



Online
PQA

PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT

OnlinePQA

Online PQA is a Valid and Reliable Assessment for Early Childhood Education Programs

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The **Program Quality Assessment (PQA)** is a rating instrument designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs. The PQA is reliable and valid and is appropriate for use in all center-based early childhood settings, including but not limited to those using the HighScope educational approach.

The PQA is an all-in-one program evaluation system with the following features:

- Assesses key aspects of program quality
- Reflects research-based and field-tested best practices in early childhood education and care
- Can be aligned with the Head Start Program Performance Standards
- Provides reliable, scientifically validated assessment proven in a wide range of early childhood programs and settings
- Can be used as a basis for program accreditation, reporting, monitoring, and training

OnlinePQA is available in three formats

- Infant-Toddler PQA
- Preschool PQA
- Family Child Care PQA

Selected domains include

- Learning environment
- Daily routine
- Adult-child interaction
- Curriculum planning and assessment
- Parent involvement and family services
- Staff qualifications and development
- Program management

Please visit www.onlinepqa.net for more information or call 800.587.5639, Ext. 234 or Ext. 206 or e-mail corteam@highscope.org.

Tackling Program Quality

THE EARLY YEARS COUNT INITIATIVE USES HIGHSOPE’S PQA TO MAKE QUALITY CHANGES IN THE CLASS ROOM AND COMMUNITY

by Sue Christensen and Ann Rosen

Sue Christensen and Ann Rosen, codirectors of the Family Connection of St. Joseph County, Inc. in South Bend, Indiana, received the David P. Weikart Achievement Award at the 2009 HighScope Annual International conference, held in early May in Ypsilanti, Michigan. HighScope presents the award annually to a recipient (or recipients) who has made outstanding contributions to the field of early childhood care and education. Rosen and Christensen have coordinated the major components of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County’s Early Years Count Education Initiative since its inception almost a decade ago. As a result of their work, some 400 local early childhood teachers (including the entire staff of the St. Joseph County Head Start program) have received extensive training, mentoring, and support in the HighScope Curriculum.

How soon can you come to do my PQA?

This is a question we’re hearing more and more often as we work to improve early childhood programs in our community. When teachers are on a quest for high quality, the Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA), developed by HighScope, is an integral component of their journey. They count on their Preschool PQA not only to measure quality, but also to mark their progress, identify strengths, pinpoint challenges, expose barriers, and provide solutions. Simply put, the PQA is an information powerhouse. We couldn’t tackle quality without it.



Our PQA journey

In 2001, the Community Foundation received \$5 million from the Lilly Endowment to improve education in St. Joseph County. With the launch of the Early Years Count Education Initiative, our goal was to provide highquality early childhood education to disadvantaged children to help prepare them for school success. We wanted to give these children a fair start — academically, socially, and emotionally. As a first step, we invited HighScope to conduct a Program Quality Assessment of our county’s Head Start program and to give us a baseline quality measure. No one was surprised that scores were low across the board. Follow-up assessments conducted

in 2002, after training in the HighScope approach, told us we were making headway. The PQA was our marker for progress.

In 2004, the Community Foundation learned about an initiative in New York called the Rochester Early Childhood Assessment Partnership. Their goal was to improve child care across their community through assessments coupled with mentoring. A team from Rochester, including the director of the Children’s Institute, was invited to give a presentation in South Bend. Early childhood providers and stakeholders

attended and came away inspired to adapt and implement this model in St. Joseph County. Shortly afterwards, the Early Childhood Assessment Project (ECAP) was underway as part of Early Years Count. And, unbeknownst to us, we turned a PQA corner.

The goal of ECAP is to improve quality in early childhood settings through a yearly process of assessments, feedback, mini-grants, training, and support. Each fall, our team of assessors visits

over 50 early childhood classrooms in Head Start programs, child care centers, preschools, and registered ministries throughout the county to conduct a classroom PQA. We also meet with more than a dozen program directors to do an Agency PQA.

At the start of ECAP, we regarded the PQA simply as our measure of quality and marker for progress. We selected the PQA as our primary assessment tool for the following reasons: 1) It is a nationally-known and

When teachers are on a quest for high quality, the Program Quality Assessment is an integral component of their journey.

The Preschool PQA

The Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a rating instrument designed to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs. The Preschool PQA is reliable and valid and is appropriate for use in all center-based early childhood settings, including but not limited to those using the HighScope educational approach.

