.

If appropriate materials and interest centers are used at these times, be sure to include them in the times listed for access throughout the day.

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, including fresh air and higher 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.

Remember that outdoor time should always support gross motor play, but other types of materials can enhance the outdoor learning environment and experiences. Some of the materials or areas listed are easier to offer outdoors than other. For example, it can be difficult to provide a special block interest center or cozy area outdoors, as compared to offering a space for privacy, a variety of books, or fine motor and art materials.

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

Cozy area:	Space for privacy:	Books:
Fine motor:	Art:	Blocks:
Dramatic play:	Nature/science:	Math/written numbers:

Consider if materials in the following categories are of sufficient quantity and set up to create interest centers outdoors. **Hint:** See p. 11 for the definition of an interest center. Circle the outdoor interest centers:

Blocks

Dramatic play

Nature/science

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”? Were there any questions where you struggled to provide written examples, or where the specific interactions considered do not occur daily, throughout the day? 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 tool in an ongoing self-study practice and will be useful in continuing with an action plan after completing the reflection questions below.

List areas where strengths were noted in activities:

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 were these and what resources/support may be needed?

Want to find out more?

Not all ECERS-3 indicators are covered in this worksheet, so review the ECERS-3 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 on the ncrlap.org website to stay informed about any updates and to continue to build your understanding of the ECERS-3 and the assessment process.

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.

Look for general information about the assessment process and specific ECERS-3 resources. These resources may offer ideas about what to focus on or to supplement ideas you were already considering. Check out the answers to the Frequently Asked Questions or send a new question to ncrlap@uncg.edu

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 TA specialists, a Child Care Health Consultant, or other child care agencies.



References:

Harms, T., Clifford, R., & Cryer, D. (2015). *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*. (Third Edition). New York, NY. Teachers College Press.

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