

# Measuring the Quality of Inclusion

**How do we know if we are providing high quality inclusion for young children with disabilities? Join Sharon and Elena in discussing two new tools for measuring the quality of inclusion or preschool classes and programs.**

<p><b>Dr. Sharon Irwin</b>  <b>The SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale</b></p>	<p><b>Dr. Elena Soukakou</b>  <b>The Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)</b></p>
<p><b>The SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale</b> (2009) is a tool for assessing inclusion quality in early childhood centres and for helping centres move toward higher quality inclusion. From 2005 until 2009, 3000 Canadian early childhood professionals (and approximately 100 Americans) were trained to use the Scale in its workshop form, and were encouraged to provide feedback on the Scale. This feedback was incorporated into the current version.</p> <p>more...</p> <p>The SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale consists of a practice subscale of 11 items (physical environment, equipment and materials, director and inclusion, staff support, staff training, therapies, individual program plans, parents of children with special needs, involvement of typical children, board of directors or other similar unit, and preparing for transition to school) and 158 indicators as well as a principles subscale of 6 items (zero reject, natural proportions, same hours/days of attendance available, full participation, maximum feasible parent participation and leadership, pro-active strategies and advocacy) and 92 indicators.</p> <p>Scoring procedures are similar to those of the ECERS-R, and are detailed in the workbook.</p>	<p><b>The Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP)</b> is a new observation rating scale that was designed to assess the quality of daily classroom practices that support the needs of children with disabilities in early childhood settings. Specifically, the ICP measures “the extent to which adult support and adjustments of various elements of the classroom can accommodate individual needs while also encouraging children’s active participation in the group”.</p> <p>more...</p> <p>Modeled after the format of the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales (ECERS-R; Harms, Clifford, &amp; Cryer, 1998), The ICP is a 7- point scale which rates quality from 1 (practices considered highly inadequate) to 7 (practices that promote to the highest degree the developmental needs of children with disabilities). The scale includes the following 11 items:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adaptations of space and materials</li> <li>2. Adult involvement in peer interactions</li> <li>3. Adult guidance of children’s play</li> <li>4. Conflict resolution</li> <li>5. Membership</li> <li>6. Adult-child social interactions</li> <li>7. Support for social communication</li> <li>8. Adaptations of group activities</li> <li>9. Transitions between activities</li> <li>10. Feedback on children’s learning</li> </ol>

The manual and a training video are available at [www.capebretonbooks.com](http://www.capebretonbooks.com).

A peer-reviewed evaluation report on the Scale, (Assessing Inclusion Quality in Early Learning and Child Care In Canada with the SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Practices Profile and Principles Scale) by Dr. Donna S. Lero of the University of Guelph, is available at [www.specialinkcanada.org](http://www.specialinkcanada.org). This report will soon be published on-line by the Canadian Council on Learning.

11. Planning and monitoring children's individualized goals.

The Inclusive Classroom Profile has been recently field tested in 45 classrooms and has initial support for reliability and validity. Please feel free to contact me if you would like information on the measure's psychometric properties. A copy of the scale is available on this site for download. I look forward to comments, questions and feedback!

**This discussion has been archived. We hope you find the comments useful.**

## **Using the SpecialLink Inclusion Quality Scale**

Dear Sharon,

I have been reading about this measure with great interest. Can you tell us a bit more about who can use this scale? What kind of training would be required for a researcher, teacher or program administrator to use the scale appropriately?

## **Using the SpecialLink Inclusion Quality Scale**

Good Questions, Elena. In our experience, many different stakeholder groups can use the Scale, although in different ways. Experienced researchers and consultants would probably achieve inter-rater reliability with the measure after a one-day training and a morning's direct observation of an inclusive classroom. People who are not familiar with the ECERS-like format of the Scale would probably need more time to develop reliability. And other people, such as students and frontline staff might want to start with just one item of the Scale, perhaps choosing one where they feel they most need improvement or, for confidence boosting, choosing one where they are already doing pretty well.

## **Developing the Inclusive Classroom Profile**

What led you to develop the Inclusive Classroom Profile?

## **Developing the Inclusive Classroom Profile**

I believe we can do a better job in measuring the quality of classroom practices and adult support that children with disabilities experience everyday in pre-k classrooms. While traditional measures of classroom quality are useful, a growing premise among the literature is that what constitutes quality in classrooms where diverse learners such as children with disabilities require additional supports, is possibly more multifaceted than what current measures describe.