The Preschool PQA is an all-in-one program evaluation system with the following features:

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- Can be used as a basis for program accreditation, reporting, monitoring, and training

What does the Preschool PQA assess?

The PQA covers 63 dimensions of program quality in 7 domains: learning environment, daily routine, adult-child interaction, curriculum planning and assessment, parent involvement and family

services, staff qualifications and development, and program management.

How does the Preschool PQA work?

Raters observe the program and interview the appropriate staff members. They record supporting evidence for each row (component) of every item. They read the indicators (definitions and examples) for that row and check the one box per row that best reflects the supporting evidence. Then, using the scoring rules they circle one item rating for the item as a whole. (See Box, opposite page.)

What do I need to get started?

There are three pieces to the Preschool PQA Starter Set:

- Administration Manual**
This book tells you how to use the PQA.
- Form A — Classroom Items**
This form is used to evaluate items on the classroom level.
- Form B — Agency Items**
This form is used to evaluate items on the agency level.

Replacement forms can be ordered individually.

For more information on the Preschool PQA, visit our Web site at www.highscope.org, and click on Assessment.

I. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT			Circle one indicator level for this item based on the scoring rules on page 4.				
			1	2	3	4	5
			<input type="checkbox"/> Check here if not observed or reported.				
Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	Supporting Evidence/Anecdotes				
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the materials in most of the interest areas lead to pre-scribed outcomes (e.g., art cutouts, lotto games, worksheets, coloring books, commercial toys—McDonald's figures).	<input type="checkbox"/> Some open-ended materials are available in some interest areas (e.g., boxes, paper, beads, paints).	<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the available materials in all interest areas are open-ended (e.g., blocks, books, sand, water, cones, dolls, scarves, toy vehicles, paints, shells).					
<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom does not provide manipulative materials in any of the areas.	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom provides some manipulative materials in some areas.	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom provides many manipulative materials in all areas.					
<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include many toy replicas in place of "real" items (e.g., toy plates and cups in place of real dishes; small plastic tools).	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include some toy replicas in place of "real" items (e.g., toy refrigerator, toy broom).	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include many "real" items in place of toy replicas (e.g., dog dish, firefighter boots, steering wheel, gardening tools, saltcrates, briefcases, pots and pans, hammer and saw, telephone).					
<input type="checkbox"/> Many materials do not appeal to all the senses (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching, and smelling).	<input type="checkbox"/> Some materials appeal to multiple senses (e.g., stuffed animals, musical instruments, play dough).	<input type="checkbox"/> Many materials appeal to multiple senses and include both natural and manufactured materials (e.g., materials include items with hard and soft textures, snacks with many smells and tastes, objects made of wood, fabric, metal, paper, liquid).					

Our PQA feedback is grounded in two strong convictions: that all teachers want to do the best for the children in their care and that there is always room for growth, no matter how good the teacher.

highly regarded rating instrument for measuring quality in centerbased programs; 2) We had already established a baseline using the PQA in our county's Head Start program; and 3) For centers that had adopted the HighScope Curriculum, it was a good measure of implementation.

Over the past four years of the assessment project, however, we've come to appreciate the extensive power of the PQA not simply to measure quality, but to impact quality as well. Today, in addition to measuring quality and marking progress, we value the PQA as an excellent tool for strengthening teaching practices, a key ingredient in a "plan-do-review" approach to quality improvement, and a guide for our own work within the community and beyond.

The PQA Impact

The opportunity to improve on the quality of teaching practices begins once an assessment is completed, scores are entered into a database, a full copy is made for our files, and a feedback session is scheduled. Our PQA feedback is grounded in two strong convictions: that all teachers want to do the best for the children in their care and that there is always room for growth, no matter how good the teacher. In the feedback session, the completed assessments are returned to the teachers (or directors for an Agency PQA). This allows them to see not only the evidence of their scores, but also the PQA descriptors that help guide them towards higher quality. Rich conversations often emerge as they

