Module 2

The Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale and the Classroom Environment

Division of Early Childhood PerformanceTeam

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FOR ALL

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COVID-19 Considerations

The information offered in this module is based on best practices as measured by the ECERS-3 tool. This tool was developed before the COVID-19 pandemic. While these practices are highly aligned with best practices for health and safety during the COVID-19 pandemic, it may not reflect all aspects of the most current policies and requirements.

For specific information on ECERS aligned early childhood practices during the pandemic, please visit the NYC DOE InfoHub.

Objectives

Participants will gain an understanding of:

- ECERS-3 Items related to classroom layout and organization
- Maintaining a safe and clean classroom environment
- The difference between a clearly defined interest center and a play area
- Creating a "Cozy Area"
- Using classroom displays to interact with children
- COVID-19 Considerations

The Classroom Environment

- Item 1: Indoor Space
- Item 2: Furnishings for care, play, and learning
- Item 3: Room Arrangement for Play
- Item 4: Space for Privacy
- Item 5: Child-Related Displays
- Item 11: Safety practices

Item 1: Indoor Space

What is it ?

- Space used by children most of the day (e.g., classroom).

Item 1: Indoor Space

Why is it important?

- Influences the number/type of activities offered to children

- Affects comfort and how staff and children feel about themselves

- Determines accommodations for individuals with disabilities

Item 1: Indoor Space

Things to consider:

- Good ventilation and natural light

- Adequate sound absorbing materials (e.g., soft furnishings, rugs)

- Clean and well-maintained

- Ample space for varied activities

Ample space for varied activities

Things to consider:

- Children access materials without moving furniture

- Staff freely assist children in spaces during routines and play (no crowding)

- Wide traffic paths allow children and staff to move freely through the classroom

Cleanliness of the Space

Things to consider:

- Large messes are promptly cleaned (e.g., sand/water on the floor, dry paint on easel/walls)
- Waste baskets are empty
- Floors and rugs are clean

Item 2: Furnishings for Care, Play and Learning

What is it?

Furniture for daily activities (e.g., cots/mats, tables/chairs, personal storage spaces, soft furnishings, specialized furniture)

Item 2: Furnishings for Care, Play and Learning

Why is it important?

- Affects how children meet their needs during routines and play activities
- Children feel secure when classrooms are set up so that children of all ages and abilities can safely explore the environment, and independently manage their surroundings.

Item 2: Furnishings for care, play, and learning

Things to consider:

- Sufficient furniture for routine care, play, and learning

- Furniture in good repair

- Furniture for specific activities

- Furnishings with a substantial amount of softness

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Creating a clearly defined "cozy area"

Things to consider:

- Provide a cozy area with a substantial amount of softness to surround a child's entire body

- Protect the area from traffic and active play

- Ensure furnishings are clean and in good condition

- Make accessible to children throughout the day

Placing a soft furnishing under the chairs provides softness under children's feet to make this a "cozy area."

Adding pillows to soft chairs/couches with hard handles/armrests and a softness under the couch ensures children's bodies are surrounded by softness to make this a "cozy area."

Creating a "cozy area"

Things to consider:

- Items gathered together in one area to create a "cozy area"
- Ensure furnishings are easy to clean (e.g., rubber mats, bean bag chairs vinyl sofas/chairs, slip covers)

Item 2: Furniture for Routine Care, Play, and Learning

- Sufficient Furniture for routine care:
  - Tables and chairs for meals/snacks
  - Cots/mats
  - **Cubbies/personal storage**
- Furniture for play and learning:
  - Tables and chairs to use materials
  - Opens shelves
  - Furniture for a specific activity (e.g., sand/water tables, easels, dramatic play furnishings)
  - Soft furnishings
  - Convenient to use

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Personal Storage Accommodations

Ample: These cubbies are adequately sized for all items stored in them to be reasonably well separated.

Sufficient: These hooks provide some individual space for personal storage with minimal touching.