The ICP was designed to complement early childhood rating scales on classroom quality by measuring additional elements of adult support and intentional adaptations that promote the learning needs of children with disabilities. Indicators of classroom practice described in the ICP

have research support and can be used to guide professional development efforts to improve classroom practice.

## **question for both**

Sharon and Elena,

Can your measures be completed at the same time someone is completing an ECERS-R? And what do you think the qualifications are for someone to use your measures? How much expertise in early childhood special education do they need? Thanks.

## **training and qualifications for users**

Thank you Kelly, these are important questions.

The ICP can be used at the same time an ECERS-R evaluation is being conducted. For the ICP, approximately 2 hours would be needed for an observer to get enough information to make valid and reliable ratings.

The ICP was designed to be used by researchers, teachers and professionals that would typically have a bachelor degree in early childhood education, or in a related field with experience in early childhood education. Use of the ICP does not require expertise in special education, although early childhood teachers or professionals with experience in teaching children with disabilities in inclusive settings might require less training. Development of indicators is grounded in research on early intervention and inclusive practices (e.g. embedded learning strategies), but indicators reflect general classroom practices, and are operationalized in a way that can be interpreted and rated without requiring expertise in special education.

In my validation study, 2 researchers, familiar with the ECERS-R scales and a BA in early childhood established good interrater agreement (mean weighted kappa=0.79) upon a day and a half of training (training included 2 classroom visits). Additional research is needed to provide more information about what type and how much training is needed for various users.

## **Evaluating Inclusive Settings**

This may be a really naive question, but how do these scales evaluate inclusion specifically? Also, are they full classroom/system scales, or are they specifically designed to evaluate inclusive settings.

## **Evaluating Inclusive Settings**

Jonathan:

This is not a naive question. The Specialink Scale was developed to evaluate inclusion quality specifically. We suggest that it be used in conjunction with the ECERS-R, which evaluates the broader global environment of the classroom.

As to the use of the Specialink Scale in classrooms that are not inclusive, we say "Yes, use the Scale to evaluate the current capacity of your classroom to include children with disabilities, but realize that your score will be quite low until you actually take the step and include at least one child with a disability." "Getting ready for inclusion" is a worthy task, but it is no substitute for actually being there. At trainings and in the formal evaluation of the Specialink Scale (see report by D. Lero on [www.specialinkcanada.org](http://www.specialinkcanada.org)), we distinguish between "inclusion quality" and "inclusion capacity" to find a way to bring the non-inclusive centres into the picture.

**thanks!**

Interesting. Thanks Sharon!

## **Evaluating Inclusive Settings**

Good question. The Inclusive Classroom Profile focuses on the classroom and elements of quality at the classroom level. It assesses how teachers organize various contexts for teaching and learning ( e.g. physical environment, child-initiated activities, planned group time, transitions) to promote children's engagement in activities, individualized goals and social relationships with adults and peers.

## **Thanks Elena**

Good info on application. Happy to hear you are sharing this at the Inclusion Institute! : )

## **SpecialLink Scale**

I see where we can download the ICP from the website but the other scale shows only one page for training purposes. Is there a website where the tool can be downloaded from or a location to purchase a copy? Thank you!

## **SpecialLink Scale**

Thank you, Renee, for drawing our attention to this question.

You are right. Only one page of the Speciallink Scale is shown on the web site. That's because we've finally moved past a 5-year development phase (our "workshop phase"), during which the Scale was downloadable at no cost. The expanded Scale has now been published and copyrighted and is available for \$16.95 plus tax and shipping at [speciallinkcanada.org](http://speciallinkcanada.org).

## **timing, approach/intro to**

Inclusive childcare is a part of our small community. Many centres currently have a child or a few children with some level of intervention needed for their positive successful inclusion that coincides with growth and development on the children's part. It would be my guess that centers would range in score on either tool from weak to strong. Helping people move along this continuum is of interest to me. Do you have any ideas? For instance...

How do you see introducing either of these tools to centers who feel that things are going fine as long as there are no behaviour problems?

## **timing, approach/intro to**

Interesting question, Laurie. If you can get centre staff (usually the director) interested in using the tool herself (as in "Let's each fill our the tool for some items" — after you show her or several directors how, perhaps in an orientation workshop). she may begin to see where weaknesses as well as strengths are in her program.