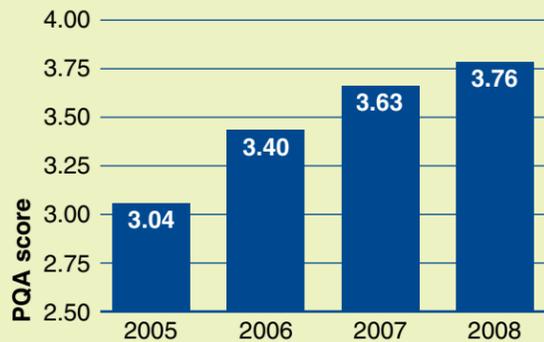
work to reconcile their understanding and actions with the quality levels described. For example, during one feedback session, a teacher questioned her score on item I-I in the domain of Learning Environment: “Child-initiated work is on display.” The display consisted of work children created during a small-group time activity in which this teacher had placed torn paper, glue, feathers and corks on the table for children to use. Because she had allowed the children to choose how to use the materials, the teacher considered the work they produced to be child-initiated. The face-to-face feedback discussion provided an opportunity for the teacher to reach a deeper understanding of the term “child-initiated” and its importance to quality. Projects that stem from children’s own interests and ideas, rather than the adult’s, are truly “child-initiated” and help to build children’s self esteem, honor their ideas, and foster a sense of independence. The very specific PQA item and related indicators helped zero in on the teacher’s misunderstanding and paved the way for an improved learning environment.

We find that most teachers value the concrete examples documented in their PQA. One teacher wrote about feedback in her evaluation of a recent HighScope workshop on using encouragement rather than praise to support the children in their classroom: “Thinking about praise as it relates to my job makes

The PQA not only gives new teachers an overview of their upcoming journey, it also acts as a roadmap — something akin to having a personal GPS that guides them to their quality destination.

me think of my supervisor, who is quick to say ‘You’re getting the job done!’ It’s her way of saying ‘Good job!’ ‘Keep it up!’ but it’s not always specific. When I get feedback on my PQA results, it is specific, concrete information collected by observing us in class. [Your] encouragement makes me feel good and challenges me to keep working at my teaching abilities. This kind of encouragement is meaningful because it is genuine and individualized. It keeps me thinking and striving rather than just settling for a job well done.”

Program PQAs for 7 programs in ECAP 2005–2008



Program Quality Assessment scores improved steadily for seven ECAP programs over a four-year period.

After the feedback session, teachers and directors receive a mini-grant packet to apply for materials, mentoring, and/or college-level courses that will help improve scores — and thus quality. As with feedback, the PQA also lies at the heart of the mini-grant process. The mini-grant application, while simple in form, invites more complex thinking about the assessment feedback. Teachers choose specific goals for their next year’s PQA scores (e.g., move from a 1 to a 3 in “child-initiated displays,” a 3 to a 4 in “peer interaction”). They also have the option to fill out a planning sheet that moves from their PQA

goals to an array of strategies to specific action steps they want to take. A teacher might, for example, decide to work on PQA Item I-B: “The space is divided into interest areas.” Her strategy to rearrange the classroom could include the following action steps: 1) Look at what materials are in the room and how they might be logically grouped; 2) Think about children’s interests and how they might fit with different areas; 3) Make a room plan with mentor; 4) Purchase shelving as needed; 5) Set time to make move and enlist help; 6) Make a plan for introducing new areas to children. Teachers must answer questions that address why they think the resources

they are requesting will help them reach their goals and how a mentor might help them.

Thus, applicants need to reflect on their practices and identify areas for improvement; they need to think through the specific steps they want to take to meet their goals and the kinds of support they will need to make it all happen. They also need to be able to justify their plan in writing. The follow-up PQA we conduct each fall starts the process over. Through this “plan-do-review” approach, the PQA consistently opens doors to new learning challenges and opportunities.

If the PQA was solely a benchmark for progress, we’d be mightily discouraged if scores declined. Yet they sometimes do — for individual teachers, for programs, even for the whole community. For us, dropped scores, while disappointing, offer opportunity

quality. She even decided to leave her cherished teacher desk behind. When Head Start scores dropped across the board in the fall of 2006, some of the causes could be traced to administrative actions that we were able to rectify for the coming year. For example, several classrooms scored low on the item “Children have an appropriate amount of time for each part of the day.” The underlying cause was bus scheduling that kept children waiting in lines for too much of their day. With this in mind, the Head Start director worked with transportation to adjust bus schedules for the following year. Even excellent teachers are susceptible to backsliding on quality, and the PQA is a consistent nudge to get them back on track. As one teacher said to us, “I know I can be a better teacher than that.”

The goal of assessment is to acknowledge strengths and identify areas for improvement. We travel side by side with teachers and directors as we all strive to make quality better.

and impetus for change. For example, when one teacher’s scores went down, it was only a matter of days before she recognized that in order to make the quality gains she was striving for, she’d need to move from making small changes to big ones. Soon she was dragging everything out of her classroom and putting it back together with an intentional focus on

The PQA results also inform our Early Years Count planning and decision making. When teachers request mentoring, we do our best to match their PQA goals to mentor strengths. We also dig deep into the collective scores to understand which of the distinct components are creating challenges to quality. For example, for classroom materials, it’s the real, everyday items and natural objects that are often lacking, so we have explored strategies to help boost their presence in classrooms, such as allowing teachers to shop at the local dollar store. When scores on Item II-I, relating to children’s choices during transition times, ranked low throughout the community, we scheduled a day-long intensive workshop with HighScope trainer Betsy Evans (author of I Know What’s Next! Preschool Transitions Without Tears or Turmoil) to develop more effective strategies for this part of the daily routine, such as “circling up” rather than lining up.

For programs and teachers new to ECAP, the PQA provides a valuable starting point in the discussion about quality. It’s a way to bring them quickly on board as part of the larger “team” working toward delivering high-quality programs to children and families. The PQA not only gives new teachers an overview of their upcoming journey, it also acts as

Family Child Care PQA

The Family Child Care PQA is a validated instrument designed to measure the quality of family child care programs and identify provider training needs. It consists of standards for best practices that can be scored by outside raters or used as a self-assessment tool by providers.

OnlinePQA.net



One Teacher's Path to Quality

After two years with ECAP and training in the HighScope approach, preschool teacher Laura Allison shared reflections on changes in her students and herself at a recent annual meeting of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County. Here's what she had to say:

I have been teaching for 13 years. My class of approximately 18 preschoolers was in a very small room that didn't allow for much more than rote learning. They sat, I taught. We focused on what the children didn't know or couldn't do. It was our mission to bring them up to appropriate standards. We didn't have time to waste on play unless their work was done or it was recess. They had to be ready for kindergarten. Paper was limited for the daily dittos. Art supplies were only used for those cookie cutter art projects. There was a time-out chair and we used it. Our kids lined up in straight lines going and coming to class and they were quiet. In fact, teachers did most of the talking. Then our center heard of a way to get free stuff and all I had to do was let the Early Child Assessment Project observe my classroom. I said, "Sure." This would be the first step toward many wonderful transformations.

Changes: There is no time-out chair in my room. My room has defined, equipped areas that can

expand out into our gym and even outside. I team-teach with my associate, based on children's interests. We share our new skill ideas with others. I take anecdotal notes to score in each child's COR (Child Observation Record). My children keep science journals, logging data they collect while tracking plant growth. They write books and do their own illustrations using some reference books. They wrote, directed, filmed, and starred in a video. Writing materials are everywhere. My kids make a daily plan and follow it. They teach each other on a daily basis. For example, if Billy needs pink paint, Suzy shows him how to make it.

Children in my classroom phonetically sound out two- and three-letter words. They love books, all kinds. We use real items in our play. Instead of quiet lines, we now sing and use creative motion to come and go. Our vocabulary grows daily. We use words like "diversity" and comprehend the meaning. Parents have become my partners in education and my biggest resource.

Bottom line: My children are ready for kindergarten. They have a broad foundation on which to build the learning and life skills that will serve them and our community for a lifetime.

Today, Laura is a certified — and very enthusiastic — HighScope teacher.

a roadmap — something akin to having their own personal GPS to guide them directly to their quality destination.

We're also seeing broader quality implications through the PQA. Our state has recently initiated Paths to Quality, a rating system for early childhood programs. Both the Classroom and Agency PQAs are well-aligned with state expectations, which include indicators such as 10.2: "The teacher supports children's development by gathering information through child observations that is used to guide lesson planning" (PQA item IV-D: "Staff record and discuss anecdotal notes as the basis for planning for individual children") and 9a.5: "Displays of children's art are available at children's eye level and show that most art work is exploratory and unique to each child"(PQA item I-I: "Child-initiated work [work

designed and created by children] is on display"). As one director put it, "Because we've regularly had PQAs, I felt absolutely on track when I met with the state mentor."

Why the PQA works

The PQA is not a single, stand-alone solution for quality; it's part of a broader system that includes training and a variety of supports, including mentoring, materials, "refresher" workshops, and more. But, as we said in the opening paragraph, we couldn't tackle quality without it.

The PQA is a reliable, valid, research-based assessment, and that's important to us. It is well aligned with Head Start Performance Standards, NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards, and



Indiana's Foundations for Young Children, and that's important to the teachers and directors with whom we work. The teaching potential of the PQA is enhanced by a layout that is simple and easy for teachers and directors to understand. Its items provide clear descriptors of what excellent, sufficient, and poor practices actually look like in the classroom and in the agency. There is ample room for anecdotes that are specific and objective, so the teacher or director can understand exactly what the assessor saw and how scores were determined for each particular item.

The integrity of the PQA helps keep the feedback nonjudgmental. The focus is on observable and measurable events, and evidence is required for every score. When we conduct an assessment for a new program or a new teacher, the PQA gives us a context within which to discuss quality in a straightforward way. If there is such a thing as a positive "teaching to the test," then the PQA results offer that opportunity. Its rich data set, collected authentically in the course of a classroom day, presents the teacher and the mentor with a clear conversational starting point.

We trust the PQA as a consistent indicator of quality. We know that if classrooms and programs score well, quality is present. Each PQA item represents an important indicator of quality, each PQA section reflects an essential piece of a well-functioning classroom, and the PQA as a whole presents a clear snapshot of best practice. The PQA sets a high bar for quality and backs up our own high standards. We like having the quality measures for HighScope teachers and program certification clearly defined by PQA scores. It gives our teachers and directors

something concrete to strive for in their quest for high quality, and it gives everyone something to celebrate when that bar is achieved.

Because the PQA is neither judgmental nor high-stakes, it is "safe" — that is, teachers and directors are comfortable knowing that the goal of assessment is to acknowledge strengths and identify areas for improvement. We travel side-by-side with teachers and directors as we all strive to make quality better. Everyone is learning together in this partnership — learning about change and how it happens, learning that setbacks do not mean failure, learning how magical and rewarding the road to quality can be. We want teachers and directors to feel safe about taking risks, trying new ideas and approaches, and challenging their status quo.

In summary, the PQA works for us because it is action-oriented, not just information-based. What we learn is relayed back to teachers and directors for planning, acted on by mentors, and integrated into the quality improvement system at all levels in the community. The instrument itself is both simple and profound. In our office, items on the PQA are discussed, dissected, and digested on a daily basis. We live and breathe the components. Simply put, the PQA is the backbone for all we do.

We'd never tackle quality without it.

Sue Christensen and Ann Rosen are codirectors of The Family Connection, and project directors for the Early Years Count Education Initiative of the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County, in South Bend, Indiana. ■

Holding Your Program Accountable

HIGHSOPE'S PRESCHOOL PROGRAM QUALITY ASSESSMENT (PQA)

by Ann S. Epstein, Ph. D., Director, Early Childhood Division

The first educational reform principle in the K-12 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is “stronger accountability for results.” (For more information on NCLB, see <http://www.nclb.gov>.) As this initiative takes effect, states will have to develop standards for education, and children will be tested to see whether those standards are met. This pressure for accountability is also being felt in early childhood programs such as Head Start, where funding may be contingent on the results of literacy and numeracy tests administered to four-year-olds as they enter and leave the program. Standards being developed for state-funded pre-kindergarten programs may result in comparable demands for accountability in those initiatives.

Accountability and Quality

We cannot hold children accountable for their performance without also holding programs accountable for educating them. Yet an emphasis on testing young children runs the risk of diverting us from focusing on the quality of the early childhood programs they attend. Quality comes to be defined by children's preacademic performance alone. The primary purpose of early childhood programs, however, must be to promote healthy development in all domains of children's growth—physical, intellectual, and social-emotional. Concerns about having a narrow focus on preacademics have appeared in a series of papers from the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), most notably *Eager to Learn* (NAS, 2000a) and *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (NAS, 2000b). Quality advocates, drawing on studies such as *Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes* (Cost, Quality, & Child Outcomes Study Team, 1995), further emphasize that early development is affected by a program's structural and process elements, including staff qualifications, relationships with families, coordination with other community services, and overall program management. In other words, program quality, like child development, is complex and multidimensional. It cannot be defined by a single narrow area.

Every dedicated early childhood professional cares about program quality. But how do we know when we've achieved it? How do we define and measure quality without waiting for — or depending on — children's test scores to tell us if we're providing the right learning experiences? We have to look at our programs honestly to identify what is good and what needs improvement. We also need a common language to share this information with parents, administrators, researchers, and policymakers. An objective program evaluation tool is essential to encourage self-assessment and promote communication among everyone concerned about program quality and its implications for early childhood development.

Overview of HighScope's Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA)

Providing a valid tool to measure program quality is a long-standing and ongoing commitment of the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. Toward this end, we are pleased to announce the publication of the second edition of HighScope's Preschool Program Quality Assessment (PQA; HighScope, 2003)¹. The PQA is a rating instrument used to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs. It is



appropriate for use in all center-based settings, not just those using the High/Scope educational approach. For example, the PQA is used by the Michigan Department of Education to monitor and fund its preschool programs in over 500 school districts and 100 community agencies statewide. The instrument has also been used in state and national studies of Head Start, state-funded prekindergarten programs, and child care settings. These programs serve a diversity of children and families.

The Preschool PQA is used to evaluate the quality of early childhood programs and identify staff training needs.

The PQA intentionally reflects research-based and field-tested best practices in early childhood education. The measure identifies the structural characteristics and dynamic relationships that effectively promote the development of young children, encourage the involvement of families and communities, and create supportive working environments for staff. In keeping with the field's emphasis on a comprehensive approach to quality, the PQA examines all aspects of program implementation, from the physical characteristics of the setting and the nature of adult-child interaction to program staffing and management. It further reflects a professional consensus that the assessment of program quality should not be

based on a single type of data but requires a multidimensional approach. PQA data are therefore collected using both observational and interview techniques.

The Preschool PQA reflects research-based and field-tested best practices.

The PQA can be administered by trained independent evaluators or used by programs as a self-assessment tool. It can be employed to conduct systematic quantitative research or to design staff development programs. Using classroom observations and interviews with teaching and administrative staff, PQA raters complete a series of objective 5-point scales describing a broad array of program characteristics. The endpoints and the midpoint of each indicator are defined and illustrated with examples to ensure reliable and valid ratings. Unlike compliance measures, which typically permit only yes-no scores on items, the PQA defines quality along a continuum of levels. These multiple levels allow raters to indicate with greater specificity a program's current status and directions for improvement. In sum, the structure and content of the PQA permit both breadth and depth of focus in the measurement of program quality.

How to Use the Preschool PQA

The PQA has widespread applicability as a training, monitoring, observation/feedback, and research and evaluation instrument. The information generated can be used to define and illustrate best practices, focus attention on program development issues in preservice and inservice training, examine the relationship between program practices and children's development, and point to promising policy initiatives and investments for improving the quality of early childhood programs. Below are some of the ways the PQA can be applied.

The Preschool PQA examines all aspects of program implementation.

¹Reprinted from *HighScope ReSource, A Magazine for Educators*, Summer 2003. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press, pp. 11-14. © 2003 HighScope Educational Research Foundation

Training. The PQA can be used in preservice and inservice training. The detailed examples in the indicators for each item offer concrete illustrations of best practices in operation. Users often comment that the PQA defines “developmentally appropriate practice” by translating an idea or ideal into specific implementation strategies. Even experienced teachers find that the depth of the PQA helps them reconsider long-established practices from a new perspective.

Self-assessment and monitoring. The PQA is a valuable tool for programs to assess their own practices and identify areas for further development and training. It can also be used by agency supervisors or others responsible for quality control to monitor program implementation at a single site or across multiple sites. Because the PQA is objective and quantitative, it can be used to set program goals in one or more areas and to provide a numerical and anecdotal record of progress.

The Preschool PQA can be used in preservice and inservice training.

Observation and feedback. Staff supervision and evaluation can be effective and nonthreatening when the PQA is used to conduct observations and provide feedback. An individual staff member or teaching team agrees with a supervisor to focus on one or more aspects of implementation. The supervisor then uses the relevant PQA items or section(s) to observe the staff member or team in the program setting, record detailed anecdotes and make ratings, and discuss these with the practitioners. Together, they acknowledge strengths and identify areas for improvement, using the PQA’s concrete examples to develop a plan of action.

Research and evaluation. When administered by trained outside observers, the PQA is a reliable and valid research tool. Studies can be designed to document program practices, compare quality in different program settings or types of auspices, and examine the relationship between program quality and young children’s development. The PQA can also be used to evaluate the effectiveness of staff development initiatives by assessing program quality before and after inservice training activities.

Information and dissemination. With its straightforward language and detailed examples, the PQA can be used to explain research-based best practices to a variety of individuals and agencies. Potential audiences include administrators and policymakers, particularly those who need help identifying the elements of high-quality programs.

The Preschool PQA is a reliable and valid research tool.

Support staff can also benefit from becoming familiar with the PQA to better understand the actions and requests of the instructional staff. Sharing the PQA with parents helps them understand the program and how to carry its educational activities into the home. Results of the PQA can be easily communicated to researchers, and the instrument’s accessibility makes it possible for others to replicate and extend the lessons learned about effective program practices.

