STATE CHILD CARE REGULATORY, MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS AS A MEANS FOR ENSURING QUALITY CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

A child care regulatory, monitoring and evaluation systems model developed by a consortium (Children's Services Monitoring Transfer Consortium—CSMC) of several states is described. This model, entitled the indicator checklist statistical model, is based upon a concept of identifying key indicators/predictors of day care program quality and regulatory compliance that have a positive impact on children's development while in out-of-home care. Research conducted by the CSMC is presented with the implications of this research for state's child care delivery systems. Advantages of the indicator checklist statistical model as it relates to public policy are presented, along with recommendations to state day care agency administrators.

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The concern for evaluating child day care services grew out of the initial studies on day care as an intervention to ameliorate child development deficits in children from low income families. These early day care evaluations (Lazar, Darlington, Murray, Royce and Snipper, 1981; Weikart, Bond, and McNeil, 1978; Ramey and Haskins, 1981; Miller and Dyer, 1975), have been summarized by Belsky and Steinberg (1978) and their potential impact on policy formulation (Federal Department of Health, Education and Welfare, 1978) has been clearly delineated regarding the regulatory aspects of day care (Ruopp etal, 1979). These studies attempted to determine the beneficial or deleterious effects of day care on children's development, but because these studies have been laboratory based they have been criticized (Bronfenbrenner etal, 1977; Etaugh, 1980).

These initial studies have been followed by a series of day care studies to ascertain the impact of varying levels of day care quality on children's development (McCartney, 1984; McCartney, Scarr, Phillips, Grajek & Schwarz, 1982; Clarke-Stewart, 1984; Howes & Rubenstein, 1985; Kontos & Fiene, 1985). These studies have been non-laboratory based utilizing a naturalistic and ecologically valid intervention strategy and have had an impact on proposed policy at the state and federal levels (Select Committee on Children Youth & Families, 1985).

An issue that has not been addressed by these two sets of day care research and evaluation studies is how to develop an ongoing process of day care monitoring and evaluation. Attempts have been made in the past to highlight exemplary state day care regulatory, monitoring and evaluation systems (Ferrar et al, 1980; Bradley et al, 1984). However, it has only been recently that a child care regulatory, monitoring & evaluation systems model, which was developed by a consortium of several states, holds promise

as an effective and efficient means of ensuring day care program compliance and quality (Fiene and Nixon, 1985).

This new regulatory, monitoring and evaluation systems model (Child Care Indicator Checklist Statistical Model) has been extensively field tested in California, Pennsylvania, Michigan, West Virginia, Texas, New York City and Alberta, Canada, and has been used in several different human services: day care, child welfare, and mental retardation services. This model is being proposed for use in North Carolina day care programs, is being pilot tested in twenty-four hour residential group care in Pennsylvania, and is being proposed for use in child protective services. The indicator checklist model has been demonstrated to be a cost effective and efficient method through studies conducted in West Virginia.

The model is based on a concept of identifying key indicators and predictors of program quality and regulatory compliance that have a positive impact on children's lives while in out of home care. This indicator checklist model is based upon a statistical methodology that has been used in the test construction literature for some time (Fiene, 1983) and is based on an emerging evaluative paradigm proposed by Cronbach (1982).

The indicator checklist model is particularly relevant because of three national developments regarding the role of government: 1) It has the potential of being a cost savings tool for states who will be suffering from federal cut backs because of the Gramm-Rudman Deficit Reduction Act; 2) The Congressional Select Committee on Children Youth and Families has proposed legislation that clearly deals with the development of child care regulatory and monitoring systems at the state level; and 3) The National Governor's Association is proposing an initiative for states to develop

early childhood monitoring and evaluation systems as an effective and efficient means for states to ensure the quality of child care services.

The chapter by Dr. Susan Kontos describes Pennsylvania's use of this indicator checklist model in a research study dealing with the impact on children's development. The interested reader should consult the following articles and publications (Fiene and Nixon, 1985, 1983, 1981) for a more detailed description of the research and theory behind the indicator checklist model and the resultant child development program indicators/predictors (Fiene, 1984). The following is a brief description of the historical development of the indicator checklist model and its implications for the future of child care delivery systems.

