

# Are They in Any Serious Danger? What Quality in Early Childhood Programs Is and Why it Is important

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Investment in Early Learning: Making an Impact  
Panel 3, First 5 California Conference  
March 9, 2010

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# Three Questions About Quality

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- **What is quality in preschool classrooms and family child care settings?**
- **How do we know good quality when we see it?**
  - (How is it measured?)
- **Why is quality important?**
  - And is there some threshold needed to be important?

# What Is Quality?

- **Structural features**
  - Ratio
  - Group size
  - Safe physical environment
  - Age-appropriate materials
  - Caregiver characteristics
- **Dynamic features**
  - Warm, caring adults
  - Emotional support
  - Teacher/caregiver-child interactions
  - Intentional instruction
  - Promoting higher-order thinking skills, creativity

# Conceptions of Quality Have Evolved

- **1970s-1980s Emphasis on:**
  - Safety
  - Warm supportive adult
  - Appropriate materials
  - Predictable daily routines
- **In 1980s-1990s conceptions emerged to support importance of early years for:**
  - Fostering literacy
  - Language stimulation
  - Self-regulation and approaches to learning
  - Pre-academic skills (math, problem solving)
- **Now :**
  - Concern with fostering all domains of school readiness
  - And California's preschool learning foundations

# How Do We Know Good Quality When We See It?

- **Measures tied to conceptions of quality**
  - ECERS among the first
  - CLASS more recently
  - Newer measures like the ELLCO, CHELLO, Language Interaction Snapshot (LISn)
- **Different measurement (observation) strategies**
  - Global ratings
  - Time sampling
  
  - We are using both in First 5 LA/LAUP study.
  - What Dickinson calls a “toolkit” approach

# Why Is Quality Important?

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- **Children's experiences in the classroom or family child care setting can affect their development and learning.**

# How Might Quality Affect Learning

- **Without...**
  - A safe environment
  - Adults who are warm and supportive
  - Adults who respond to and extend conversations with children
  - Appropriate materials that foster play and exploration
  - Adults who help children think analytically while reading stories
  - Adults who model good language and provide literacy opportunities
  - Etc., etc., etc.,
- **Children are not going to learn and develop in the ways that foster kindergarten readiness and success in school.**