## **timing, approach/intro to**

Sharon: What are your thoughts on how either of these resources might be used in less formal inclusive settings like family child care? Camille

## **timing, approach/intro to**

Good question.

Since we introduced the "workshop version" of the SpecialLink Inclusion Scale back in 2005, people have been asking us for instructions on how to use it for family daycare and for after-school programs. The optimal answer would be to create versions of the Scale for these other types of programs, and have them tested for validity and reliability. That's not possible now.

A group of family daycare providers spoke about creating a family daycare version of the Scale. Nothing came of the enthusiasm, except for a good idea.

In the meantime, there is no reason not to use the relevant items and indicators, as understood by people working with the less formal inclusive settings. We'd like to hear from anyone who chooses to do so.

Sharon

## **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Tools**

Sharon and Elena,

Thank you for sharing so much great information about the tools. Many of our US states have developed Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) as part of efforts to increase the global quality of programs for young children; many of those states are using the Clifford and Harms Environmental Rating Scales to assess classroom quality. Some of the states have addressed or have expressed interest in addressing inclusion more intentionally as part of QRIS. Have you had any experiences in this country or other countries that might help states incorporate your tools into QRIS? Do you have ideas on this topic?

## **Related to Program Quality**

Sharon and Elena: Related to Pam's question about using your tools to address state QRISs, I also would be interested in learning more about how the tools map onto key dimensions of program quality as defined by the DEC/NAEYC joint position statement on inclusion. These defining dimensions of high quality inclusion include access, participation, and supports. Shouldn't states be using these dimensions as part of their QRIS systems and shouldn't they be using measures of program quality like yours to evaluate quality in these areas?

## **Related to Program Quality**

Virginia:

It was affirming to cross-reference the DEC/NAEYC joint position statement with the SpecialLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale and see how well they related to each other. Your idea of states using these dimensions as part of their QRIS systems and then evaluating quality change through the Scale seems like a good one. All items and indicators in the Scale relate to either access, participation and/or supports.

Sharon

## **Related to Program Quality**

Virginia,

Important question. I agree that QRIS systems should be using measures that assess dimensions of quality that specifically relate to the support offered to children with disabilities in inclusive settings. The 3 dimensions endorsed by the NAEYC/DEC joint position statement are all measured by the ICP:

Specifically, the ICP measures aspects of access to materials/space, small/whole group activities and peer interactions. Participation is assessed as it relates not only to being 'physically' included in activities and routines, but to the quality of children's engagement and the quality of adult support that is provided for children to actively engage with others in activities while promote their individualized goals. An item titled "membership" also assesses the extent to which children with disabilities are offered equal opportunities to assume social roles, leadership and responsibilities in the classroom. Adult support is assessed within all 11 items, scoring higher supports that accommodate individual needs while also encouraging children's active participation in the group.

Access, participation and supports need to be assessed comprehensively at the classroom level and the ICP was specifically designed to focus on teacher practice in the classroom.

## **Related to Program Quality**

It does certainly look like the ICP addresses access and participation as described in the DEC/NAEYC inclusion position statement. How about systems-level supports (as opposed to supports at the level of the individual child/children)?

Heidi

## **Related to Program Quality**

Heidi:

Thank you for asking. The ICP focuses on classroom practice. It addresses aspects of systems-level supports such as families involvement in IEP planning and instructional decision making, and there are indicators that assess collaboration between adults in the classroom (e.g. sharing responsibilities). Also many indicators assess the extent to which materials or specific accommodations/ interventions included in IEP's are incorporated in the classroom. However, dimensions such as opportunities for staff to engage in ongoing professional development or implementation of specific services (e.g therapy) are not explicitly assessed by the ICP. Future research might examine the inclusion of these additional dimensions of quality in the ICP.

## **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Tools**

Most of my work on the SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale has been done in Canada.

In 9 of the 10 provinces, there has been substantial movement toward using this Scale, either as a requirement or as a supplement to other quality measures (most commonly, the ECERS-R). The agencies and provinces are using the Scale in different ways. For example, Manitoba child care

practitioners are speaking about how their government is developing a policy to require an inclusion statement in all Manitoba child cares — a basic element of the Scale. In Newfoundland, all centres that currently include children with disabilities are involved in utilization of the Scale, with the support of an inclusion facilitator. In Ontario and British Columbia, regions of the provinces have implemented a process of supporting inclusion enhancement, with the Scale as a measure of progress and a method of providing a sense of direction to higher quality inclusion. At this time in Canada, there is no solid tie to quality dollars for enhanced inclusion, beyond licensing requirements.