Storage should accommodate personal belongings throughout the year

Insufficient: These spaces are not large enough for personal storage without items touching in winter AND summer months.
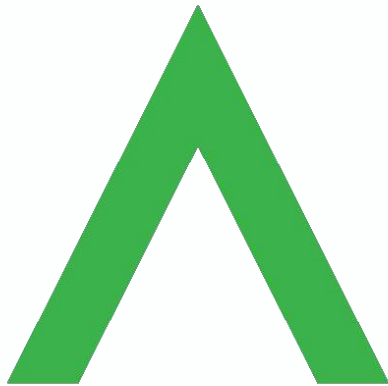
How can staff reduce the spread of germs?

Items in these cubbies protrude and touch belongings in neighboring cubbies.

To keep them separate, consider:
- Pushing belongings into the space
- Placing belonging in non-porous reusable bags before storing them in the cubbies

Item 2: Furniture for Routine Care, Play, and Learning

Tables and chairs should be appropriately sized for at least 75% of children:

- Feet can reach the floor
- Elbows can rest comfortably on the table

Inappropriate Table Height

Inappropriate Chair Height

Which furnishings are not considered child-sized?

Appropriate Table Height

Appropriate Chair Height

Item 3: Room Arrangement for Play and Learning

What is it?

Arrangement of indoor furniture and activities to support sustained play.

Why is it important?

- Determines how children/staff move through the space
- Provides messages about what is allowed in the space
- Influences staff-child supervision interactions

Things to consider

Item 3: Room arrangement for play and learning

- A variety of play areas
- At least 5 clearly defined interest centers
- The classroom is arranged for easy supervision
- Play activities are not interrupted
- Active and quiet areas are separated

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Play Area Vs. Clearly Defined

Play areas:

- Are spaces to play

- Can be within another play area

- Can be with materials for different types of play

Clearly defined interest centers:

- Only have materials for a specific type of play

- Offer appropriate space for the activities allowed

- Have materials and furniture to use them in the same space

- Typically include the Cozy Area, Blocks, Dramatic Play, Reading, and Nature/Science Centers

Conveniently equipped

- Necessities for play are conveniently located
- Play and cleanup go smoothly

Clearly defined "Cozy Area"

Clearly defined Block Center
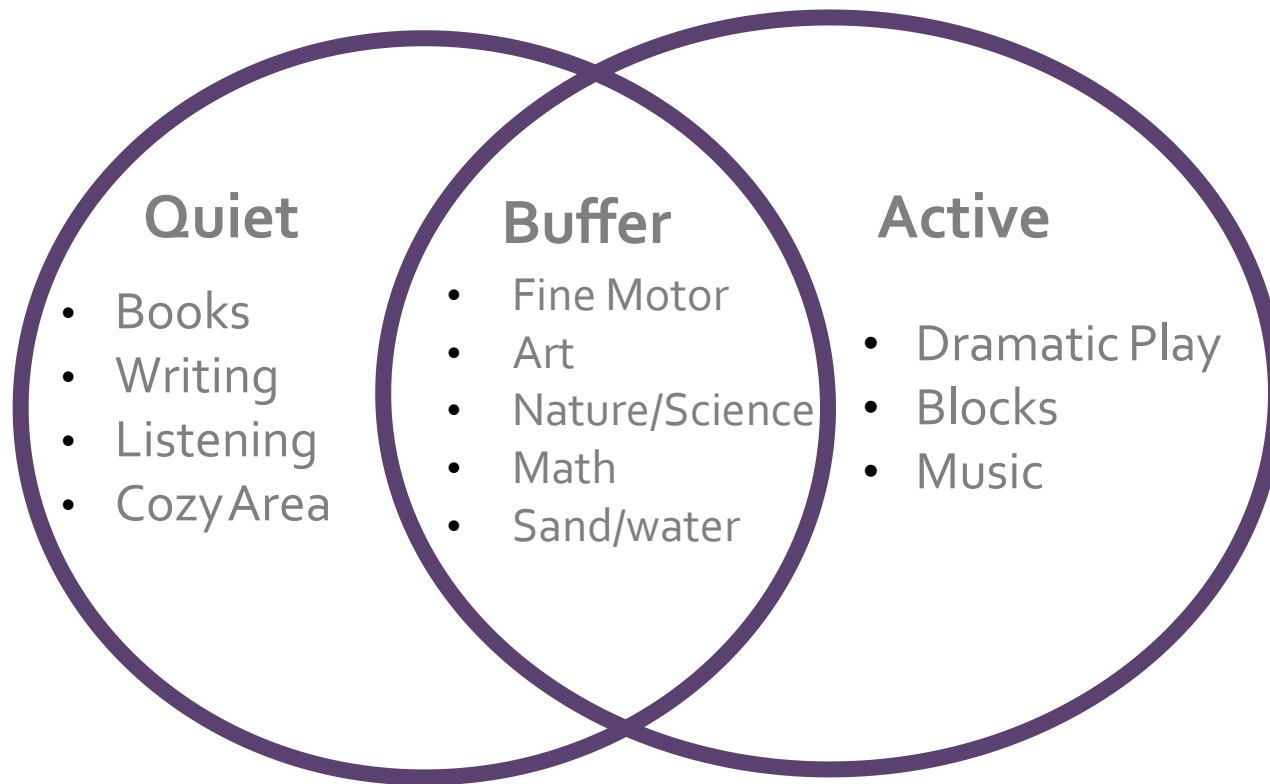
Clearly defined Dramatic Play Center

