

An Opinion on Balancing Structural and Process Quality Indicators in Early Care and Education

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I have been following a very interesting discussion in the early care and education field about quality indicators and their impact on young children. As QRIS (Quality Rating & Improvement Systems) systems have been providing the impetus for this discussion, I think it is time to readdress how process and structural quality indicators both benefit a child's development, albeit in different domains. Hopefully this discussion will be one of inclusion rather than exclusion in which we do not place greater emphasis on process quality indicators at the expense of structural quality indicators which appears to be at the heart of this most recent discussion.

In the research literature, the focus of structural quality indicators are generally in the health and safety domain and are more regulatable, such as staff-child ratio, group size, supervision, child immunizations up to date, proper staff hand washing, etc; while the focus of process quality indicators have been interactions amongst children and staff which do not lend themselves to being regulatable easily.

As a developmental research psychologist I have been delighted with the increased focus on the process quality indicators and agree that we need to spend more time focusing our efforts on identifying the key indicators that make a difference in a child's developmental life in early care and education. However, after 40 years of public policy research, I am not willing to throw the structural quality indicators "under the bus". It is important to advocate for those process quality indicators that have an impact on a child's language, social-emotional, motor, and cognitive development but we cannot leave out the child's physical well-being and healthy development. My concern as I listen to my fellow researchers, policy makers, and legislative staff as I crisscross the country is that everyone is talking a lot about the process quality indicators with little regard to the continued importance of the structural quality indicators.

I have lectured on this topic more than I would like to admit over the past 5 years. I was hoping by now that the "either-or" discussion would have given way to an "and" discussion which accepts and embraces the contributions of both structural and process quality indicators to a child's development. As of this writing, I haven't seen a change and in fact I think the discussions are becoming more divisive rather than inclusionary. So for that reason I am putting on paper my above opinion about this discussion and the need for additional research to build more effective and efficient early care and education regulatory systems that have a balance between structural and process quality indicators.

For those interested in continuing this discussion, please contact me at the following website: <http://DrFiene.wordpress.com/home> or go to <http://RIKInstitute.wikispaces.com/home> for additional information about quality ECE key indicator research. I can also be reached at DrFiene@gmail.com