A Scoping Review of Quality in Early Childhood Publicly-Funded Programs

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Link to article

Background

With focus on high-quality early learning and child care (ELCC) programs, it's important to understand what elements impact quality in these programs.

This research explores what is known about high-quality early childhood programming in publicly-funded, school-based settings, for children in the year prior to school entry.

Methods

The scoping review method involves gathering all existing literature on the topic. A search was completed using key words such as "early childhood," "public system/education," "program quality," "assessment," etc.

Relevant literature between 2000 and 2020 was used and researchers noted how common concepts of quality effect the different levels of the ELCC system.

Key Findings

The results show themes impacting quality within publicly-funded programming connected to the public-school system:

Policies

Government investments, regulations and standards, and assessment and evaluation are important foundations of quality ELCC programs.

Place

Learning environments, location, and the amount of time spent in a space influence quality.

Practice

Pedagogy, adult-child ratios and class sizes, educator-to-child interactions, and inclusion and diversity influence quality.

People

Educator qualifications and experience, professional development and training, wages and working conditions, partnerships, and involvement of communities and families influence quality.

Conclusions

This scoping review shows how complex it is to define quality in early learning programs, especially in school-based, universal, publicly funded Pre-K programs.

Broadening the definition of quality to include policies, practice, place, and people recognizes that the quality of these programs is affected by the many systems and people involved and the connections between them.