Clearly defined Reading Center

Clearly Defined Nature/Science Center

Quiet

- Books
- Writing
- Listening
- Cozy Area

Buffer

- Fine Motor
- Art
- Nature/Science
- Math
- Sand/water

Active

- Dramatic Play
- Blocks
- Music

Loud and active centers should be kept separate as much as possible to avoid distracting children in typically quieter centers. Buffer centers can be used to create space between quiet and active play areas.

Room Arrangement Trivia

Is this enough for a "Cozy Area"

Maintaining a Sanitary Cozy Area

Play area or clearly defined center?

Is this a Reading Center?

Item 11: Safety Practices

What is it ?

Supervision provided and action taken to minimize hazards.

Why is it important?

- Determines dangers/hazards children are exposed to
- Young children are learning about the world by exploring and trying things out. Even if they have been told that something is dangerous, they can easily forget

Item 11:
Safety Practices

Arrange play areas and clearly defined centers to avoid safety problems:

- Keep play areas away from doors
- Cover or place barriers in front of outlets
- Use natural obstructions in pathways to discourage running
- Secure loose cords

What is the hazard? What can staff do to prevent children from getting hurt?

DID YOU KNOW?

Since 1996, there have been over 350 reported cases of child death or injury in the United States due to unsafe window covering cords.

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Item 4: Space for Privacy

What is it ?

A place that children can count on to be able to relax and feel protected from competition as they play alone or with a friend.

Why is it important?

The constant pressure of sharing toys, space and adult attention in a group setting can be stressful. Private spaces allow children to take a break.

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Item 4: Space for Privacy

Things to consider:

- Allow children to find or create their own space for privacy that is easy to supervise

- Set aside space for privacy protected from intrusion

- Engage positively with children as they use spaces for privacy

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Item 5: Child-Related Display

What is it ?

All displays in a classroom. They include staff, child or commercially generated creations.

Why is it important?

- Children are given a message that their creations and thinking are valued and respected when they see their unique work on display.

- Promotes making connections to previous learning and experiences.

- Families are more likely to engage in learning when displays feature children's work and are updated.

Item 5: Child related display

Things to consider:

Displays are:

- Individualized and child-created
- Photographs of children in the class
- Appropriate
- Related to current activities
- At children's eye-level
- Discussed during free play or routines