What’s New

The hallmarks of the old PQA — its comprehensiveness and clarity — remain part of the new edition. At the same time, the second edition corrects certain shortcomings, most notably the skewing of scores toward the positive end of the distribution. Raters reported that the old rules required them to assign overall item scores of 4 or 5 (5 being the highest) to programs that were in reality not operating at such high levels of quality. The new PQA procedures require raters to document each component of an item and follow rigorous decision-making rules before assigning a total item score, a change that has greatly improved the distribution of scores. In addition to these changes, HighScope has also made improvements in the PQA’s content and structure. Confusing items have been reworded and redundant items consolidated. Several formatting changes accommodate the new scoring procedures and make the PQA easier to use. Finally, extensive data collected during a series of state and national studies have allowed us to verify the new PQA’s psychometric properties, that is, the statistics that tell us whether the instrument is reliable and valid.



Evidence of Reliability and Validity

The psychometric properties of the PQA were tested in a series of studies in which trained observers collected data in over 800 diverse program settings (Jurkiewicz, 2003). Score distributions on the PQA demonstrated variance (i.e., 27% were low, 43% were medium, and 30% were high). Interrater reliability computed as percentage of agreement averaged 90% or better, and correlations between scores ranged from .57 to .75. Internal consistency, calculated with Cronbach’s alpha, averaged .89, .94, and .95 in three study samples. In a confirmatory factor analysis, five factors corresponding to sections I through V accounted for 58% of the variance. As further evidence of validity, the PQA has been significantly correlated in the expected direction with other measures of program quality, teacher beliefs, and child outcomes. The magnitude of these correlations ranged from .25 to .86.

A Snapshot of the PQA

The PQA has 63 items that address seven key areas of program quality. Sections I through IV are assessed in each classroom; sections V through VII are assessed for the agency as a whole.



- I. Learning Environment (9 items)
- II. Daily Routine (12 items)
- III. Adult-Child Interaction (13 items)
- IV. Curriculum Planning and Assessment (5 items)
- V. Parent Involvement and Family Services (10 items)
- VI. Staff Qualifications and Staff Development (7 items)
- VII. Program Management (7 items)

To complete the PQA, raters observe the program and interview the appropriate staff members. They record supporting evidence for each row (component) of every item. They read the indicators (definitions and examples) for that row and check the one box per row that best reflects the supporting evidence. Then, using the scoring rules in the box on page 14, they circle one quality rating from 1 (low) to 5 (high) for the item as a whole.

See the boxes at the end of this article for two sample items from the PQA. Item I-F is a classroom-level item with four rows; item V-A is an agency-level item with two rows.

Infant-Toddler Program Quality Assessment (PQA)

The Infant-Toddler Program Quality Assessment (PQA) is a research-validated tool that provides an accurate and authentic picture of a program's strengths and needs for improvement in a form that caregivers can understand and use. F1260SET includes an Administration Manual, Form A—Classroom Items, Form B—Agency Items for Infant-Toddler and Preschool Programs, and PQA Administration Manual.

OnlinePQA.net



Conclusion

To be accountable for meeting our mission and goals in early childhood education, we must regularly and systematically evaluate the structural and dynamic components of our programs. Only by engaging in honest assessment can we as practitioners, researchers, and policymakers guarantee that the services we deliver are of sufficient quality to promote the development of young children and support those who care for them. HighScope's Preschool PQA is a reliable and valid tool for conducting this comprehensive assessment. It reflects what current theory, decades of practice, and ongoing research tell us about the ingredients of high-quality early childhood programs. ■

References

- Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes Study Team. (1995). *Cost, quality, and child outcomes in child care centers*. Denver: University of Colorado at Denver, Economics Department.
- HighScope Educational Research Foundation. (2003). *Preschool Program Quality Assessment* (2nd ed.). Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Press.
- Jurkiewicz, T. (2003). *The Revised Preschool PQA: Report on psychometric properties*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Educational Research Foundation, Research Division.
- National Academy of Sciences. (2000a). *Eager to learn: Educating our preschoolers*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- National Academy of Sciences. (2000b). *Neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early childhood development*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.



Scoring Rules for the Preschool PQA

For items with 3 or more rows of boxes

Level 1: Half or more of the level 1 boxes are checked (regardless of the level 3 or level 5 boxes checked).

Level 2: Fewer than half of the level 1 boxes are checked and some of the level 3 and/or level 5 boxes are checked.

