Chapter 5
Planning and Evaluating the Program Goals

OBJECTIVES
- Describe how the vision informs practice.
- Discuss the purpose and implications of a philosophy statement.
- Discuss the importance of family-centred practice.
- Identify the steps in developing a philosophy statement and program goals.
- Explain that policies and procedures reflect the goals and values of program.
- Evaluate programs for indicators of quality.
- Identify tools for evaluating program quality.

Building a quality early childhood program requires creativity, energy, and resources. The process requires the decision makers to consider multiple factors. These decision makers must be effective problem solvers and have a full picture of both the program and community needs. The leader is charged with knowing the goals of the program, supporting the involvement of families, staff, and stakeholders in implementing, assessing, and evaluating the program against the vision. Ongoing quality depends on staff development, mentoring, and support. Monitoring for quality involves appraising program performance and how the program functions as a whole. It involves looking at satisfaction with the program from the perspective of the children, staff, and parents as well as the impact of elements of the environment. Leadership in the design and review of the program vision is crucial; it is the director who will lead efforts to put this vision into practice.

With increased public investments in early childhood, there are higher rates of accountability for programs using government and public websites. In determining the level of quality, directors, families, and staff need to be involved in regular program evaluation that measures progress toward the program's goals and objectives. Among the areas that should be included are program quality, quality of children's experience, children's development and learning, family and community involvement, staff well-being, and overall satisfaction.

WHAT IS A VISION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS?

Quality in early childhood settings rests on the goals, values, assumptions, and principles that guide the program. A vision of quality extends beyond a concern for good care and education, health, and safety to encompass children's total well-being and development.
The program is thought of as the total experience of the children in the setting, not just those activities that might be termed educational. The vision includes the program’s relationship with each child and family. It acknowledges that children and families live and grow within different cultures and that all cultural beliefs and values deserve respect.

The report *With our Best Future in Mind* presents a vision for establishing a strong foundation in the early years (Pascal 2009). Ontario has implemented full-day kindergarten where, in partnership with parents, young children access quality programs that will help lay the foundation for a healthy and productive life.

### Our Best Future is One Where Children Are

- Healthy and secure
- Emotionally and socially competent
- Eager, confident, and successful learners
- Respectful of the diversity of their peers


A vision imparts a realistic, credible, and attractive future for the organization and provides direction for what the program strives to become. It is who we are, what we do, how and why we do it, and who we do it for. Developing a vision and values statement is part of the planner’s strategic planning process. A vision for early childhood programs is formed using a combination of information and knowledge and a concern for the well-being of the stakeholders of the program who will, in turn, benefit from the implementation of the vision. It provides a dynamic concept for the future that motivates an organization to make changes, incorporate new ideas, and take new directions. The vision first needs to be articulated and then owned by those who form it, and finally, a strategic plan to achieve the vision needs to be outlined and followed. The philosophy is a statement of the values underlying the vision.

### DEFINING A PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

Today, some envision early childhood programs as the neighbourhoods of the twenty-first century, poised to transform the cultural ills of society through mutually respectful and empowering relationships among those who inhabit these neighbourhoods. Others may, on the other hand, have a more limited vision of a place where children are cared for in a safe, loving environment. Every program needs its own vision of what it intends to be. This, then, becomes what is reflected in the daily activities, such as children’s play, interactions between children and staff, interchanges between families and staff, and the way staff feel about themselves and others as they go about their work. Everything about the program should be considered in light of this vision of quality: how the program looks, how it sounds, and what it expects from all involved.

A philosophy is a statement of beliefs reflecting the program’s value system, based on theory and guided by research. A well thought-out educational philosophy articulates intentionality and demonstrates that the program knows what it is doing and why it is doing it. The statement defines the nature and purpose of the organization to families and the public at large. The philosophy of an EC setting determines the characteristics of the
Core Values

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Appreciating and supporting the bonds between child and family. Children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships based on trust and respect.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Respecting the dignity, worth and uniqueness of each child, family member, and colleague. Basing our work on knowledge of how children develop and learn. Appreciating childhood as a unique, valuable stage of life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Respecting diversity in all individuals (child, family member, colleague). Recognizing that children are best understood and supported in the context of family, culture*, community, and society.</td>
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*Culture – ethnicity, racial identity, economic level, language, religion, and political beliefs, which profoundly affect each child’s development and relationship to the world.

After determining the vision and philosophy statement, the next step in planning is to set program goals for serving the children and families attending the program. After determining the needs of children and families, key stakeholders (parents, staff, governing body, community) work to define the philosophy and decide how to shape the program to reflect it. Once program goals are chosen, decisions regarding the policies, human resources, physical facilities and equipment, family involvement, and so on should be consistent with the goals. For example, a skilful leader supports early childhood educators (ECEs) in appreciating how their individual learning goals support program-wide goals and help advance the organization’s vision. She or he must determine the process by which program goals will be met, operationalize the strategies necessary to meet the goals, and evaluate the progress the program is making in fulfilling them.

Some envision EC programs as the neighbourhoods of the twenty-first century.
A **philosophy statement** outlines the beliefs and goals that are considered central to educating and nurturing young children and helps parents, the director, governing body, educators, support staff, and the community to accurately realize these goals. It is critical that this important declaration be established in a thoughtful, systematic manner.

The philosophy statement is a dynamic, living document that reflects current research and responds to the changing needs of the community. Since the program philosophy is a culmination of beliefs and goals for early childhood development, it should be re-evaluated on an ongoing basis, incorporating new understandings by decision makers.

A philosophy is about goal orientation. It also serves as a yardstick to measure the performance of the setting in meeting its goals. Program goals for children and families are statements of what really matters in a program—reference points for assessing whether the policies and practices are achieving what they were intended to achieve. The hallmark of any successful organization is a shared vision among stakeholders of what they are trying to accomplish and why. Agreed-upon goals and ways to attain them provide the foundation for rational planning and action.

Developing a vision for an organization occurs through a collaborative process that includes families, staff, and stakeholders. It takes into account standards and guidelines developed by relevant professional organizations such as the Standards of Practice developed by the College of ECEs identified in Chapter 7.

Regardless of the initial inspiration for a program’s purpose, in order for the philosophy to evolve, the involvement of others must be cultivated. It is critical to communicate the vision during the hiring process. Staff members must feel comfortable with the program’s philosophy. Frustrations over incompatible philosophies can create unworkable situations for staff. The opportunity to participate in program decision making is a leading factor in the morale of staff. Involving staff in the revision of an existing philosophy statement gives them a critical stake in it.

When meeting with prospective families, a director should ensure that they understand the program beliefs and that these are consistent with their goals and traditions. Parents should be aware that the underlying philosophy will meet their expectations, especially in the areas of curriculum and pedagogy. It is not enough to make grand statements about the philosophy—parents want to see this vision in action. They want to see the ways in which parents and staff work together to provide the best experiences for their child.

Early childhood programs are relationship based, and for some families, their supportive relationships with the staff help to fill the gap left by the absence of extended families. Encouraging the involvement of families builds their confidence in, awareness of, and desire to participate in their child’s education. Families who feel a shared ownership of the vision feel more motivated to contribute. This can lead to real involvement in the program and a genuine parent–staff partnership. This inclusive approach has a positive influence on children’s learning and development outcomes.

**INCLUDING A STRENGTHENING FAMILIES APPROACH**

A key aspect of EC practice is strong, healthy families and EC professionals who are well prepared to support them. Supporting and strengthening families has always been a part of the EC professional’s role. **Family-centred** practice describes respectful collaboration between
families and EC educators. The underpinnings of a family-centred practice reflect respectful collaboration between families and early childhood educators based on the following premises:

- Family is central to the child’s life.
- Each family has its own strengths, competencies, resources, and ways of coping.
- Every family is respected and accepted on its own terms, without judgments or preconceptions.
- Each family’s race, culture, ethnicity, religion, language, and socio-economic status are respected.

When educators and parents recognize each other’s expertise and acknowledge that differences in opinions and approaches are natural, they can use their combined strengths to develop trust, set goals, make plans, and solve problems. The child, the family, and the program all benefit.

A strengthening family perspective is radically different from the once-traditional model in which professionals considered themselves experts who determined and implemented interventions for children without family input or participation. Family-centred practice is not defined by a particular set of methods or procedures; rather, it requires a perspective-taking and willingness to embrace values that are respectful of and lead to collaboration with families. A key feature of a family-centred collaboration is that it is a continually evolving relationship. It creates an environment in which children and parents are free to ask questions. There is an ongoing process of evaluation and rethinking of approaches. The relationship changes and evolves.

**Steps in Developing the Program Philosophy**

A number of provinces (New Brunswick, Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario) have developed curriculum frameworks for early learning, many of which are intended to complement, rather than replace, specific curriculum and pedagogical approaches, such as emergent curriculum, High/Scope, or Montessori. These frameworks provide a starting point for program decision makers, determining their vision for the program. This can occur when a new setting is being developed or when an existing statement is being updated. Steps in developing a statement include the following points:

**Be Knowledgeable About Theories of Child Development** When preparing a philosophy statement, there must be a clear understanding of the various theories of child development and learning. Most of the curriculum models currently in practice follow the whole child approach. An example of a comprehensive, inclusive approach to EC education is the Reggio Emilia model, which involves an entire community in the development of a system of early childhood services.

**Consult with Stakeholders at Each Stage** Identify everyone involved in the EC program who will need to be consulted. This includes the governing body of the program, parents and children, staff and director, community representatives, and others who have a vested interest in the program.

**Identify Key Considerations** Bloom, in *Circle of Influence: Implementing Shared Decision Making and Participative Management* (2000), identifies a number of decisions that can guide process. Some examples of these decisions include...
Deciding the curricular approach
- Determining educational objectives for each age group
- Setting the expectations for family involvement
- Identifying the criteria for hiring staff
- Determining the guidelines for staff performance appraisals
- Determining the types of relationships with community agencies

**Identify Priorities** Once input from all the stakeholders has been gathered, identify the key areas of agreement. State explicitly any key values that should be maintained; for example, “We want to ensure that staff have an early childhood educational background.” Common threads of agreement will emerge as the priorities of individual stakeholders are revealed. These key points can then be used to draft the philosophy statement.

**Shared Beliefs**

Every experience in a child’s early life has an impact on his or her development now and in the future. Parents and families are the primary and most powerful influence on children’s early learning and development. Young children and their families live in communities that shape early experiences. Early learning programs need reciprocal partnerships with parents, families, and communities. These partnerships can be built by

- Acknowledging children’s individual and diverse development and natural disposition to learn
- Being inclusive, supporting meaningful engagement and equitable outcomes for all children

- Recognizing that families, early childhood professionals, and healthy communities are key to quality, effective early childhood programs
- Using the evidence of research, knowledge of professionals, wisdom of practice, and context of communities.


**Draft the Philosophy Statement** The statement is refined to reflect the feedback gathered. Once the draft has been created, all stakeholders should be given time to reflect on its implications and a chance to express their views.

**Operationalize the Statement** Once the development process has been completed, the next step is to operationalize the beliefs and values contained in the philosophy statement, and use them to guide practice. Remember, a philosophy statement is a living document, and it should be reviewed on a regular basis.

**Sample**

**Philosophy Statements**

*Millbrook Children’s Centre*—A learning community for children and adults where children are valued for their ability to do meaningful work, their wonder and curiosity, their perspectives and ability to play.

Where families are valued for their bonds and traditions, their ability to play, their commitment to work, home, and community, and their dreams for their children.

Where staff are valued for their vision, their delight in children, their skill, heart, and knowledge, (continued)
their commitment to families, and their ability to play.

We cherish what we can learn from each other.

Olivia Child Development Centre

Our program, in partnership with families, staff and community, provides high-quality early childhood experiences which enhance the lives of young children in an integrated, educational environment. We

- Value the child within the context of its family and community
- Recognize the integrative nature of children’s play as it affects learning in curriculum areas
- Acknowledge and support children’s individual learning styles
- Value the arts as symbol systems through which children make sense of themselves and their world
- Provide opportunities for discovery learning through self-selected activities, and encouraging the development of children’s abilities to explore, investigate, imagine and problem solve
- Value daily routines as opportunities for learning and social development, ensuring these times are engaging and stimulating
- Respect the needs and rights of children to make choices and decisions by empowering them to take responsibility for routines and the care of their environment and materials
- Recognize the need for children to practice skills and consolidate their learning by providing opportunities for repetition of experiences and extension of their ideas
- Establish an enriched environment that stimulates the imagination, promotes creativity and enhances aesthetic development
- Value and support staff in their work with children, families and in their own professional development

Developing a Personal Philosophy of Education

As you begin working in the field, reflections on your practice and learning more will coalesce into your personal philosophy that will guide your practice. This process of developing your personal philosophy serves as an important part of your development as an early childhood educator and will continue to evolve throughout your career. Formulating a personal philosophy of education clarifies your purpose, process, disposition and ideals of teaching as an educator. It commits the individual to certain intentions and implies a plan of action. It is important to recognize that a personal philosophy is a work in process, growing and changing as the educator gains experience, increased commitment, and understanding of the EC field. When writing your philosophy, you must be reflective and clear. A well thought-out educational philosophy articulates intentionality and demonstrates that you know what it is you are doing and why you are doing it.

Reflection upon why you entered the professional of early childhood is a good place to start writing down your philosophy. Consider what it is that you like, specifically, about working with young children. Your philosophy of education evolves as you learn more about child development and learning theories, such as ecological systems theory or Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences.

Your philosophy, although it covers numerous issues, it should be concise. This statement grows and is adapted as one’s knowledge and experience deepen. For example, a student’s philosophy statement will evolve as she or he is involved in continuous learning, such as completing additional course work or engaging in other reflective processes. Evaluating day-to-day practice in light of one’s statement of philosophy serves to keep ideals and realities aligned. Examples of philosophical statements include common ideas and beliefs about children, such as “All children have the right to inclusive education,” “I believe children learn through play,” and “Input and involvement are critical components of the family-centred environment.”
### Reflection Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Why did or do I want to become an early childhood educator?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the elements of being an effective early childhood professional?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are my beliefs about how children learn?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is my view about the role of family and community in my practice?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the obstacles facing children, families, and the field of ECE, and how can I overcome these obstacles?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What theories or philosophies support my beliefs?</td>
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In considering each question, write down your thoughts. Use these reflections as the basis of your educational philosophy.

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### USING THE VISION TO INFORM PRACTICE

A key attribute for leaders is to demonstrate a capacity to organize ideas and ideals, along with doing the same for time, talent, and tasks. Policies and procedures are critical to the delivery of quality EC programs and reflect the philosophy of the program. Although most programs would state that they have a philosophy, it is not uncommon to find that little attention is devoted to it. Often the documented statement outlines the program’s intent to serve children, treat them respectfully, and meet their developmental needs. Leaders and staff hired into programs are seldom asked how they would like to see this statement brought to life. To be useful, the statement needs to be reviewed regularly and used as a guide for decisions being made about the program. A well-constructed statement enables the program to develop policies and procedures that are consistent, to develop alliances with other organizations that share the program’s values and vision, and to guide major decisions. Figure 5–1, “Turing the Vision into Action,” outlines the steps involved.

The philosophy statement needs to be reviewed often and used as a guide for decision making.
One of the characteristics of successful teams is that they are guided by a set of achievable goals that are understood and accepted by all. Many staff teams have not had the opportunity to be involved in the development of the goals and policies that inform their practice. Some staff teams do not even consider this to be part of their responsibility. Given that the director or governing body may have imposed these goals and policies, not all staff may agree with, accept, or value them.

Because goals and policies are based on values, they can engender conflict. Individual beliefs, values, and perspectives that have a strong emotional component dominate the field of early childhood. Understanding that not all people are likely to accept or agree with the goals and policies of a program is important. Providing opportunities for discussion, the sharing of perspectives, and regular review of goals and objectives is necessary to maximize commitment to. Rood identifies four steps that a leader can use to facilitate staff involvement (1998):

1. **The definition of organizational and individual goals and/or objectives.** First, achieve
   - clarification of the program and its purpose,
   - an outline for future directions,
   - a description of procedures,
   - identification of resource requirements, and
   - explication of the roles and responsibilities of each staff member.
2. **The setting of individual standards and expectations.** Tasks are outlined in terms of the functions specified in each staff member job description, including standards of performance.

3. **The provision of support and feedback.** Constructive feedback will be provided to individual team members to develop their expertise. As well, directors can provide ongoing mentoring and opportunities for collaboration and team planning.

4. **The monitoring and evaluation of outcomes.** A process for regular review is essential to ensure that the program is meeting legal requirements, professional standards, and achieving its objectives within the specified time frame.

### POLICIES REFLECT GOALS AND VALUES OF PROGRAM

The written policies reflect the values and the philosophy of the organization. Good policies should reflect best practices and provide standards that reflect current research to guide educators. Figure 5–2 identifies the sequencing of policy development from best practices through to step-by-step procedures. A knowledgeable director will guide the governing body’s decisions about philosophy and policies so that they reflect sound theories. Policies should be stated in general terms that allow the flexibility necessary for dealing with specific situations. Once established, policies must be followed consistently. As discussed more fully in Chapter 8, policy and procedure manuals communicate standards of performance. A policy describes a course of action that guides decisions. Policies provide written rules that specify the behaviours or actions permissible in the program and what the organization expects of employees. They also define what the employees can expect from the program.

![Figure 5–2 Policy Development Flow Chart](image-url)
Policies also reflect legislation, the regulations that prescribe, direct, limit, or govern early childhood programs. Policies:

- Reflect the efforts of the organization to anticipate situations
- Identify the approach for dealing with issues as they arise
- Guide thinking and action by providing a framework for making decisions
- Answer the what and why of daily operations
- Explain how goals and objectives will be achieved in general terms
- Are set by governing body—board of directors or owners

Policies and procedures are necessary to promote better understanding of expectations for both staff and parents. They can provide clarification and standardization of the program’s governing rules as well as promote consistency and continuity in decision making. They determine the blueprint for achieving the established goals of the program.

There are two types of policies that are needed for programs: general policies that address the legal and structural rules of the organization. Examples of the content these policies include confidentiality, communication with families, or reporting of child abuse. There is more focus on program policies in Chapter 8, “Managing Safe and Healthy Learning Environments.”

The second focus is employment status—policies that cover employees’ rights and responsibilities. These include hiring practices, probation, and professional development. They must reflect legislation such as EC legislation, employment standards, directives, statutes, or standards that prescribe, direct, limit, or govern early childhood programs. This focus is elaborated in Chapter 6, “Human Resource Management.”

The more carefully that policies and procedures are written, the more the staff and families will connect them to the philosophy and vision of the program. In turn, the policies and procedures will more directly address the situations they are meant to govern, and ultimately, they will be more effective.

EVALUATING THE QUALITY OF A PROGRAM

Once the program’s vision and philosophy statements have been developed and agreed upon, the next step is to assess its potential to fulfill these. The program evaluation should be comprehensive, identifying areas of strength and those needing improvement. Taking the initiative to evaluate the program engages the team in a powerful process where they become invested in the results. When the team is involved in knowing and doing something about improving the program, they are less likely to wait defensively for outside evaluators to tell them what is wrong. The evaluation process gathers evidence on all areas of the program including policies and procedures, program quality, children’s progress and learning, and family involvement and satisfaction. The results are used as a basis for continuous improvement, continuing with successful initiatives, and changing those that need improvement.

Many measures for assessing the quality of children’s environments were developed originally for use in research and as self-assessment tools for directors and educators. These tools have also moved into the arena of public policy where they are now being used to make decisions about the program and inform families about the quality of settings. In fact, the results of many of these measures are posted on websites, some on a room-by-room basis...
where parents or potential users of the program can see how a room is functioning. The City of Toronto Children’s Services website is an example of this growing transparency of program quality.

Directors may have a global impression that things are either going well or not going so well with the program, but they often lack specific information. Information gleaned from an evaluation of the program can help turn those vague feelings into pinpointing what aspects of the program need to be improved. Directors can, in turn, work with the staff and governing body and secure resources to address these concerns.

The primary purpose of program evaluation is to improve the quality of the experience provided to children and families. All programs should undergo regular evaluation in order for the staff to engage in continuous reflection and improvement. Quality early childhood settings use ongoing observations and appropriate assessments to gather information on children’s learning and development; similarly, they use valid program evaluations to measure the quality of the program. Engagement in these activities benefits children by informing decisions about pedagogy and curriculum.

Observing children’s behaviour and responses to the curriculum provided offers an overall sense of whether all children are meaningfully engaged. Monitoring early childhood development through the use of a developmental continuum can help educators understand how well their setting is meeting the needs of children and families, as identified in the program philosophy or mission statement. Reflection on the presence or absence of children’s challenging behaviours and the strategies of guidance used should be an ongoing component of staff or team meetings, providing stakeholders with an overall sense of program effectiveness. In order to conduct valid program evaluation, adequate supports are needed so that the program evaluation does not drain resources from the actual delivery of the service. Two agencies that provide these supports are the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement and the Affiliated Services for Children and Youth (ASCY) in Hamilton, Ontario. These agencies provide supports to EC programs, including monitoring quality through

- Frequent on-site observations
- Parent and/or educator feedback collection each year
- Action plan development to address areas of need and to plan for improvement, and providing consultation through early childhood consultants

Major barriers to program quality include financial instability and insufficient government funding, inadequate levels of staff education and too few professional development opportunities, directors who are inadequately prepared for their jobs, and a lack of infrastructure support to programs. As well, major challenges with attraction, recruitment, and retention of staff are factors in many provinces and territories. When quality is lacking, programs are constrained from attaining their goals for services for children and families.

The annual evaluation and planning processes should complement each other, with the evaluation providing the information to guide strategic planning. As well, the data collected from various evaluations can document how close to its goals the program has come. The evaluation process can serve as a self-renewal process. It is a means for developing teamwork and building collective action to bring about an understanding of the changes necessary to achieve program objectives and acceptance of responsibility for implementing those changes. The planning process can be used to set goals in areas needing improvement.
For example, the philosophy statement may state that the program serves children and families from a range of cultures, socio-economic groups, and children of varying abilities. Although an important shared value of the stakeholders, it may be found that this is not what is occurring. A goal may be set to diversify the population served. Some of the barriers to achieving this goal may include a homogeneous staff, an environment that only reflects one culture, and materials that are available only in English. To meet the goal of increasing the diversity of the population served, the program could set specific objectives, such as

- Hiring qualified staff from representative backgrounds of the population served for the next available positions
- Providing opportunities, on a regular basis, for staff to learn more about culturally relevant programming

To get broader feedback on the functioning of the program in meeting diversity, the director could involve representatives of the community in reviewing human resources, enrolment, health, and nutrition policies and procedures.

An ongoing evaluation process is an integral means for creating, designing, improving, and maintaining effective early childhood programs. When staff members have an active role in evaluating the program and generating solutions, they feel a greater responsibility for implementing change and are more responsive to incorporating new practices. An example of a tool designed to improve the collaboration of an EC program with schools and other community agencies is the City of Toronto Operating Criteria Working Together component. This tool is intended to assist leaders in assessing their program’s standing in working collaboratively with schools to aid in developing partnerships for child care and kindergarten. Its intent is to increase awareness of the EC program in contributing their expertise to the early year’s team to achieve common goals and to identify obstacles and solutions in working toward inclusive access for young children and families. An ultimate goal is to develop a continuum of seamless supports from EC through to kindergarten programs.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE PROGRAM QUALITY MEASURES

The benefits that result from well-developed systems of high quality are recognized for the contributions they make to children’s learning and development. The development of standards of quality and the use of tools to assess quality have contributed our understanding of how these dimensions affect children. In the following section, some considerations when selecting tools will be overviewed:

- Program assessment tools should define quality along a continuum. By using a continuum to rate quality, the assessment tools help programs identify where they are on the path to achieving quality, and the successive steps they must take to continue their progress. See Figure 5–3, which uses this continuum approach that aids programs to see what step they are currently at.
- Program evaluations are most helpful when they provide users with examples. To aid individuals including the evaluation instrument fairly and objectively, it should be explicit about the practices and behaviours that define poor, acceptable, and excellent
levels of quality. Instruments designed in this manner produce a higher level of agreement, or interrater reliability. (This means that instrument outcomes are similar despite having different evaluators.)

- Program evaluations are most informative when they are comprehensive. Tools should look at the process elements as well as the structural elements of quality (described in Chapter 1, “Defining Quality Early Childhood Programs.”) Most instruments do a detailed job of looking at structural elements, such as the safety of the physical features or the diversity of the materials and equipment provided. However, many tools fail to pay equal attention to the most vital aspect of quality—the nature of the interactions between practitioners and children. These interpersonal characteristics and qualities are crucial to promoting child development. Additionally, complete program assessments will consider how educators interact with families and colleagues, opportunities for family involvement, the types of support directors provide to staff, and how management secures adequate resources.

- An effective program quality evaluation tool can serve as a staff development tool by helping staff and leaders decide what areas they want to emphasize in team development.

**Figure 5-3** Quality Standard EC Programs Working with Schools/Community Agencies

Source: City of Toronto Children’s Services Operating Criteria, 2009. Reproduced with permission.
An assessment of a program's quality should highlight its strengths and identify areas for improvement. For example, the program evaluation tool below identifies those steps needing immediate action.

**TOOLS FOR CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT**

Early learning programs can be supported and encouraged to engage in a continuous cycle of quality improvement focused on improving outcomes for children and families. Along with technical assistance and professional development, many supports and resources for programs can be linked together in a Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) framework. Programs can review multiple sources of evidence (i.e., family-teacher-child surveys, licensing inspections, audits, child and other observational assessment data, individual and program-wide professional development plans, health and safety checklists, administrative data), which may
include program self-assessment using one or more tools (some examples listed below) and then work as a team on developing the annual CQI plan. Programs are encouraged to strategically select initiatives based on the goals and objectives of the program improvement plan.

### Early Childhood Program Evaluation Tools

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)
- Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL)
- Preschool Program Quality Assessment Instrument (PQA)
- Early Childhood Work Environment Survey
- SpecialLink Inclusion Practices Profile
- Program Administration Scale

A widely used global evaluation tool is the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS). While its original purpose was for self-assessment, the tool is also used in research and for shaping public policy: to measure quality, methods for quantifying quality, and as a tactical approach in increasing quality in large numbers of programs. These scales are designed to assess process quality in an early childhood or school-age groups. Process quality consists of the various interactions that go on in a classroom among staff and children; among staff, parents, and other adults; among the children themselves; and the interactions children have with the many materials and activities in the environment, as along with those features, such as space, schedule, and materials that support these interactions. Process quality is assessed primarily through observation and has been found to be more predictive of child outcomes than structural indicators such as staff: child ratio, group size, cost of care, and even type of care; for example, child care centre or family child care home (Sakai et al. 2004). In order to provide care and education that will permit children to experience a high quality of life while helping them develop their abilities, a quality program must provide for the three basic needs all children have:

- Protection of their health and safety
- Building positive relationships
- Opportunities for stimulation and learning from experience

All of the scales have been developed in close collaboration with field-based sites. They have good interrater reliability and validity, thus making them suitable for research and program evaluation as well as program improvement efforts. In addition, there are four environment rating scales, each designed for a different segment of the early childhood field:

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R)
- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R)
- Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale-Revised (FCCERS-R)
- School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale (SACERS)

Supportive Environmental Quality Underlying Adult Learning (SEQUAL): This is a multipurpose tool for examining and improving environments in which early childhood staff work and learn. The SEQUAL scale assesses how well the workplace supports teaching...
staff to learn and continue to develop their knowledge and skills on the job. SEQUAL assesses five overarching domains of the workplace that support professional growth and high-quality care and instruction. These include the following:

1. Teaching Supports domain focuses on curriculum and child assessment, classroom materials, support services for child and families, and staffing patterns.
2. Learning Community domain examines teaching staff’s participation in opportunities for individual and collaborative professional development, sharing information and practicing new approaches, and planning and implementing quality improvements.
3. Job Crafting domain measures program policies and practices that support staff initiative and team work, and promote their input into their work.
4. Adult Well-being domain examines teaching assessments and program practices and policies related to their economic and physical well-being and work relationships.
5. Program Leadership domain examines how program leaders interact with staff to support their teaching practice, professional growth, and well-being.

Each domain examines the policies, practices, and relationships necessary for a high-quality adult learning environment. Teaching staff focus groups and multi-disciplinary theory and research related to adult learning, teacher education, early childhood quality, and organizational psychology informed the development of the SEQUAL.

Preschool Program Quality Assessment Instrument (PQA): This rating instrument is designed to evaluate the quality of EC programs and identify staff professional development needs. The tool, developed by a diverse team of researchers, training consultants, and practitioners, was validated in a variety of early childhood settings following the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation philosophy as well as settings using other curriculum approaches. There are seven domains, such as the learning environment, daily program, adult–child interaction, curriculum planning and assessment, family involvement, staff qualifications and development, and program management. It uses a five-point rating scale (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation 2002).

There is a growing consensus among early childhood educators, directors, consultants, parents, and therapists concerning the factors that are important in providing and sustaining effective inclusion. EC programs that are effective in including children with special needs require a mix of supports and resources within the program, such as staff given time to plan and participate in individual program plans (IPPs) with community specialists. The SpeciaLink Inclusion Practices Profile is a tool for use with the SpeciaLink Inclusion Principles Scale to assess sustainable and evolving inclusion quality. These scales were combined in 2009. This tool provides a picture of inclusion quality and is used for assessing inclusion quality in early childhood settings. As more children with special needs attend community-based programs, this is a critical aspect of the program to evaluate. The tool is similar in design to the ECERS-R formats. Some of the elements include the role of the director and board of directors, supports available to staff, staff training, and preparing for transition to school. The creators recommend the tool be used along with ECERS as the terminology, procedures, and descriptions are compatible. The areas assessed include physical environment, equipment and materials, the director and governance committees, staff support and training, therapies available to the program, IPPs, families, involvement of typical children, and transitions to school.
## Sample

### SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale

Note frequency and intensity of play that involves children with special needs and typically developing children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inadequate 1</th>
<th>Minimal 3</th>
<th>Good 5</th>
<th>Excellent 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Typically developing children rarely interact with children with special needs.</td>
<td>3.1 Typically developing children sometimes interact with children with special needs, but mainly in a helping role.</td>
<td>5.1 Children with special needs are often included in group play, usually as babies or in another diminished status.</td>
<td>7.1 Children with special needs are included as valued participants in group social play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Staff take no active role in encouraging inclusion.</td>
<td>3.2 Staff make ineffective comments or gestures to promote social inclusion.</td>
<td>5.2 Staff suggest appropriate roles or dramatic situations that are inclusionary.</td>
<td>7.2 Staff systematically use techniques of scripting, cooperative learning, and valued-object sharing to promote social inclusion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.3 Staff use strategies that support social inclusion.</td>
<td>7.3 Staff receive specific training in promotion of inclusive social play.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sharon Hope Irwin, "SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale" (Wreck Cove, NS: Breton Books, 2009).

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Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES): Program leaders often have a global impression that things are going well or not so well at their centres, but they lack specific data on just what different areas of the organization contribute to those impressions. Organizational climate assessment can help explain where things are going well, identify where changes are needed, increase staff involvement, and improve the overall morale and commitment of employees. The ECWES is an assessment tool that measures staff perceptions about coworker relations, opportunities for professional growth, supervisor support, clarity, reward system, decision making, goal consensus, task orientation, physical setting, and innovativeness. Early childhood leaders play a pivotal role in creating work environments that promote high performance and personal fulfillment. Assessing staff attitudes about organizational practices is one way directors can better understand the collective perceptions of the team and help improve overall morale and job satisfaction. When staff are dissatisfied with their work, the results are turnover, stress, and burnout—and even departure from the profession. In such a situation, it is impossible to maintain a quality program. The areas surveyed by this tool include the following:

**Collegiality:** The extent to which staff are friendly, supportive, and trust one another; the peer cohesion of the group

**Professional growth:** The degree of emphasis placed on staff's professional growth; the availability of opportunities to increase professional competence

**Director support:** The degree of facilitative leadership providing encouragement, support, and clear expectations
Chapter 5 Planning and Evaluating the Program Goals

SUMMARY

Each early childhood setting has its own characteristics that are articulated in its program vision, philosophy, and goals. One of the director’s main tasks is to provide leadership in the development and implementation of the program philosophy and the evaluation of the program. A philosophy is a distillation of the ideas, beliefs, and values held by an individual, a group, or an organization. It has a direct bearing on curriculum development, staff hiring, degree of family involvement, budget allocations, and community resource use. All key stakeholders—families, staff, the community, and the governing body—should be involved in the development of the philosophy statement. As well, each educator should continue to develop and reflect on her or his personal philosophy.

An inclusive vision for quality benefits all the stakeholders. An inclusive process encourages supportive relationships, open communication, and confidence in the program, and it is of benefit to staff and management as well as to families. The quality of a program is based on relationships: child–child, child–parent, staff–child, staff–parent, staff–staff, and so on. By creating a vision for quality that is owned by the stakeholders, a commitment to the pursuit of excellence is made and a culture of self-reflection and continuous improvement is created.

Programs need to evaluate the process and structural features of quality regularly and systematically. Reliable and valid measures of quality can be used to assess the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving quality and as useful tools to develop program standards for the profession. As well, policy makers require tools to determine if EC programs are providing the quality of programs young children need and deserve, and to assure public accountability for investments in programs.

Key Terms and Concepts

Clarity, p. 134
Collegiality, p. 133
Family-centred, p. 119
Decision making, p. 134
Director support, p. 133
Goal consensus, p. 134
Innovativeness, p. 134
Personal philosophy, p. 122
Philosophy, p. 118
Physical setting, p. 134

Clarity: The extent to which policies, procedures, and responsibilities are defined and communicated

Reward system: The degree of fairness and equity in the distribution of pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement

Decision making: The degree of autonomy given to staff and the extent to which they are involved in program decisions

Goal consensus: The degree to which staff agree on the philosophy, goals, and educational objectives of the program

Task orientation: The emphasis placed on organizational effectiveness and efficiency, including productive meetings, program outcomes, and accountability

Physical setting: The extent to which the spatial arrangement of the program helps or hinders staff in carrying out their responsibilities

Innovativeness: The extent to which an organization adapts to change and encourages staff to find creative ways to solve problems

This instrument measures staff’s perceptions about a wide range of organizational practices. It can be administered annually to check the pulse of organizational functioning.
Activities

1. Request the philosophy statement from your field placement and determine the statement’s implications for planning the program for children. Is the statement compatible with or contrary to your beliefs?

2. Collect three philosophy statements from community early childhood programs. Compare these statements. Identify how each statement complies with your present understanding of quality. What do you feel that might be missing? Draft an ideal personal philosophy statement.

3. Use the SEQUAL assessment tool to evaluate how well your workplace supports the teaching staff to learn and to continue to develop their knowledge and skills on the job. What can be done to improve the policies, practices, and relationships necessary for a high-quality adult learning environment?

Recommended Reading


Weblinks

**www.eccdc.org**

*Early Childhood Community Development Centre*

The “child care resource link for owners and boards” on this site provides a listing of resources to help decision makers maximize their operations. The web page is organized around six key areas of responsibility: direction, guardianship, public relations, advocacy, legal conduct, and ethical conduct. Included are bibliographies and lists of contacts, links, and articles.

**www.specialinkcanada.org**

*SpeciaLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion*

A resource and research helpline, SpeciaLink provides personalized responses to specific questions, referrals to other organizations, and sources of help, information, and technical assistance. It also provides the SpeciaLink newsletters, fact sheets, books, and videos, as well as a speakers’ bureau. It maintains an alert network of key mainstream child care advocates across the country who can quickly identify and respond to opportunities and threats to mainstream quality and funding.