

Quality as a Measurable, Objective Concept

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Overview

- ▶ What is my concept of quality?
 - What constitutes early childhood education and care (ECEC) quality?
- ▶ How can we develop and ensure “good”, meaningful and inspiring ECEC places for children?
 - What advise would I give to ECEC practitioners and policy makers?



Early Experiences

- ▶ Early experiences play a crucial role in development
 - Behavioral trajectories
(Brooks–Gunn & Duncan, 2000; Belsky et al., 2009)
 - Brain development
(Shonkoff, Boyce, & McEwen, 2009)
 - Epigenetics – shape genes govern cognitive and social development
(Caspi et al., 1996)
- ▶ High priority for policy, practice, and research

What is my concept of quality?

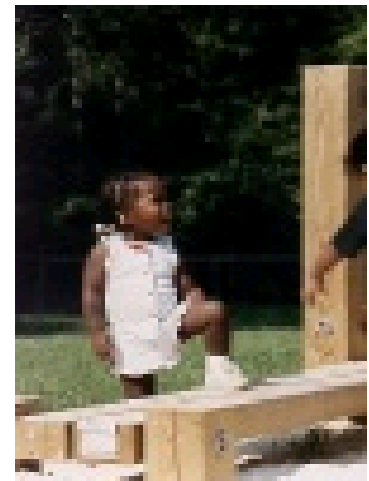
- ▶ Theoretically: 4 broad developmental theories lay the foundation
 - Bronfenbrenner: Ecological System Theory:
 - relationship between the caregiver and the child as proximal processes influencing early development
 - relationships between the caregiver and parent
 - Bowlby/Ainsworth: Attachment Theory:
 - Caregiver's responsiveness and support as a crucial factor influencing early development

What is my concept of quality?

- ▶ Theoretically: 4 broad developmental theories lay the foundation
 - Piaget: Constructionist Theory:
 - Access to a wide variety of developmentally appropriate objects
 - Child as little scientist
 - Vygotsky: Social Development Theory:
 - Scaffolding learning by caregiver
 - Adult engages and challenges the child within the zone of proximal learning

What is my concept of quality?

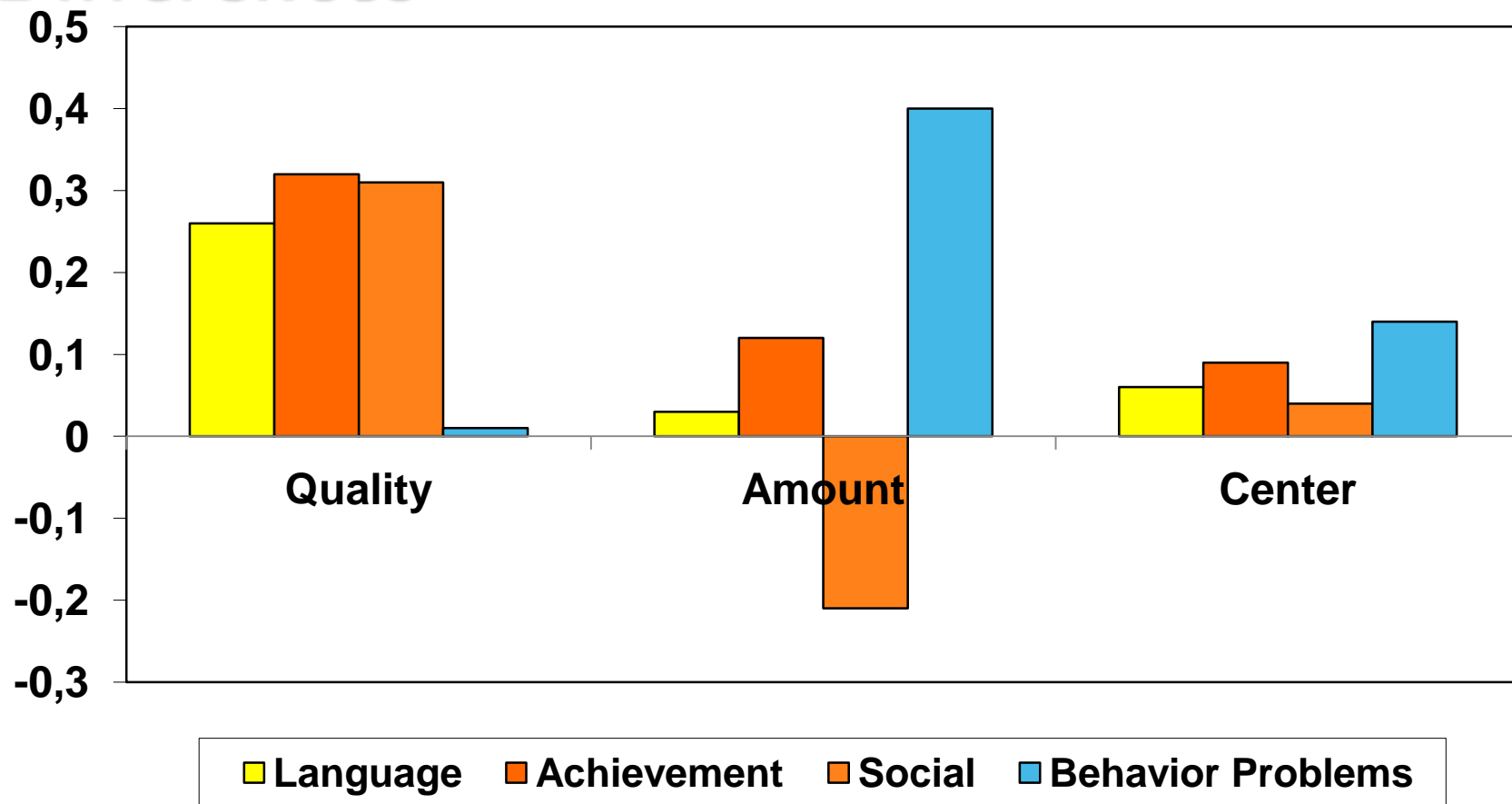
- ▶ Empirically: Strong evidence that ECEC processes described by the theories promote early development
 - Experimental evidence → moderate to large short term impacts and long-term effects
 - Perry Preschool, Abecedarian Project, Infant Health and Development Program
 - Random assignment of children
 - high quality ECEC
 - control groups
 - Long term effects on
 - Cognitive and academic skills,
 - Employment
 - Criminal Activity
 - Medical Outcomes