Level 3: Half or more of the level 3 boxes are checked and no level 1 boxes are checked.

Level 4: Fewer than half of the level 3 boxes are checked and the remaining boxes are checked at level 5.

Level 5: All the level 5 boxes are checked and no level 1 boxes or level 3 boxes are checked.

For items with 2 rows of boxes

Level 1: Both level 1 boxes are checked.

Level 2: One level 1 box and either one level 3 box or one level 5 box are checked.

Level 3: Both level 3 boxes are checked.

Level 4: One level 3 box and one level 5 box are checked.

Level 5: Both level 5 boxes are checked.

I-F. Classroom materials are varied, manipulative, open-ended, and authentic and appeal to multiple senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste).

I-F score (circle one level using scoring rules):
1
2
3
4
5

Check here if not observed or reported

Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	I-F. Supporting evidence/ anecdotes:
<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the materials in most of the interest areas lead to prescribed outcomes (e.g., art cut-outs, letter games, worksheets, coloring books, commercial toys—McDonald figures).	<input type="checkbox"/> Some open-ended materials are available in some interest areas (e.g., boxes, paper, beads, paints).	<input type="checkbox"/> Most of the available materials in all interest areas are open-ended (e.g., blocks, books, sand, water, corks, dolls, scarves, toy vehicles, paints, shells).	<i>Telesio puppets, counting bears, paperboard, scissors, scissor, glue, magnetic rods, Computer PC & printer, dot markers, beads, clay, washers, scissors, ink pad, wood, paint, blocks, wooden letter, 5 out, stop sign, vase, Beanie baby, vase, house, ethnic dolls, bed, sock puppets</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom does not provide manipulative materials in any of the areas.	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom provides some manipulative materials in some areas.	<input type="checkbox"/> The classroom provides many manipulative materials in all areas.	<i>See above—e.g., puppets, leaving bears, pig boards, Bristol's blocks, Tinkertoy, beads, shape puncher, feathers, sponges, stamps & ink pad, stapler, paper scraps, pencils, vase & trucks, sewing board</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include many toy replicas in place of "real" items (e.g., toy plates and cups in place of real dishes, small plastic tools).	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include some toy replicas in place of "real" items (e.g., toy register, toy broom).	<input type="checkbox"/> Materials include many "real" items in place of toy replicas (e.g., dig dish, firefighter boots, steering wheel, gardening tools, suitcases, briefcases, pots and pans, hammer and saw, telephone).	<i>Plastic dishes and appliances, play tools (no real hammer, etc.)</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> Many materials do not appeal to all the senses (sight, hearing, touch, and smelling).	<input type="checkbox"/> Some materials appeal to multiple senses (e.g., stuffed animals, instruments, play dough).	<input type="checkbox"/> Many materials appeal to multiple senses and include both natural and manufactured materials (e.g., materials include items with hard and soft textures; snacks with many smells and tastes; objects made of wood, fabric, metal, paper, liquid).	<i>musical instruments, sand, clay, wood, yarn, leaves</i>

V-A. The program provides a variety of opportunities for parents to become involved in the program.

V-A score (circle one level using scoring rules):
1
2
3
4
5

Check here if not observed or reported

Level 1 Indicators	Level 3 Indicators	Level 5 Indicators	V-A. Supporting evidence/ anecdotes:
<input type="checkbox"/> There are no activities or materials to help parents become involved in the program.	<input type="checkbox"/> The program provides some parent-oriented activities or materials to help parents become involved in the program.	<input type="checkbox"/> There are many parent involvement options consistent with a variety of parent interests and time constraints, e.g., parents may <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer in the classroom • Bring in materials • Attend parent meetings and workshops • Serve on parent advisory councils • Meet with teachers to discuss children's progress • Support children's learning at home • Read or contribute to a parent newsletter 	<i>Parents welcome at greeting circle, can stay as long as want, parents accompany class on field trips, family meetings with potluck, families bring in materials, family photographs, things from home, parent newsletters, parents rotate bringing snacks on Fridays</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> The program does not encourage parent participation.	<input type="checkbox"/> The program sometimes encourages parent participation.	<input type="checkbox"/> The program encourages parent participation (e.g., providing child care, arranging transportation, scheduling events at times convenient for parents, making reminder phone calls the day before, networking parents with one another).	<i>Arrange car pooling and transportation to school and meetings for families without cars, child care during parent meetings, handwritten invitations/ reminders for meetings, web site with classroom news and notes</i>

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