Using displays to engage with children

- Mostly work done by children
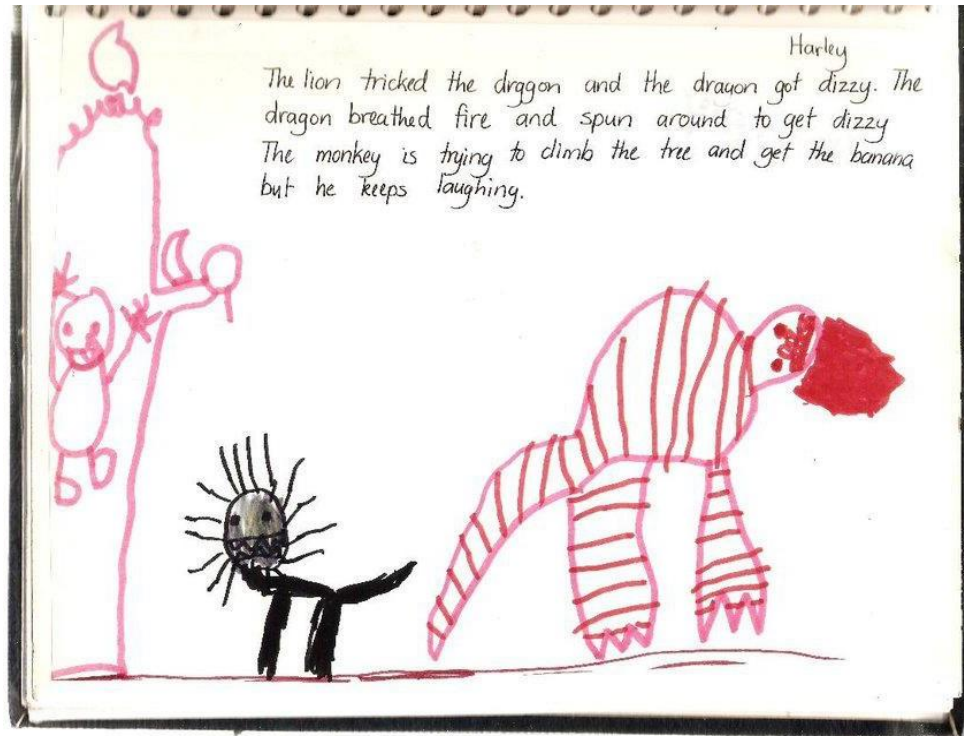- Relates to current activities
- Reference display throughout the day

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How can I engage children with this display?

How can I engage children with this display?

# How can I engage children with this display?

Key Takeaways:

- Limit furnishings at each center to only what is needed
- Place furniture (e.g., shelves, cabinets, etc.) between centers to create a physical barrier
- Place centers away from high traffic areas (e.g., bathroom, sink, cubbies, etc.)
- Use shelves with casters that are easy to move
- Use non-porous/vinyl plastic furnishings that are easy to clean

For more information on ECERS-3
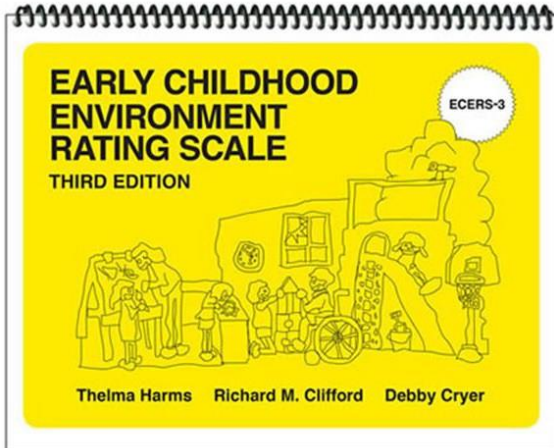
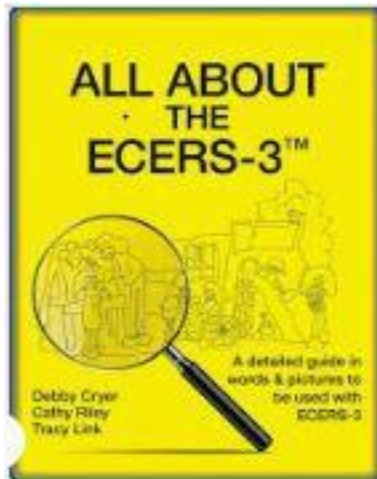- Please also visit the program assessment page on DECE's website for additional educator resources:

- https://infohub.nyced.org/partners-and-providers/early-childhood/early-childhood-educators

- Review the Frequently Asked Questions page

- For other information on ECERS-3 not specific to NYC, please visit http://www.ersi.info/.

Thank you!

Please fill out the feedback survey!

You can also scan this QR code to fill it out online: