

Child Care Work Environments: Implications for Assessing Child Care Quality

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The purpose of this paper is to inform constituents about the relationship between child care work environments and children's learning environments to aid decisions about measurement of child care quality in state quality enhancement initiatives. Utilizing a sub-sample of 30 centers from the **North Carolina Rated License Assessment Project**, this study addressed the relationship between child care teacher work environments (program administration and organizational climate) and classroom global quality. It supports a dynamic relationship between leadership and management practices, teachers' perceptions of their work environment, the quality of classrooms, and interactions experienced by children. It provides a foundation to improve child care quality by focusing on the needs of teachers to do their job

Organizational Climate and Global Quality. Organizational climate was measured with the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey—short form¹ and classroom global quality was measured with the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised². There was a significant positive correlation between organizational climate and classroom global quality. That is, teachers with more positive perceptions of their work environment also had higher quality classroom environments. Additionally, organizational climate had a positive relationship with the language and interactions³ experienced by the children. More specifically, teachers that had better perceptions of their work environments had higher quality interactions with the children in their care.

How teachers perceive their work environment is a part of what children experience.

Program Administration and Global Quality. Leadership and management practices were measured with the Program Administration Scale (PAS)⁴. Child care programs with higher quality leadership and management practices had teachers creating higher quality classroom environments as measured by the ECERS-R.

PAS and Parents and Staff Subscale. Because the Parents and Staff subscale of the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) contains indicators measuring leadership and management practices, the relationship between the PAS and the Parents and Staff subscale was examined. There was a significant positive relationship between the two measures, providing support for the inclusion of the Parents and Staff subscale when using the ERS in quality enhancement initiatives.

Director Experience and Education. The PAS is set up as a rubric for improving leadership and management practices over time. It was of interest to see if director years of experience or education level was related to PAS scores. Director years of experience and education was attained from director report (n = 25). Years of child care administrative experience was not correlated with PAS scores. That is, years of experience in the role of director did not result in better leadership and management practices. However, education mattered. The leadership and management practices of directors with at least a 4-year degree scored significantly better than directors with some college or a 2-year degree. Additionally, directors with the North Carolina Administration III Credential scored significantly higher on the PAS compared to directors with no or a lower level Administration Credential.

It matters to child care quality that directors learn about leadership and management.

Policy Implications. Based on the current findings, the use of the Parents and Staff subscale of the Environment Rating Scales in quality enhancement initiatives is supported. Currently, the Parents and Staff subscale is frequently omitted in research and in quality enhancement initiatives⁵. Work environment standards, such as the questions within the Parents and Staff subscale, when not used, fail to increase awareness about the importance of good work environments for teachers, fail to contribute to improved working conditions, and subsequently fail to sustain quality child care. One way to improve standards for teacher work environments is to create supportive policies. Based on the current study, it is recommended that when using the Environment Rating Scales as measures of global quality, the Parents and Staff subscale should be included in the assessments. Additionally, as Quality Rating Systems develop across the nation, the use of the Program Administration Scale as a performance measure of leadership and management practices should be explored. Including leadership and management practices in comprehensive center evaluations used for quality ratings is not only logical but, may be necessary to achieve an accurate picture of the environment in which both children and adults develop.

Teacher work environments impact children's learning environments.

Conclusion. This study supports the idea that child care leadership and management practices and organizational climate are related to classroom global quality. That is, child care work environments are related to children's learning environments. Leadership and management practices and organizational climate should not be overlooked when improving child care quality, developing Quality Rating Systems, and building a stable workforce. *Teaching directors and teachers about quality work environments and professional relationships is a component to include when focusing on creating optimal environments for children.*

- Policy Directions**
- Include the Parents and Staff subscale when using the Environment Rating Scales in quality enhancement initiatives and state Quality Rating Systems.
 - Support the use of the Program Administration Scale as a performance measure of leadership and management practices in quality enhancement initiatives and state Quality Rating Systems.
 - Support director education focusing on leadership and management practices in child care settings.

References
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