

The "quality" of early care and education settings: Definitional and measurement issues ^[1]

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Abstract:

There is a widespread belief that high-quality early care and education can improve children's school readiness. However, debate continues about the essential elements of a high-quality experience, about whether quality means the same things across different types of care settings, about how to measure quality, and about the level of quality that might make a meaningful difference in outcomes for children. Are the aspects of the child care environment that researchers measure the ones that are most strongly related to children's development? This article argues that the ways in which researchers currently measure early care environments are flawed and that the conclusions drawn about the relationship between these measures and outcomes for children are frequently incorrect or overstated. The article addresses four questions: How is the quality of the child care environment commonly defined and measured? Do the most commonly used measures capture the child's experience? Do they work well across all settings? Are researchers drawing the correct conclusions from studies that relate the child care environment to child outcomes? Finally, the article discusses some possible directions for future research.

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