What is my concept of quality?

- ▶ Observational studies: relate quality rating scales to child outcomes
 - Scales based on theoretical frameworks
 - Modest associations: short and long-term
 - Statistically significant modest to moderate associations across many study
 - In past 10 years: modest associations after accounting for family selection bias
 - Bias: children with more advantages attend higher quality care

NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development and 54m Outcomes- Standardized Mean Differences



Adjusting for site, gender, ethnicity, family income, maternal education and depression

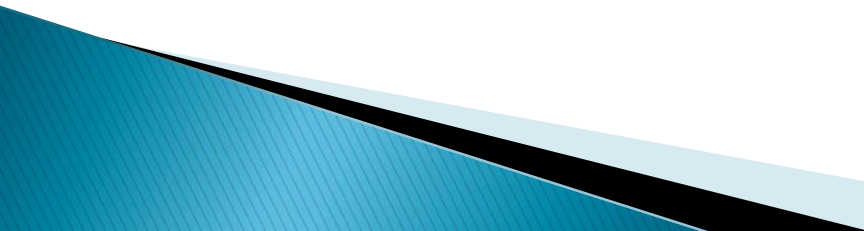
NICHD SECCYD: Longer-term associations

- ▶ 15 year outcomes–follow up: small, but reliable, associations
 - Quality
 - Language/academic composite ($d=.10$)
 - Problem behaviors ($d=-.08$)
 - Amount of care
 - More risk taking ($d = .08$)
 - Impulsivity ($d=.12$)
 - Center care was not related 15 year outcomes

Impacts of the Best Pre-K Programs (RDDs)

| | Achievement Gain | Long-term impacts | Larger gains |
|----------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| New Jersey | 40% SD points | 5th Grade | Poverty |
| Boston | 40% - 60% SD points | 3rd Grade | Poverty, home language |
| Maryland | 32 percentile points | 4th Grade | Poverty |
| North Carolina | 20% - 30% SD points | 3rd Grade | Poverty, home language |

Characteristics of High Quality Programs (strongest evidence)

- ▶ Teacher–child interactions
 - Frequent, warm, responsive interactions
 - Frequent elaborated conversations
 - ▶ Activities / Curricula
 - Engaging
 - Sequence and scope
 - Scaffolding learning
 - ▶ Evidence–based curriculum with aligned professional development
 - ▶ Some, less strong, evidence for structural characteristics
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Measuring ECEC Quality

- ▶ We can measure ‘quality’ in ECEC, but we may not be measuring very well
 - Very modest associations, even with the two widely accepted measures (ERS and CLASS)
 - Psychometric issues with scales –
 - Rater effects
 - Restriction of range
 - Coverage of scales
 - focus on process
 - not looking at content (what are children are learning)

Measuring ECEC Quality

- ▶ Suggest that more focus on “content”
 - Scaffolding during conversation with young children
 - Critical for early learning
 - This dimension represented rather superficially in current ECEC quality measures
 - Activities that focus on ensuring children are learning constructs
 - Developmental trajectories
 - Sequence and scope
 - Engaging
 - Scaffolded

Measuring ECEC Quality

▶ Why this focus

- Equity / Achievement gap:
 - Huge gaps in vocabulary and general knowledge
 - ECEC designed to reduce gap, but ECEC curricula and teaching practices do not focus explicitly on infusing language and general knowledge into all aspects of ECEC
- Potential problems with current ECEC practices
 - Learning is clearly facilitated when it is structured so that new learning builds hierarchically off prior learning – again this is not a focus in most ECEC curricula and teaching practices
- NOTE – this does not mean ECEC should involve explicit lessons in math and reading
 - “High quality” ECEC must involve extended conversations that scaffold learning based on lesson plans
 - Lesson plans should explicitly introduce concepts hierarchically and provides children with opportunities to practice what they know as they learn new concepts as they engage in activities in the ECEC classroom

Recommendations

- ▶ From my approach to quality, recommendations to practitioners regarding how to develop and ensure “good”, meaningful and inspiring ECEC places for children?
 - All ECEC must involve sensitive and responsive caregiving in which all children feel valued and respected
 - ECEC practices should focus more on the level of conversation between caregivers and children –
 - and the extent to which caregivers are scaffolding learning in a manner that engages children (makes it more fun)

Recommendations

- Lesson plans – engaging and explicitly introduce concepts hierarchically
 - Provides children with opportunities to practice what they know as they learn new concepts as they engage in activities in the ECEC classroom
 - Focus on developmental trajectories
 - Include active scaffolding by caregivers

Thank You

- ▶ Questions?

- ▶ Contact

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