



Assessing quality in the early years: The Environment Rating Scales



London seminar

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Who are A+ Education Ltd?

- Our work is based around the Environment Rating Scales (ECERS and others)
 - Helping LAs to develop effective and high quality projects to raise quality of provision and outcomes for children
 - Helping practitioners to use the scales as positive and practical self-evaluation tools to raise the quality of their own provision
 - Working with research teams to support reliable and consistent data collection
- Directors: Sandra Mathers and Faye Linskey
- National training/audit team

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What are the Environment Rating Scales?

- Internationally recognised, evidence-based tools for improving the quality of the learning environment
- Designed for Early Years and childcare provision
- Provide a measurable 'profile' of quality
- Suitable for all types of Early Years providers
- Used in the EPPE research and shown in many studies to relate strongly to child outcomes
- Recognised by Ofsted and used by many UK practitioners as part of their Continuous Quality Improvement Cycle.
- Acknowledged in the EYFS

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Our philosophy

- The Environment Rating Scales are most effective when used:
 - positively and inclusively
 - reflectively
 - objectively and rigorously
 - as an integral part of the work of practitioners and Local Authorities rather than adding to the workload
 - as one tool in a toolkit rather than a single blue-print for quality



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Introducing the scales

- The Environment Rating Scales are tools for measuring and improving the quality of early years provision:
 - research and audit (measuring quality)
 - developing practice (improving quality)
- Input from many researchers and practitioners over the years & still evolving in response to feedback
- Reliable, valid and supported by research evidence
- Focus on the **‘learning environment’** in its broadest sense i.e. the context needed for learning to take place
- Provide a structure for recording what is happening in the learning environment so that elements of it can be developed

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The Environment Rating Scales

Centre-Based Early Years Provision

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (**ECERS-R**) & UK curricular extension (**ECERS-E**)
- Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale (**ITERS-R**)

Out of School Care

- School Age Care Environment Rating Scale (**SACERS**)

Childminding

- Family Child Care Environment Rating Scale (**FCCERS-R**)

Harms, Cryer, Clifford, Vineberg Jacobs, Romano White



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Increasing acknowledgement of ECERS nationally....

- **EYFS Practice Guidance (May 2008):**
 - In a continuously improving setting the leader will...draw on the full range of quality improvement tools available, for example the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-R and E).
- **Guidance for Ofsted Inspectors (April 2010):**
 - Local Authorities are increasingly using Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scales (ECERS) with providers to judge the quality of provision. Inspectors should be familiar with this means of assessment.
- **Frank Field Review on Poverty and Life Chances (2010)**
 - ECERS listed as a recommended measure for assessing the quality of 'nursery care'

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Which aspects of quality are considered?

- **Welfare requirements:** e.g. daily routines, keeping safe/ healthy
- **Enabling environments:** e.g. space, furniture, resources and activities to support play, learning and exploration
- **Positive relationships:** e.g. the 'emotional environment', interactions between staff and children
- **Learning and development:** e.g. support for children's developing language/thinking skills
- **Structure of the day:** e.g. balance between child initiated and adult-directed play
- **Partnership with parents** e.g. communication with parents
- **Provision for staff members** e.g. opportunities for training

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Why use the scales?: the research evidence

- Effective Provision of Pre-School Education Project (EPPE, now EPPSE)
- UK longitudinal study funded by the DCSF (now DfE)
- Led by Professors Kathy Sylva, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and colleagues
- Used the ECERS-R to assess quality of provision
- Developed a UK extension (the ECERS-E) to assess curricular provision
- New book published 2010: “Early Childhood Matters: evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education Project” (Sylva et al)

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What did EPPE find?

- Quality of provision is paramount
- ↑ ECERS scores = ↑ quality = ↑ child outcomes
- During the early years children in high quality settings did better, e.g. in terms of early reading, number concepts, non-verbal reasoning
- But the effects of quality were also lasting....
 - better social-behavioural outcomes at ages 7 and 11
 - better academic outcomes (English & Mathematics national tests) at ages 7 and 11
- The positive effects of pre-school on pro-social behaviour were lasting for all quality types **BUT** by the end of KS2 children who attended low quality pre-schools had no other lasting benefits over children who had stayed at home...
-so low quality early years provision adds little value

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UK and international reputation

- UK research studies:
 - Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative National Evaluation
 - Millennium Cohort Study
 - Evaluation of the Two Year Olds Pilot
 - Evaluation of the Graduate Leader Fund
 - Evaluation of Children's Centres in England
- Used in many countries throughout the world for research and for developing practice

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How are settings in the UK using the scales?

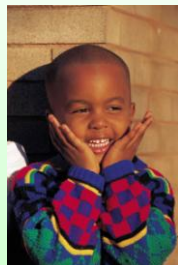
- Used by more than 40 UK Local Authorities and hundreds of practitioners
 - Whole-staff tool
 - Self-evaluation, observation and reflection
 - Providing evidence (e.g. for the SEF)
 - Part of the continuous quality improvement cycle
- Transparent and positive, providing concrete steps towards improvement in many areas
- Systematic structure and scoring system allows measurement of progress over time

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How are Local Authorities using the scales?

- Quality improvement and supported self-assessment for settings
- Quality Assurance
- Audits at Local Authority level to provide information and prioritise spending, training and support
- Measuring change in quality over time and assessing impact



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How does an ERS evaluation work?



How do the Environment Rating Scales work?

- Observational rating scales
- Used with one room/group of children at a time
- Information gathered during a half day observation on a 'typical day' (longer needed for ECERS-E)
- Some elements can be scored by asking a question – but the majority of evidence comes from observation
- Some settings will need two or more separate observations depending on the age of the children provided for (e.g. an ECERS-R and an ITERS-R)
- Not an inspection!

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The structure of the scales

- ECERS-R has 7 subscales and 43 items
- ITERS-R has 7 subscales and 39 items
- 6 subscales cover provision for children
- Final subscale looks at:
 - Provision for parents
 - Provision for staff

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ITERS/ECERS-R Items

- Items rated using a 7 point scale
- Each item made up of a series of quality statements (indicators) ranging from 'inadequate' through to 'excellent'
- Provides a comprehensive profile of what was observed on the day (i.e. what is already in place) and what was not (i.e. signposts to improvement)

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The scoring system

- Separate score-sheet for every observation
- Make sure you are familiar with the scoring system before you use the scale
- Always start scoring at 1 – don't assume!
- We recommend always scoring to the end of items
 - The score tells you where an element of provision was first 'missing'
 - The indicators provide a more detailed picture of what was observed on the day and possible areas for development.

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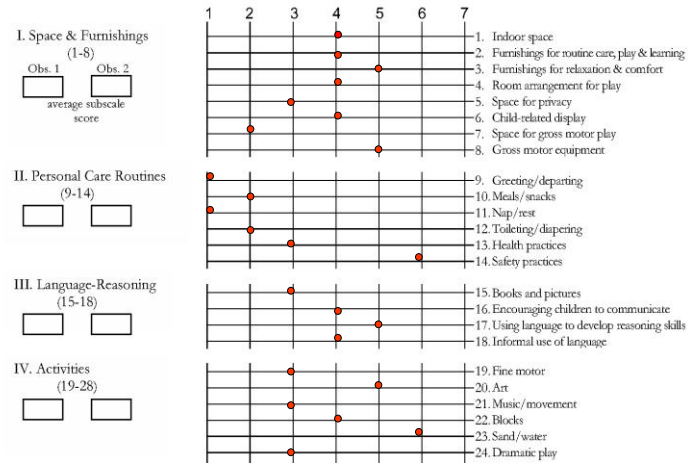


The scoresheet

18. Informal use of language		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
	Y N							
1.1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	3.1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	5.1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	7.1	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
1.2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	3.2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	5.2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	7.2	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	
1.3	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>			5.3	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>			
				5.4	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>			

ECERS-R Profile

Center/School: Teddy Bears Observation 1: $\frac{06}{m}$ / $\frac{06}{a}$ / $\frac{06}{y}$ Observer: Faye Linskey
 Teacher(s)/Classroom: _____ Observation 2: $\frac{m}{m}$ / $\frac{a}{a}$ / $\frac{y}{y}$ Observer: _____





Expectations of scoring

- We would not expect any setting to achieve all 7s and it is quite normal to get a few low scores.
- Often the reason for the low score is a quick fix and statements in the 5s and 7s will have been met. For example, Item 34 (Schedule).
- Provides an opportunity for some quick wins.
- Average in EPPE project was 4.3 for ECERS-R.



Ratings on ERS

- Ratings on ERS are a reflection of the choices and professional practices of staff teams and the constraints under which they operate.
- There will be some things you don't want to change and some which you can't. For example:
 - In a community building which is not accessible, scores on some of the 'space and furnishings items' will be low. This may reflect the constraints of the space rather than staff practices.
 - ERS is particularly strict on hygiene and supervision. For example, it requires hand-washing with liquid soap rather than bars of soap or anti-bacterial gel. If you use anti-bacterial gels, you may get a low score on some of the hygiene items but feel this may be the best practice in your situation.
- In these cases, we would not change the ERS score but these areas would obviously not form the basis of your priorities for development.



Overall quality is the main focus

- The purpose of an ERS observation is to highlight areas for consideration.
- Research shows positive child development is related to the average total score rather than to any of the single items by themselves.
- This allows scope to work on improving certain areas, while recognising that others are not being (or cannot be) provided.
- Important themes (e.g. accessibility of resources, safety) are given greater weight, and appear in several items throughout the scale.



Other things to bear in mind

- The power of observational tools is that they capture what is actually happening – not what we think is happening. But they can only ever provide a snapshot of that particular day. A ‘no’ may not mean that something ‘never happens’ just that it wasn’t seen on the day.

Using the ERS information

Which level of implementation?

- We suggest the scales are most powerful when implemented at all three levels:
 - Settings (supported self-evaluation and quality monitoring)
 - Advisers/consultants (shared tool for supporting settings)
 - Local Authority level (using data to direct resources and support)

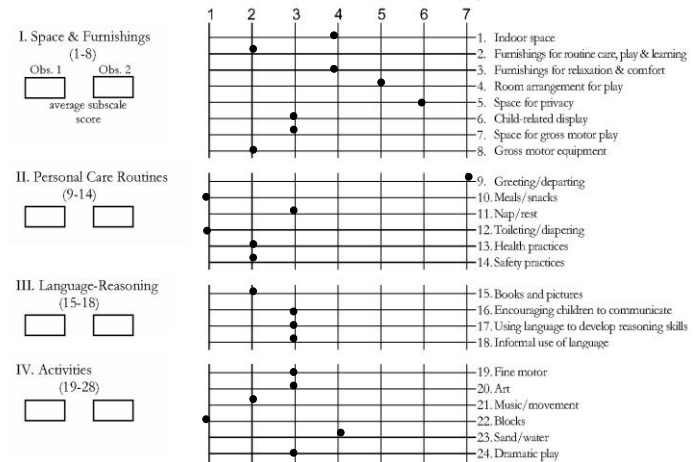


Using the scales to set targets for improvement

- End product of a standard observation is a scoresheet – not very user-friendly!
- Can use the scales themselves as a visual record of strengths and areas for development.
- Celebrate indicators and items which have been achieved.
- Use the wording of the statements to set targets for improvement.

ECERS-R Profile

Center/School: Teddy Bears Observation 1: 06/06/08 Observer: Faye Linskey
Teacher(s)/Classroom: _____ Observation 2: 06/06/08 Observer: _____





Identifying and recording strengths and areas for development

Setting: Teddy Bears **Room/ area:** FS Provision **Scale/s:** ECERS-R **Date of observation:** 06/06/06
Date of review:

ECERS/TERS item/s	Strengths
ER 9:Greeting/departing	Both greetings and departures are very warm and well-organised. All children and parents are greeted individually, and the time is used for sharing information.
Etc.....	

ECERS/TERS item/s	Target/details of improvement to be undertaken	Review date and comments
ER: Gross motor equipment (8)	Improve the level of gross motor challenge for older children e.g. by providing a climbing frame for outdoor play or offering more advanced pedal toys, bean bags, hoops etc. Make sure equipment provided stimulates a variety of skills e.g. balancing, climbing, ball play, steering and pedalling wheel toys.	
Etc.....		



Inadequate	06/06/06	Minimal	Good	Excellent		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Gross motor equipment						
1.1 Very little gross motor equipment used for free play.	na	3.1 Some gross motor equipment accessible to all children for at least 1 hr daily.*		5.1 There is enough gross motor equipment so that children have access without a long wait.*		7.1 Both stationary and portable gross motor equipment are used.
1.2 Equipment is generally in poor repair.	na	3.2 Equipment is generally in good repair. *		5.2 Equipment stimulates a variety of skills. *		7.2 Gross motor equipment stimulates skills on different levels.
1.3 Most of the equipment is not appropriate for the age and ability of the children.	na	3.3 Most of the equipment is appropriate for the age and ability of the children. *		5.3 Adaptations made or special equipment provided for children in group with disabilities.*		n/a

Green = achieved
Red = target



Developing action plans

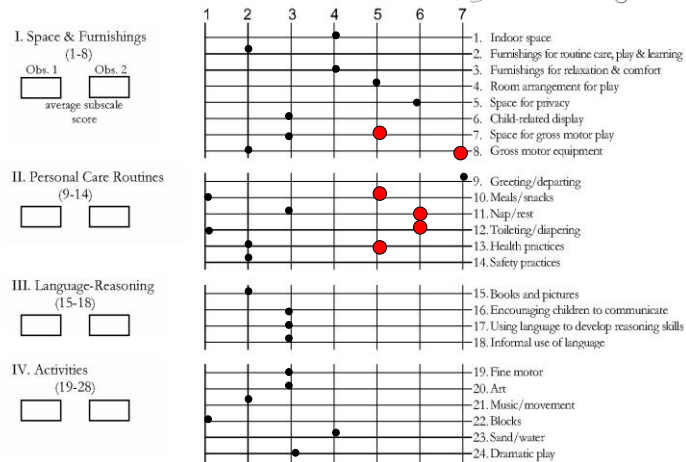
Key issue... To provide varied and stimulating gross motor equipment for all ages...

Action	Timescale	Lead responsibility	Monitoring procedures	Resources	Success criteria	Evaluation
To carry out an audit of gross motor equipment.	By 30 th July '06	Manager and pre-school staff.	Owner	None	Complete list of equipment incl. ages for which appropriate and skills stimulated.	Manager and owner
Identify gaps in gross motor provision.	By 7 th August	Manager and pre-school staff.	Complete at staff meeting.	None	'Shopping list' of new equipment needed.	Feedback from EYAT
Buy new resources	By 1 st Sept.	Owner and manager.	Staff to review new purchases.	£1,000	Stimulating gross motor equipment available for daily use.	Feedback from children, parents, staff.

Recording progress

ECERS-R Profile

Center/School: Teddy Bears Observation 1: 06-06-08 Observer: Faye Linskey
 Teacher(s)/Classroom: _____ Observation 2: 15-07-09 Observer: Faye Linskey





Continuous quality improvement



Where do we want to be?
Set targets



Follow-up and support

Where are we now?
Observe and record the current situation

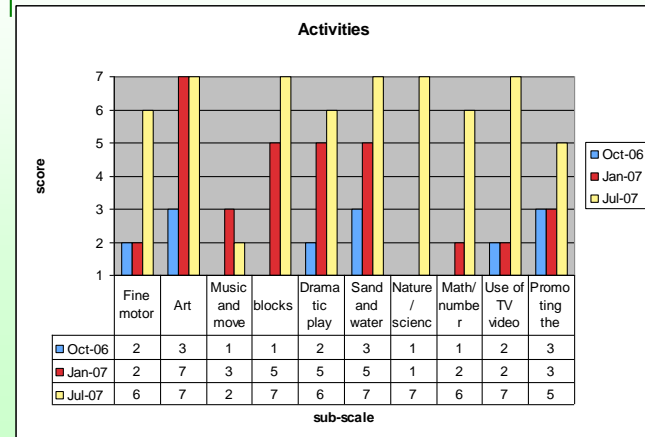
How will we get there?
Create action plans



How will we know when we have got there?
Repeat observation



A case study of improvement





The step-by-step approach

- Started with something achievable ('activities' subscale').
- Made changes in a manageable way over time.
- Tackled some of the larger issues once some progress had been seen and staff were 'on board' with ERS.



Using the data at setting level

- Basis for stimulating discussion and reflection (whole staff tool)
- Identifying strengths and areas for development
- Tracking improvements over time
- Evidence for Ofsted Self-Evaluation Form

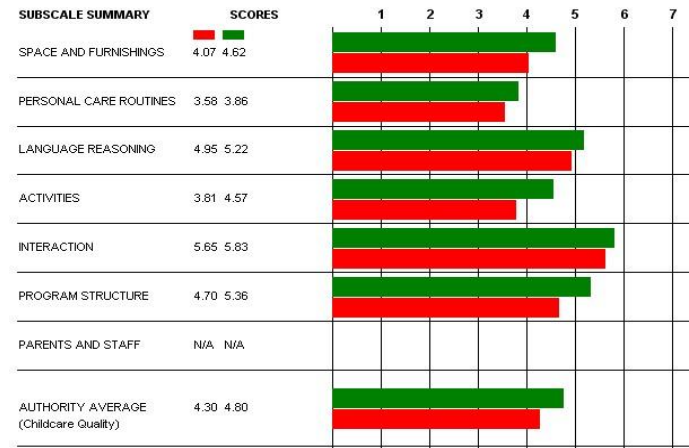


Using the data at local authority level

- As well as supporting quality improvement within individual settings, the data can be used at the local authority level to:
 - Identify high quality settings
 - Prioritise spending, training and support based on quantitative evidence
 - Measure change in quality over time



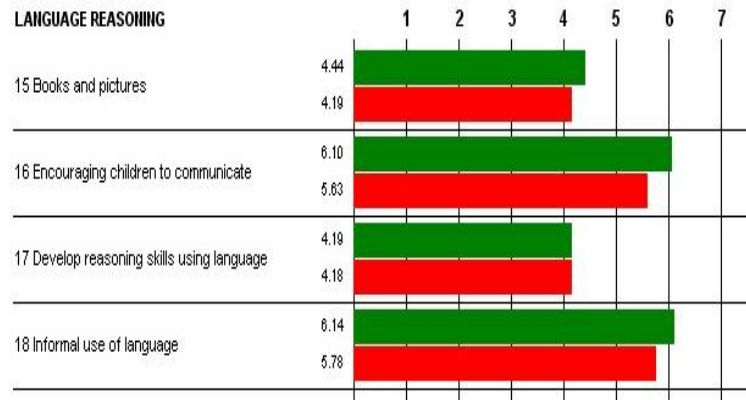
Example ECERS-R local authority audit (subscale averages at baseline & follow up)





Example ECERS-R local authority audit (language reasoning items)

LANGUAGE REASONING



If using the scales to provide data at local authority level....

Three essentials:

- Getting settings on board (doing 'with' not 'to')
- Moderation programme or other strategies for ensuring consistency
- Good data management and analysis



Data analysis

- ECERS/ITERS provides a robust and systematic means of making decisions based on evidence (“using data to direct resources and support”)
- Indicator level analysis allows you to drill down to the fine detail – over 400 statements completed for each setting observed
- Important to think about possibilities for data analysis from the beginning – a good system and good software needed to harness quantitative benefits
- Links with EYFS, ECM and other data

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Why use ECERS?

- Simple yet rigorous self-improvement tool which can be used to celebrate strengths and help to highlight and prioritise areas for improvement
- Observational tools capture what is actually happening at the time – not what we think is happening
- Supportive tool for managers in leading quality improvement. Provides a springboard for tackling areas already ‘on the radar’ and may highlight new areas for consideration
- Empowering for staff – the scales provide a clear path to improvement via concrete, transparent and achievable steps
- Reliable, valid and supported by research evidence
- A starting point for essential dialogue about quality and how to achieve it – even in those areas where you disagree with the ECERS definition of quality!



For more information

- A+ EDUCATION LTD
 - www.aplus-education.co.uk
- ECERS UK website:
 - www.ecersuk.org
 - UK addendum to the ECERS-R
 - ECERS-EYFS map
- American ECERS website:
 - <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ecers/>