

This article was downloaded by: [Jenny Robson]

On: 03 November 2014, At: 13:26

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



European Early Childhood Education Research Journal

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/recr20>

Multiple perspectives on the quality of early childhood programmes

Dr. Lilian G. Katz ^a

^a University of Illinois

Published online: 01 Jul 2008.

To cite this article: Dr. Lilian G. Katz (1993) Multiple perspectives on the quality of early childhood programmes, *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 1:2, 5-9

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13502939385207411>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Multiple Perspectives on the Quality of Early Childhood Programmes

Dr. Lilian G. Katz

PROFESSOR OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
DIRECTOR OF ERIC/EECE
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

SUMMARY *The main argument of the paper is that the quality of programmes for young children can be seen from a variety of perspectives as follows:*

- (1) *from above as seen by visiting adults and observers*
- (2) *from below as seen by the children themselves*
- (3) *from the outside as seen by the parents served by the programme*
- (4) *from inside as seen by the staff who work in the programme and*
- (5) *finally as perceived by the society and its representatives who sponsor the programme.*

Criteria of quality from each perspective are proposed. It is theoretically conceivable that aspects of quality that satisfy one perspective may not satisfy another, and the question of whose perspective has first claim in the ultimate judgment of quality is raised. The paper discusses the implications of the multiple perspectives from each of them.

SUMMAIRE *Dans L'étude de la qualité des programmes pour jeunes enfants plusieurs perspectives pouvant être envisagées:*

- (1) *"du haut", c'est à dire en prenant le point du vue d'adultes et d'observateurs visitant le groupe*
- (2) *"du bas", en prenant le point du vue des enfants mêmes*
- (3) *"du dehors", en prenant le point du vue des parents*
- (4) *des membres de l'équipe et*
- (5) *de la société et de ses représentants.*

A partir de ces perspectives, des critères définissant la qualité sont proposés. Théoriquement il n'est pas exclus que des aspects de qualité qui sont proposés dans le cadre d'une perspective ne soient pas supportés par une autre perspective. Ainsi la question concernant la perspective prioritaire dans le jugement ultime de la qualité est posée. Une réflexion est donnée sur les implications de chaque point de vue.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG *Beim Bewerten der Qualität von Programma für junge Kinder können mehrere Perspektive unterschieden werden:*

- (1) *von "oben", d.h. vom Gesichtspunkt der Erwachsenen und beobachtende*

Besuchern

- (2) *von "unten", aus der Sicht der Kinder selbst*
- (3) *von "aussen", aus der Sicht der Eltern*
- (4) *aus der Sicht des Schulteam*
- (5) *aus der Sicht der Gesellschaft und ihre Repräsentanten, die das Programm unterstützen.*

Für jede Perspektive werden im Beitrag die Kriterien expliziert. Es ist theoretisch möglich das Aspekte der Qualität die aus eine Perspektive als befriedigend gesehen werden, aus eine andere Perspektive als unzureichend abgelehnt werden. Daraus folgt die Frage welche Perspektive letztendlich entscheidend ist. Die Konsequenzen von jede Perspektive werden ausführlich diskutiert.

The quality of early childhood programmes can be assessed in many ways. Most of the available literature on the subject examines quality from what we might call "a top-down perspective" by identifying selected characteristics of the setting, the equipment, and the programme, as seen by adults. Another way to assess the quality of a programme is from what we might call "a bottom-up perspective" by attempting to determine how the programme is actually experienced by the children. A third perspective on quality, which we could call an "outside-inside perspective", is how the programme is experienced by the families it serves. A fourth perspective, an "inside" perspective, considers how the programme is experienced by the staff that provides the programme. Agencies sponsoring programmes might also want to take a larger perspective in the course of policy and accountability deliberations concerning how the community, the larger society, and indeed, posterity is served by the programme.

The top-down perspective typically takes into account such programme and setting characteristics as:

- the ratio of adults to children;
- the qualifications and stability of the staff;
- the quality and quantity of space per child;
- the quality and quantity of equipment and materials;
- the number of toilets, fire safety provisions, etc.
- health regulations
- characteristics of adult-child interactions and relationships;

Fiene (1992) refers to features of programmes like those listed above as regulatory methods of ensuring the quality of child care, in that they are a directly observable and enforceable way that providers can "set the stage for desirable interaction..." (1992). There is substantial evidence to suggest that the programme and setting features listed above do indeed predict the effects of an early childhood programme (c.f. Beardsley 1990; Fiene 1992; Harms & Clifford 1980; Howes, 1991; Phillips 1987).

The Bottom-up Perspective on Quality

It seems reasonable to assume that the *ultimate effects* of a programme depend primarily on the ways it is experienced by the participating children. In other words, the real influence of a programme is the quality of life as experienced by each child in the programme over periods of weeks and months. If this is so, assessment of programme quality requires answers to the question: What does it

feel like to be a child in this environment?

Assessment strategies by which one obtains the bottom-up perspective require making inferences about what it feels like to each child to be in the environment over extended periods of time. Based on cumulative interactive contact with peers and adults, and careful observation of each child, the assessment is made on the basis of the best guesses that can be made of the nature of the children's subjective experiences. Thus assessment of quality involves making inferences, on the basis of observation and interaction, about how each child would - so to speak - answer the questions like:

- Do I usually feel welcome rather than captured?
- Do I belong rather than just function as one of the crowd?
- Am I usually accepted and understood rather than overlooked or scolded by the adults?
- Am I usually addressed seriously and respectfully, rather than as precious or cute?
- Am I usually accepted by some of my peers, rather than isolated, or rejected by them?
- Are most of the activities interesting, rather than frivolous or boring?
- Are most of the activities meaningful, rather than trivial or mindless?
- Are most of the activities engaging and absorbing, rather than just amusing, fun, entertaining or exciting?
- Am I usually glad to be here, rather than eager to leave?

When most of the answers to these questions are positive, we can assume that the quality of the programme is worthy of the children. Of course there might be many explanations behind negative answers to these questions. The programme itself should not automatically be faulted for all negative answers. There are causes of children's experiences for which caregivers and teachers cannot be held entirely accountable. However, the staff of a programme are accountable for applying every strategy and procedure believed by the profession to be relevant and appropriate to each case. The assumption suggests that ensuring good quality requires that all staff members are capable of applying all of the accumulated knowledge, wisdom and best practices of the profession.

The Outside-Inside Perspective on Quality

Ideally, the assessment of the quality of a programme should include characteristics of parent-teacher relationships, ascertained from the perspective of *both* parents and teachers. Such assessments can proceed by asking of parents *and* teachers: Are our relationships:

- primarily respectful, rather than patronising or controlling?
- accepting, open, inclusive, and tolerant, rather than rejecting, blaming, prejudiced?

The positive attributes of parent-teacher relationships suggested above are relatively easy to develop when teachers and parents have the same backgrounds, speak the same language, share values and goals for children, and when they like each other. However, the development of positive, respectful and supportive relations between staff and parents of culturally diverse backgrounds requires professionalism that is usually based on a combination of experience, education, and in-service support, as well as personal values.

Similarly, parents are more likely to relate to their children's caregivers and teachers in positive ways when they understand the complex nature of their work, and appreciate what the teachers are striving to accomplish. Certainly parents are more likely to approach teachers positively when teachers initiate such respectful and accepting relationships themselves.

The Inside Perspective on Quality

It is highly unlikely that an early childhood programme can achieve a standard of high quality unless the staff relationships within it are similarly of good quality. An assessment of this aspect of quality might proceed by asking of each member of staff:

Are staff-relationships on the whole:

- supportive rather than contentious?
- cooperative rather than competitive?
- accepting rather than antagonistic or even hostile?
- trusting rather than suspicious?
- respectful rather than controlling?

Conclusion

Keep in mind that it is possible, at least in theory, that a programme for young children might satisfy given standards on the criteria of the top-down perspective, but still fail to provide all the participating children and parents with the quality of experiences listed from the bottom-up and outside-inside perspectives. For example, a programme might be judged from the top-down to be high on standards of space, equipment, or even the curriculum, and yet fail to meet adequate standards of quality of life for some of the children. After all, the important aspect of experience is the meaning the "experiencer" - if you will, gives to it. Humans attribute and assign meanings to their experience in one situation based on their experiences in all others, in much the same way that the meaning of a particular word is a function of the sentence in which it appears and the paragraph in which it is embedded.

As I have pointed out elsewhere (Katz 1989) for example, the stimulus potential too of a given preschool environment to a child is likely to be a function of the stimulus level of the environment she experiences outside of it. A child whose home environment is full of play materials, television sets, outdoor play equipment, frequent trips to the playground, and so forth may find the same preschool programme boring that another child from a home environment that is low on such features finds engaging. Such individual differences in the experiences of children in early childhood programmes, i.e. the bottom-up view, should be taken into account in assessments of the quality of a programme.

Similarly, in theory at least, it is possible that a programme could fall below acceptable standards on the top-down criteria and yet many of the participating children experience the programme as satisfactory on the bottom-up criteria listed.

With respect to the outside-inside and inside perspectives, it seems reasonable to assume that, in principle, we cannot have really good environments for children unless they are good for the adults who work in them. Of course there may be some days when an environment has been "good" for the children at the expense of the staff (e.g. Halloween, birthday parties), and vice versa.

In addition, it seems reasonable to assume that, in principle, teachers and

caregivers treat children very much in the way they are treated. To be sure, some caregivers and teachers rise above being treated poorly by the person(s) they report to, and some fall below the good treatment they receive. But on the average, it is useful to assume that good environments for children are more likely to be provided when the adults who staff them are treated appropriately on the criteria listed.

All four perspective outlined above can make an indispensable contribution to determining the quality of life offered within the programme. Each of the perspectives contributes differently to an overall assessment of quality as experienced by all who have a stake in the programme. These perspectives are also useful for making informed decisions about the kinds of modifications to be considered for the provision of high quality services for individual children, for the whole group, and for their families.

REFERENCES

BEARDSLEY, L. (1990) *Good Day Bad Day. The Child's Experience of Day Care* (N. Y., Teachers College Press).

FIENE, R. (1992) *Measuring Child Care Quality*, Paper presented at the International Conference on Child Day Care Health; Science, Prevention and Practice, June, 1992. Atlanta, Georgia, U.S.A.

HARMS, T. & CLIFFORD, R. M. (1980) *The Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* (New York, Teachers College Press).

HOWES, C., PHILLIPS, D. A., WHITEBOOK, M. (1992) Thresholds of Quality: Implications for Social Development of Children in Centre-based Child Care, *Child Development*, 63, pp. 449 - 460.

KATZ, L. G. (1992) Afterword, in: OLMSTEAD, P.O. & WEIKART, D. P. (Eds.) *How Nations Serve Young Children: Profiles of Child Care and Education in 14 Countries* (Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Foundation)

PHILLIPS, D. (1987) *Quality in child care: What does research tell us?* Washington, D C: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

United States Department of Human and Social Services, *Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements*, Washington, D C.

Correspondence about this paper should be addressed to:

Dr. L. G. Katz
Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
University of Illinois
805 West Pennsylvania Avenue
Urbana, IL 61801
ILLINOIS
U.S.A.