The indicator checklist model grew from research work conducted with Dr. Francis H. Palmer in the early 1970's as a regional child development program evaluation model (Fiene, 1975). This evaluation model was to be used at a state level to monitor the various levels of program quality in child day care. With the advent of the Federal Interagency Day Care Requirements Appropriateness Study (FIDCR) and the need for a monitoring tool to measure compliance with federal day care regulations, this Child Development Program Evaluation (CDPE) Model gained the attention of federal officials as a generic systems model for FIDCR compliance (Ferrar, Gleason, and Smith, 1980; Bradley et al, 1984).

This CDPE Model was supported by federal research and demonstration monies starting in late 1979. But before the project could get off the ground the FIDCR were put into a state of abeyance or moratorium and the federal role shifted substantially to a state supported role with substantially fewer federal dollars. It was during this time period that

two significant approaches developed to alleviate the above problem: 1) a consortium of six states (Pennsylvania, California, West Virginia, Texas, Michigan, and New York—Children's Services Monitoring Transfer Consortium—(CSMC) was formed to take on this new state initiative for day care monitoring and 2) This Consortium proposed the indicator checklist model as a cost effective/efficient means for states to monitor and evaluate day care services in their respective states.

The Children's Services Monitoring Transfer Consortium (CSMC) conducted several significant research studies utilizing this indicator checklist model that attempted to answer two questions: 1) Does compliance with state child care regulations have a positive impact on children? and 2) Are their predictors of program quality?

There has been an attempt to identify the relationship between program quality and compliance with state day care regulations, and child development outcomes. This has been addressed in several of the other chapters in this book. However, the relationship between program quality and program compliance which could give some direction to states' as they develop their day care regulatory and monitoring systems has not been addressed and was the focus of research of the CSMC. The results of this research is now presented.

There has been an assumption in day care licensing that full compliance (100% compliance) with state day care regulations is an indication of program quality. It has been hypothesized that as compliance increases with state day care regulations, a corresponding and equivalent increase in program quality will also occur— the more a program is in compliance, the better the program.

This hypothesis was not totally supported in the CSMC study. The data indicate that the centers with low compliance scores (below 85%) had the lowest program quality scores. This was expected and the results supported it. However, the centers that were in substantial compliance (97-90%) but not full compliance (100%) had the highest program quality scores, while those centers in full compliance (100%) had lower program quality scores. This was not expected. In other words, the worst programs had low compliance scores, but the fully compliant programs were not the best programs (see Figure 1). A related and similar result has been identified in other children's services (Fiene, 1985).

Another significant result from this second set of analyses in the CSMC study was the identification of a series of regulatory and program quality items that correlated with the overall compliance (substantial compliance) and quality of the day care programs evaluated. These items can be grouped into the following generic categories: the day care program has an effective overall administrative structure; the day care program consistently implements the child development curriculum emphasizing the use of language, free play opportunities, and interest centers; and the day care center administration emphasizes parental participation (see Figure 2).

From a day care regulatory and monitoring point of view, these results could have an impact on public day care policy in the United States. It implies that many states in the United States are supporting public day care policy that may not be as effective and efficient from a child care regulatory point of view, i.e. requiring day care centers to be in full compliance with state day care regulations. Many state licensing departments have taken the position that day care centers in order to

THEORY OF COMPLIANCE

As compliance with state regulations increases, child outcomes increase linearly; but only to a certain level and with selected regulatory items that have been determined to be predictors of overall compliance/outcome.
Full compliance with regulations has a plateau effect or a diminishing return effect on child outcomes.

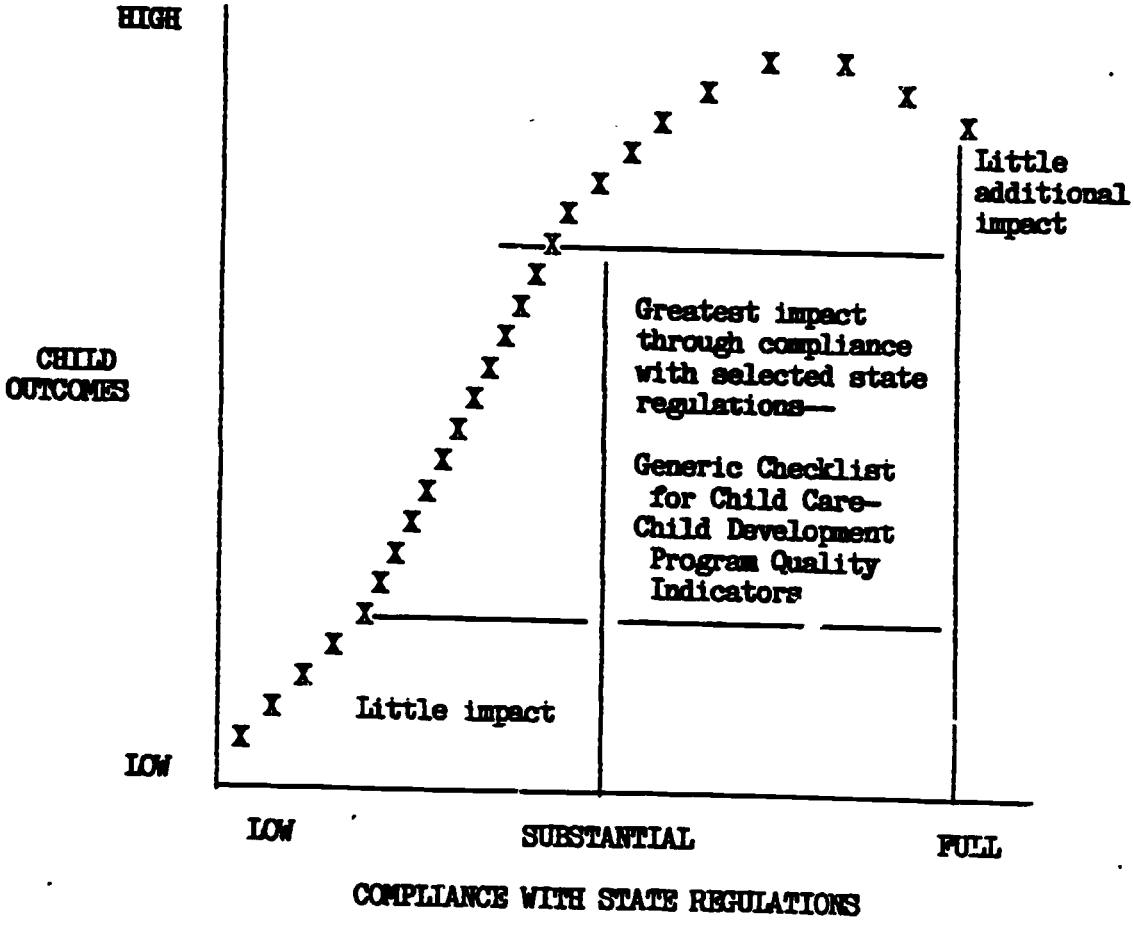

FIGURE 1

CHILD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS[1,2]

Child Development Curriculum—Program Component

A. The program has a consistent and detailed child development curriculum that teaching staff, administrators, and parents can express succintly. The curriculum has clearly articulated goals and objectives and these goals and objectives have been developed by parents and staff.
B. Children's needs are identified and reflected in the child development curriculum.
C. The child development curriculum takes into account a child's ethnic and cultural background, special needs, social-emotional, physical, cognitive, language development and provides activities in art, music, dramatic play that fosters a child's total development.

Parent Participation—Statistical Component

A. The program emphasizes and encourages parents to participate and help out in all aspects of the program's development. Family/parents work with staff in the evaluation of program support activities.
B. Parents are encouraged to take ideas and activities home for follow-up and reinforcement.
C. Educational activities are provided for parents on an ongoing basis.

Program Administration—Fiscal Component

A. The program administration communicates effectively with teaching staff and parents, but is not overly restrictive. The program has an overall program philosophy clearly stated in program goals.
B. The program has a performance appraisal system that has been developed by staff and administration.
C. The program has clearly articulated personnel policies and staff development plan for all staff.

1 These nine items/three component areas are taken from the Child Development Program Evaluation Scale.

2 These nine items consistently discriminated between those programs that were of a high quality from those that were not of a high quality.

FIGURE 2

receive a day care license must be in 100% compliance with state day care regulations. This position has been supported by the research of Class and Orton (1980) who have been strong advocates of full compliance with regulations.

An alternate approach for states in their development of day care regulatory and monitoring systems is not to emphasize full compliance but rather substantial compliance with the predictor/indicator items identified in the Kontos & Fiene (1985) study. Compliance with predictor or indicator items is the most efficient and effective means of ensuring program compliance and, ultimately, program quality. The predictor or indicator items that were used in the Kontos & Fiene study were adult-child ratio, emergency contact information on children, qualifications of the director, health appraisals for children, and emphasis on day care activities that promote development of children's skills, and positive self identity/self esteem. It is also significant to note that positive scores on children's social development assessments were related to higher scores of compliance with these indicator items. The items that did not add substantially to the overall quality of a program were those administrative items where all records had every item in compliance, such as, all eligibility/agreement forms completed at the time of a licensing visit.

In addition to the above approach, social policymakers at the state & national levels should consider refocusing their emphasis from one of a strict regulatory stance to one that achieves a greater balance between day care regulations and regulations that deal with program content. A recommendation that will take the findings of the CSMC and the Kontos & Fiene studies and apply them directly to Day Care Regulatory & Monitoring

Systems is the following: states could develop and use an Indicator Checklist along with a program quality assessment instrument to assess day care centers, such as, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) or the Child Development Program Evaluation Scale (CDPES). The CDPES is the result of the CSMC research study involving Pennsylvania, California, West Virginia, Michigan, New York with their respective indicator checklists. The CDPE-Scale items were the generic indicators that consistently appeared on the respective states' indicator checklists at the program compliance and program quality levels. There is also an 80%+ agreement and overlap between the ECERS (Harms & Clifford, 1980) and the CDPES (Fiene, 1984). By utilizing this model, states can continue to comply with their licensing mandate through the use of their indicator checklist while at the same time increasing the quality of day care services with proper focusing on program content through the use of the ECERS, or the CDPES.

Two advantages of this model are readily apparent to public policy makers: the indicator checklist approach can reduce the cost of monitoring and licensing day care centers and permit the more efficient reallocating and refocusing of staff resources in providing technical assistance and assessing program quality. The other advantage is that it substantially reduces the burden on day care centers, especially those centers that have a record of high compliance and are judged suitable for use of the indicator checklist. In time analysis studies conducted in several states, 60%+ savings in day care program monitoring time was realized through the use of the indicator checklist. It would be proposed that these day care centers be visited once every three years using the comprehensive 270 Item CDPE instrument. In the intervening years, the 15 Item Indicator Checklist would

be used. This model could be a potential solution for states as they attempt to develop cost effective/efficient methods to deal with the Gramm Rudman budget cuts.

If states implement the above recommendations of using the indicator checklist and program quality assessment instrument model, they will have additional data in the future to make sound resource allocation decisions regarding their day care policy based on a research data bank and not on capricious intuitions. In addition, these recommendations could have a very positive impact on the current state of the art in day care regulatory and monitoring systems based on a review completed by Kendall and Walker (1985). In this review the authors point to the eroding effects of deregulation and the increasing cost to conduct licensing and monitoring visits. The above day care regulatory and monitoring systems model, which employs a continuous program monitoring information system with an evaluative component, could potentially alleviate some of these detrimental effects that have been occurring in the day care regulatory field.

It is particularly gratifying that in Pennsylvania's case, its day care regulatory and monitoring system is accomplishing its intended purpose—to establish a baseline for quality and to ensure the health and safety of children while they attend day care. But there also appears to be an added benefit in that Pennsylvania's regulatory system does have a beneficial impact on children's social development. Pennsylvania hopes that these recommendations and potential revisions to its public day care policy will continue to protect the health and safety of young children while ensuring the quality of child development programs.

This model could also have a beneficial impact on child care delivery

systems if the "Child Care Opportunities for Families Act" were to become law. There would be the potential that the above model (Indicator Checklist Statistical Model) could blossom into a national child care regulatory, evaluation and monitoring system, something a number of child care and child development experts have been advocating since the FIDCR Appropriateness Study was completed (Select Committee on Children Youth and Families, 1985). If this could be accomplished, it would appear to be a significant advance in social policy formulation and day care regulatory and monitoring systems especially as Pennsylvania celebrates the 100th Anniversary of its Licensing Law; and Head Start, at the national level, celebrates its 25th Anniversary.

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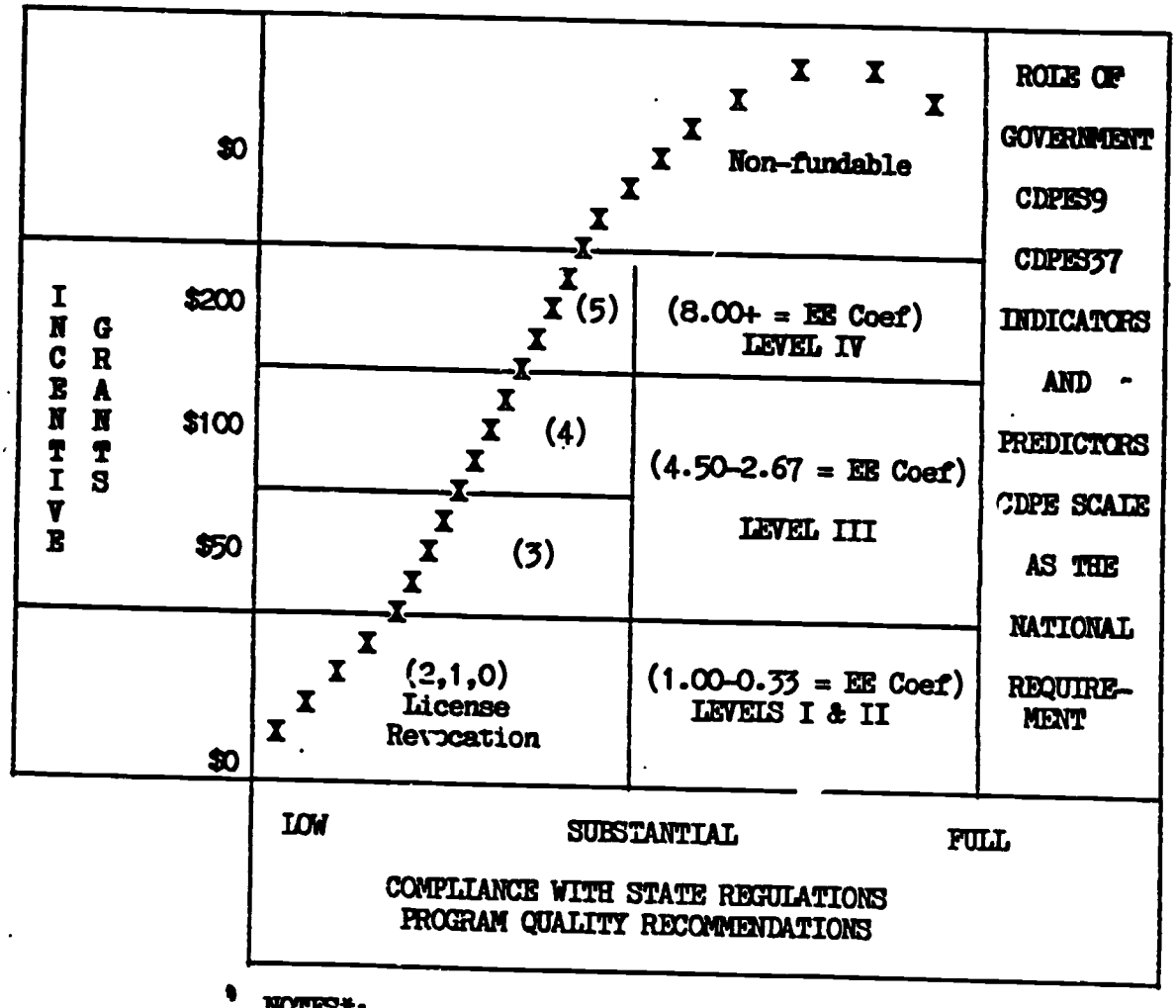
RESOURCE ALLOCATION FORMULA (RAF) UTILIZING THE COMPLIANCE THEORY EQUATION (EE = f O**Q/C)—BETA MODEL AND CDPES 9-37:
NATIONAL CHILD CARE REGULATORY, MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEMS MODEL—ROLE OF GOVERNMENT



NOTES*:

1. EE Coef = Effectiveness/Efficiency Coefficient Table

2. LEVEL I = OUT OF BALANCE
   LEVEL II = QUESTIONABLE BALANCE
   LEVEL III = BALANCED
   LEVEL IV = OPTIMALLY BALANCED

   BETA MODEL

3. (0,1,2,3,4,5) = Cdpes 9-37 Indicator Scoring Protocol

* See Piene's Child Development Program Evaluation Scale for a detailed explanation of NOTE 3 and Child Care Econometric Model for a detailed explanation of NOTES 1,2.

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