# Back to the Threshold Question

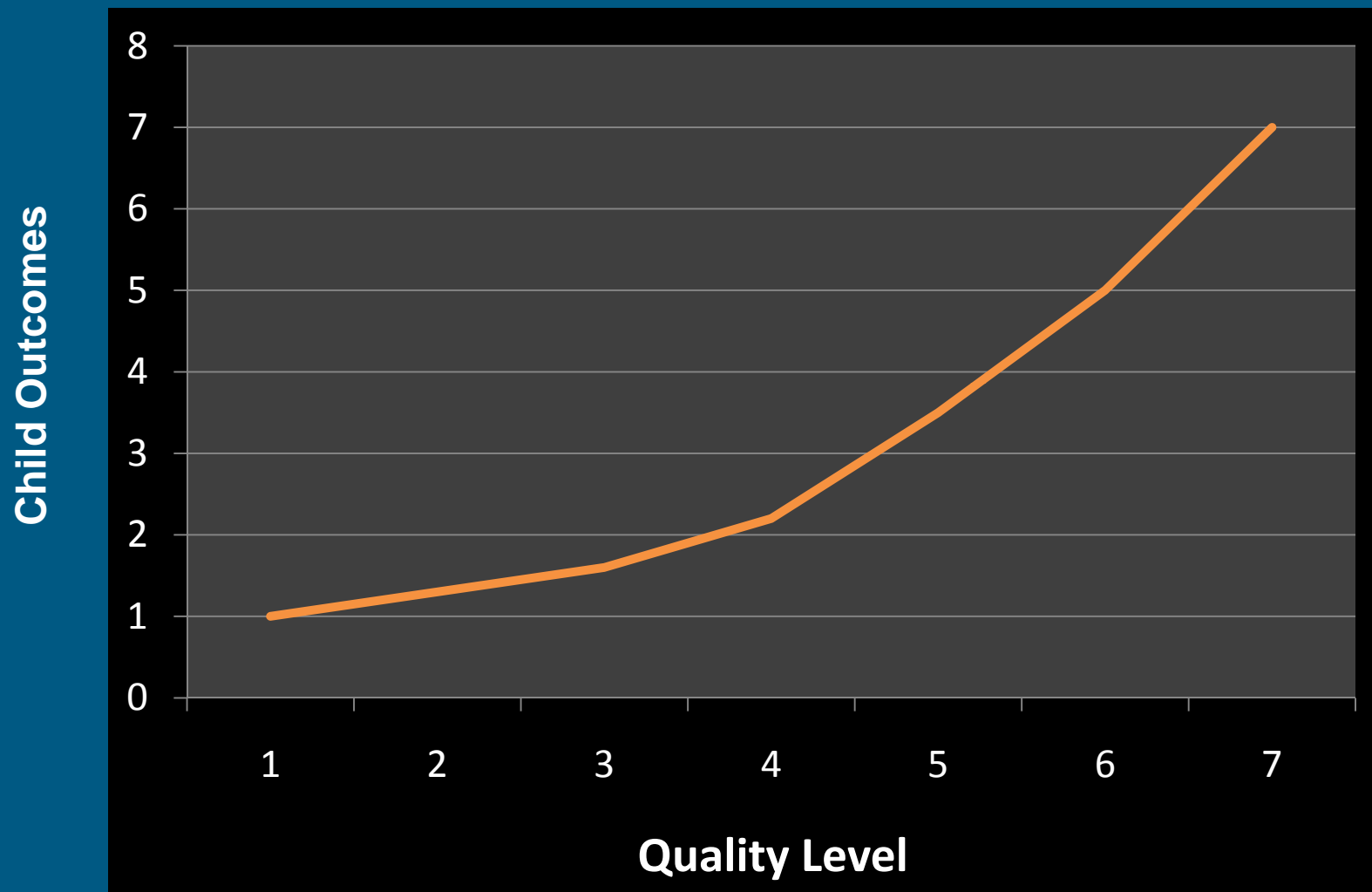
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- How much of a good thing is enough?
- Is more better?
- How much more is necessary?
- What is the relationship between quality and children's development and learning—outcomes?

# Quality-Outcomes Relationship: What We Might Assume



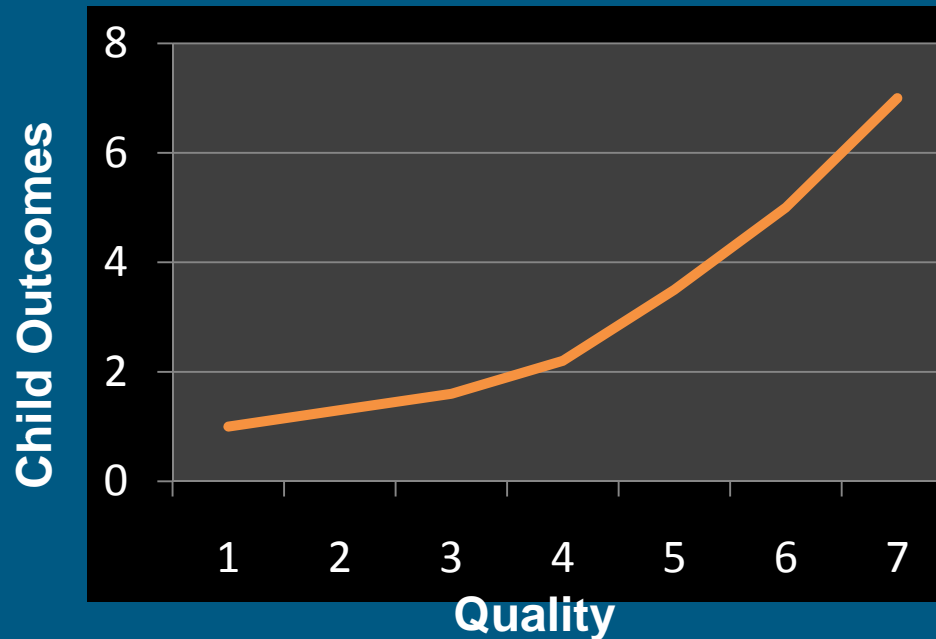
# What the Relationship Might Really Be (A)



## Or Maybe It's Like This (B)



## Implications of Relationship (A)

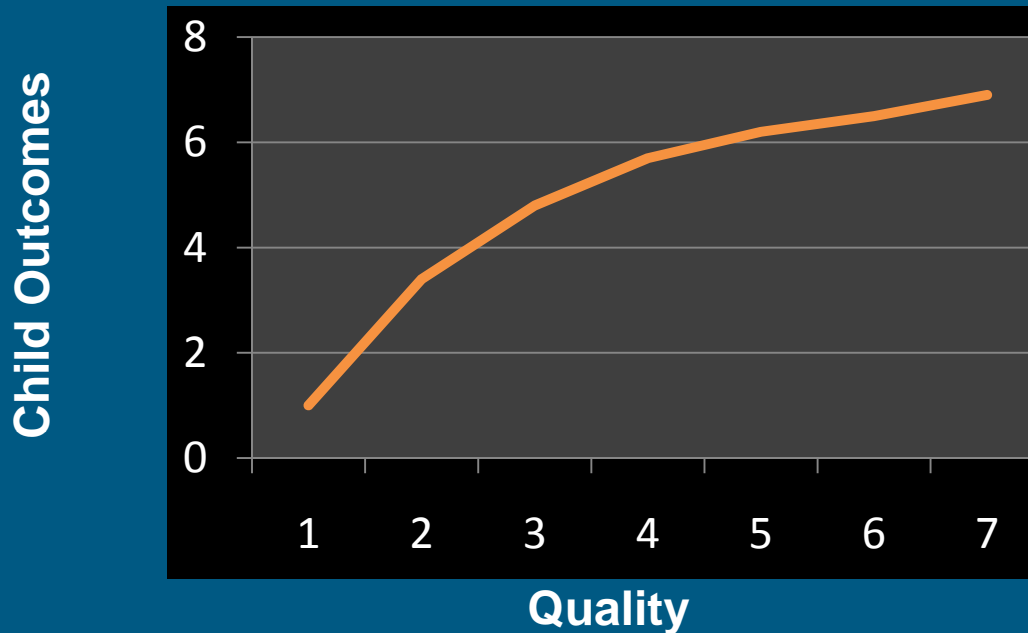


Increasing quality from 1-4 makes little difference.

Increases above 4 make a big difference.

So where would you invest quality improvement dollars?

## Implications of Relationship (B)



**Little impact of improving quality if it's already relatively good.**

**If this were the case, where would you invest quality improvement funds?**

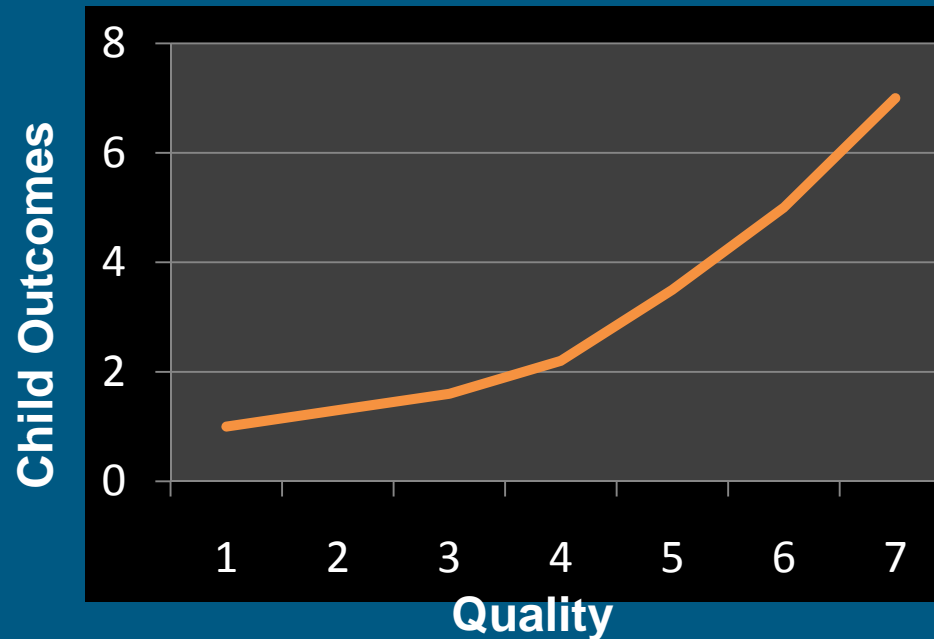
# And the Answer Is....



# Peg Burchinal and Colleagues

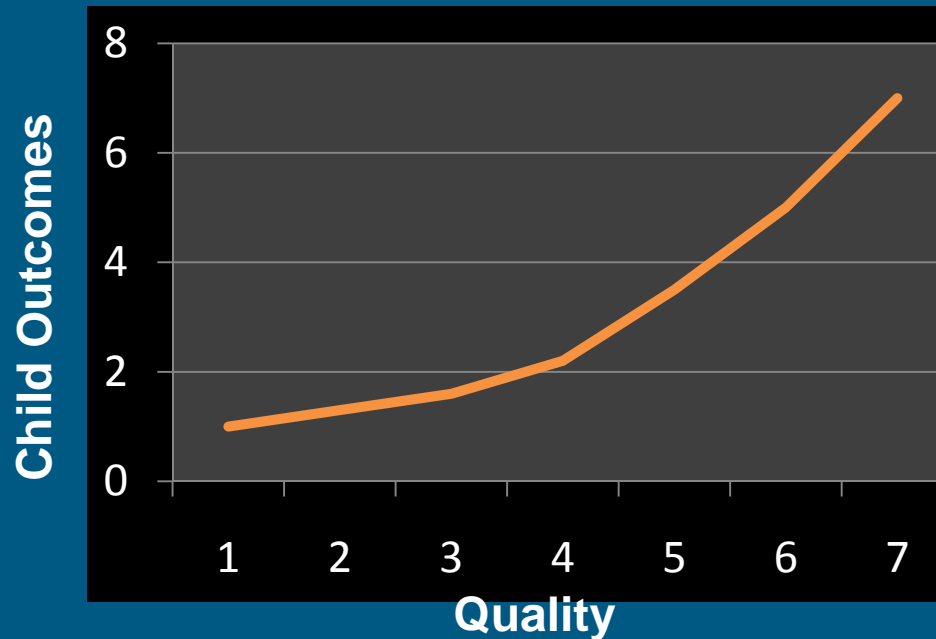
- 5 large data bases
- Including 11-state prekindergarten study
- Relationship looks like graph A
  - Quality is more strongly related to child outcomes in the moderate-to-high portion of the quality range.
  - Next 2 slides show examples—different dimensions of quality are related to different domains of children’s school readiness.
    - But same general relationship.

## Based on the Five Databases



**For *Emotional Support*: At moderate- to high-levels, improvements in emotional support relate to more-positive social competence and less-negative problem behaviors.**

## Based on the Five Databases



**For *Instructional Support*: At moderate- to high-levels, improvements in instructional support relate to improved reading, math, and expressive language.**

# Main Messages to Take Away

1. Quality IS important in preschool, center child care, and family child care homes.
2. Quality must be at least moderately good before it begins to make a difference, at least for programs serving low-income children.
3. The threshold may be different for different measures.
4. We will get more out of quality-improvement investments by working with moderately good programs.
5. But if we want to improve school readiness for all children in all settings, need to work harder to bring programs to moderate quality—and keep going to improve even more.
6. We can't predict the impact of quality improvement efforts without knowing what the starting point is in each program.
7. But just being “good enough” may not be good enough.