

# Continuous Quality Improvement in Practice

By Ann Hentschel

## Purpose

When we engage in the act of continuous quality improvement we are focused on making changes to improve care and learning for young children. We are invested in providing the very best for the young children and families we serve. This requires a willingness and openness to change. Here are three key concepts to consider about change:

- Change is ongoing. There is no “finish line.”
- Change that is self-directed will elicit a deeper commitment from all involved.
- Change in small, incremental steps will achieve better results.

The purpose of this learning activity is to support early childhood educators in the planning phase of CQI. It provides an opportunity to think of the Environment Rating Scales (ERS) as more than a score. The process includes reflection and discussion on the quality indicators related to one item in ECERS-3, ECERS-R, or ITERS-R. The goal is to self-assess and plan our own changes to improve quality in our classroom.

## Directions

Teachers and program leaders work in small learning teams. Learning teams are best defined as ongoing groups of four or five people that meet regularly with the focus on increasing understanding about children’s learning. For this activity, the learning team prioritizes three scale items identified as areas of interest. In order for this work to be meaningful, the ERS items should be ones that your program values and you would like to learn more about to enhance classroom practice. It is recommended that your learning team work on one priority at a time and give it your full attention before moving on to the next priority.

Priority	Item Identified	Learning Team Members	Meeting Date
#1	ECERS-R item 22 Blocks		
#2			
#3			

Once your group has determined its priorities each member will independently complete the *Getting to Know the Assessment Tool*.

It is fine to use the ERS scale and *All About ECERS-R* or *All About ITERS-R* books to guide your thoughts in completing the handout. It is important that the handout is used as an individual tool for reflection that is completed prior to discussing as a group. This allows the learning team to hear varying perspectives and interpretations from one another.

Once each member of the team completes the handout a learning team meeting is scheduled for discussion. In round robin fashion, each person shares one or two components from their completed handout that were of particular interest to them. Once each person has had a turn, the group responds to the guided questions below:

- What are common beliefs we agree upon relating to this item of the assessment tool?
- Are there any areas where we have differing points of view?
- What resources might help guide our group to a better understanding of this item?
- Are there steps we’d like to take to improve this item in our classrooms?

The group generates a list of what they do well and possible next steps to implement or improve this item in their classrooms.

# Getting to Know the Assessment Tool

Teacher:		Date:	
Assessment tool:			
Item or dimension:			
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Why does this item matter for positive child outcomes?			
Key questions prompted by the item	The environment includes	A child will experience	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪</li> <li>▪</li> <li>▪</li></ul>	
When you think about this item in your own environment, what questions come up?			
What steps are necessary to implement or improve this item in your environment?			

## Getting to Know the Assessment Tool

Teacher: Marta	Date: September 23	
Assessment tool: ECERS-R		
Item: Blocks		
<b>Why does this item matter for positive child outcomes?</b> using blocks with young children is important because they develop the following skills: problem solving, social interaction, math concepts and motor skills.		
<b>Key questions prompted by the item</b>	<b>The environment includes</b>	<b>A child will experience</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What does substantial portion of the day mean and why does it matter?</li> <li>▪ What kinds of accessories are appropriate for block play?</li> <li>▪ How do we determine if there is enough space for block play?</li> <li>▪ What would count as two types of blocks?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A block area with wooden unit blocks</li> <li>▪ Lots of accessories for kids to use with blocks, like the new small wooden cars and trucks we put on the block shelf this week</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ using his or her imagination to create block structures</li> <li>▪ Active, hands-on learning</li> <li>▪ How to resolve conflict when someone knocks down your structure</li> </ul>
<b>When you think about this item in your own environment, what questions come up?</b> I think I tend to focus more on art activities and what is happening in the dramatic play center. The block area always seems like it promotes too much chaos. I tend to keep it closed or only allow limited use of the blocks. I'd like to learn how to create better learning opportunities for the children in the block area.  Also, as I look at the photos in the All About ECERS-R I notice that they have large space with only blocks and block accessories. Our block area has a lot of extra stuff in it like a Lego table, wood working bench, and fine motor toys. I wonder if that limits block play.		
<b>What steps are necessary to implement or improve this item in your environment?</b> Perhaps I could observe Sam's classroom during free play? During our learning team sessions he has shared some amazing photos of children building elaborate block structures. I'd like to know what he does to promote such dynamic learning in the block area.  I wonder if our learning team could review some articles or video clips on the importance of block play with young children. I also need to talk to someone about the definition of substantial portion of the day in the ECERS-R.		