Individual consultants, notably in California, have begun to use the Special Link Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale, but to my knowledge, there has been no take-up at the state level.

And in Melbourne, where we provided training to 53 consultants from across Australia, a number of agencies and states have become to try out the tool and spread interest among their peers.

Sharon

### **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Tools**

Sharon, Sounds like a variety of ways that the Scale is being used across Canada. So interesting. How do practitioners and directors react to using two scales (ECRS and Inclusion Quality Scale)? Do they perceive this as burden? Do they typically select components of each scale or use both scales in their entirety? Have there been any efforts to merge the two scales?

thanks

### **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Tools**

Pam:

I think we have seen every possible permutation and combination of the ECERS and the Inclusion Quality Scale that are possible. In one province, consultants were tasked to help centres improve both their global quality (ECERS) and their inclusion quality. But they became so involved in raising global quality, that inclusion quality got overlooked. The conclusion was that maybe they should be two separate, sequential tasks.

In another province, the two scales are used simultaneously, but with different consultants (Early Childhood and Inclusion). That also seemed difficult, almost as if it led to information overload.

In our hearts, we'd love to merge the two scales, since "inclusion" should not be separate from "global quality." The only scale I know that has done so very well, the EC=SPEED, requires 3 observers with at least master's degrees spend three full days doing the observations in each centre. Too rich for anybody except deep researchers, I think.

Another practice, and I am going on too long for a blog response, is to choose 2 or 3 inclusion items to start with. When these show obvious improvement, practitioners seem empowered to move along.

Hope this helps,

Sharon

## **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Tools**

Pam,

The ICP was developed and validated in the UK. However, it may be appropriately incorporated into QRIS because: 1) The Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP) has been grounded on pre-k inclusion research in the US; 2) Expert review of the measure for validation included inclusion specialists/researchers from the US and 3) It reflects current notions of DAP and of the joint position of NAEYC/DEC.

As an author of the measure, I also developed the ICP items based on my US training in Early Childhood Special Education and my experience as an inclusion teacher in US pre-k inclusive settings. Additional validation studies in the US will be helpful to see how the scale's items work in diverse US inclusive programs.

## **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Tools**

Are additional validation studies in the US planned or already underway?

Thank you, both, for your work and for providing these tools. Such an interesting conversation!

Heidi

## **Quality Rating and Improvement Systems and the Tools**

Heidi,

Since the ICP measure has very recently been introduced to the US, there isn't yet an additional validation study underway in the US. There has been expressed interest to further validate the ICP and I look forward to hearing from any team that would be interested to conduct such a study.  
Elena

**test**

good

## **Family's definitions of inclusion**

I am interested in how or if these scales look at family's opinions/views of how their child is being included in the classrooms being assessed. I am currently researching inclusion as it is defined by families and their ideas and thoughts may or may not include our more 'academic' definitions. Is this a component of rating inclusion? If the parents are in agreement with the school's approach or if they would like to see changes seems to me like it could affect how a school approaches inclusive practices.

## **Updates on the ICP measure**

Thank you all for your interest in the Inclusive Classroom Profile (ICP). Discussion on this blog really helps answer the important question that initiated this dialogue: How do we know if we are providing high quality inclusion for your young children with disabilities? The ICP measure includes 11 items that aim at answering this question. Current work on the ICP investigates issues related to

training for most valid and reliable use of this measure, and a more detailed manual for implementation is being developed. Additional information on the ICP and availability of the tool can be provided upon request to [elena.soukakou@unc.edu](mailto:elena.soukakou@unc.edu). Contact information is also provided on the cover page of the ICP measure ( see Pdf link on this blog). I look forward to continuing this important discussion! Elena Soukakou

## **for my Bachelor Degree in Science**

This something that I have been studing in my classes and the Instrutor made mended about this web site. This is a great resource of help. Thanks

### Related content

- **INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM PROFILE**
- **Measuring Classroom Quality in Pre-K Inclusive programs: Development of the Inclusive Classroom Profile**
- **Including Children With Disabilities In State Pre-K Programs**
- **SpeciaLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale**