

## **C4: New Approaches to Quality Improvement in Early Care and Education Programs**

Wednesday, April 17, 2019

4:00 p.m. – 5:15 p.m. | *Burnham*

### **1. Descriptive Information**

#### **C4: New Approaches to Quality Improvement in Early Care and Education Programs**

Achieving and maintaining high quality in early care and education programs are central goals of state and local early childhood systems. The purpose of this session is to raise awareness of innovative quality improvement methods being tested in early care and education settings. The presenters will each share insights about a particular method of quality improvement including a Rapid Cycle Evaluation Coach and the Breakthrough Series Collaborative being used in different types of setting (Head Start, child care centers and family child care networks). The facilitator will then pose questions to the presenters to help identify similarities and contrasts among the QI approaches. The work presented in this session is quite different than the typical quality improvement approach, so the facilitator will aim to spark discussion about the potential of these new methods to provide better and more effective support in the quality improvement process.

#### **Facilitator**

**Michelle Adkins**, Child Care Aware  
**Kathryn Tout**, Child Trends

#### **Presenters**

**Nina Philipsen Hetzner**, OPRE | *An Overview of New Approaches for Quality Improvement*

**Anne Douglass**, University of Massachusetts, Boston | *A Theory of Change for the Culture of Continuous Learning Project*

**Juliet Bromer**, Erikson Institute | *Using Learning Collaboratives in Family Child Care Networks*

**Kaitlyn Newel**, CAP | *Supporting Decision-Making with the Rapid Cycle Evaluation Coach*

#### **Scribe**

**Caroline Faux**, ICF

### **2. Documents Available on Website**

- Bromer\_Using Learning Collaboratives
- Douglass\_Social and Emotional Learning
- Newell\_Rapid Cycle Evaluation Coach

### **3. Brief Summary of Presentations**

- **Summary of Presentation #1: Nina Philipsen Hetzner, OPRE | An Overview of New Approaches for Quality Improvement**
  - CQI models are used in combination with training/teaching models; staff/family child care providers/directors are empowered to test changes and promote improvement.
  - Presenters will share a lot about “little” data (informal, used by teacher/staff to set goals, fine-tune approaches, observational), “bigger” data (research tools, for research purposes).
  - Presentations demonstrate a move from a culture of compliance to a culture of improvement
  - Sustainability is a goal, teachers/family child care providers learn from CQI cycles to fine-tune current practices, problem-solve
- **Summary of Presentation #2: Anne Douglass, University of Massachusetts, Boston | A Theory of Change for the Culture of Continuous Learning Project**
  - CCL Project Overview: using a Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC-SEL) to improve quality. BSC was developed by Institute for Health Care Improvement

- A BSC brings together multiple teams across organizations that work towards a common aim using continuous quality improvements methods
  - The CCL Breakthrough Series Collaborative on SEL:
    - Project funded by OPRE
    - Assess the feasibility of implementing a CQI model- a breakthrough series collaborative (BSC) in Head Start and child care settings on social and emotional learning (SEL) in Boston, MA. This was a feasibility study to design an evaluation plan to exam effectiveness of SEL (addressed by using the Pyramid Model).
  - Theory of Change explains how to get from intervention to the ultimate outcomes (increasing social emotional learning, decreasing challenging behavior). The core components (strategy, outputs, mechanisms, outcomes, impact) are important. In outputs, structures that support relationships work processes/routines.
    - BSC: 5 components, all interact, team of people, each have their roles
    - This leads to increased knowledge, skills, and beliefs about SEL practices and how to improve organizational climate/culture, stronger leadership, and individual and collective efficacy.
    - In the long term, it also creates more nurturing, responsive, and supportive relationships and environments and strong family partnerships while also addressing racial equity and cultural responsiveness, organizational capacity for staff; and promoting continuous improvement. This impacts children’s social and emotional learning.
  - The team will produce a brief on the BSC-SEL Theory of Change and complete the CCL Feasibility Study. Final report anticipated in early 2020.
- **Summary of Presentation #3: Juliet Bromer, Erikson Institute | Using Learning Collaboratives in Family Child Care Networks**
    - This aim is to improve quality of toddler care in FCC by using a network approach. In September 2018, 10 teams of FCC networks that supported home-based child care providers across six states, pairing each team with 2 agency staff and 1 FCC provider. In order to help providers, there were monthly newsletters and peer support (“toddler teams” where ideas were exchanged, support group for mixed aged groups, Facebook page, mentoring, and community of practices).
    - Teams are working on TA from the network. This meant reducing administrative time spent on provider visits to focus on caregiving and planning for toddlers, connecting visits to training, using video to monitor behavior, and facilitating provider-child interactions during visits. The team asked questions about process measures and providers’ experience with peer support, TA visit, and how toddlers were observed.
    - Midpoint successes included tests of change, especially around observation of toddlers and facilitation of provider-to-provider sharing about toddler care. Teams reported an increased understanding of how to use practical data for weekly decision-making around quality improvement and see the value of documentation. They also increased sharing and collaboration across agency staff and providers and across networks and providers emerged as a driving force in spreading change and innovation and helping networks test ideas that make sense for home-based child care providers.
    - Midpoint challenges for network staff included network culture of compliance, lack of leadership engagement, paperwork burden, discomfort with data, team-work inexperience. For providers they had challenges with having time to participate and seeing value. On the implementation side, agencies worked in different policies/regulatory contexts, there’s a lack of measurement/evidence for what works, and a lingering question of who is the change agent.
  - **Summary of Presentation #4: Kaitlyn Newel, CAP | Supporting Decision-Making with the Rapid Cycle Evaluation Coach**
    - RCE Coaching is a free, easy to use platform that was launched in 2016 by the US Department of Education and Office of Educational Technology. It was updated in January 2017 and aids in decision making and reveals the need to narrow research questions, enhance data capacity and use, and assess and strengthen user readiness for the tool. A current revision to making the tool work better across sectors (including ECE) is underway.

- The Coach approach allows for rapid identification of results, continuous improvement cycles, and evaluation using rigorous experimental techniques.
- CAP Tulsa’s experience exploring RCE Coach: Reflections for CAP Tulsa and the field
  - The disciplined research planning process seems valuable. Adjustment-wise, pre-specifying the threshold for adoption or expansion of the pilot might add some agility to the decision-making process. Furthermore, selecting the correct tool is important. The experience found that RCE Coach might be most useful to CAP when there’s a well-defined pilot (with a treatment and control group), and when there’s a clear theory of change and clear parameters. There is already in-house capacity, processes, and tools to support pilots and implementation.
  - RCE Coach may be useful for organizations without experienced research and innovation staff.
- Next Steps
  - Plans for RCE Coach enhancements include: developing a more generic front end, incorporating continuous improvement modules, determining whether specific customization is needed (for ECE)
  - In terms of customizing levels of support, they should look at changing the consulting model (conduct the work), technical assistance model (train/support the evaluator), and capacity building model (train-the-trainer).

#### 4. Summary of Key Issues Raised

- *Emerging findings that may be of particular interest to policy-makers and ACF?*
  - The culture of compliance was a challenge that was brought up in multiple studies.
  - For RCE Coaching, front end planning pieces are useful for providers, accessible for who you’re serving, intervention, how you’re changing, who you’re changing
  - Also point out that not just the internal capacity, but who they’re networked with
- *Methodological issues including innovative methodologies that may help maximize resources available for research and evaluation?*
  - Peer support groups
- *Follow-up activities suggested addressing questions and gaps (e.g., secondary analyses of data, consensus meetings of experts, research synthesis or brief, webinar, etc.)?*
  - For the BSC SEL Theory of change, a brief on the BSC-SEL Theory of Change will be published and it plans to complete the CCL Feasibility Study with a final report anticipated in early 2020.
  - CAP-The disciplined research planning process seems valuable. – Pre-specifying the threshold for adoption or expansion of the pilot might add some agility to the decision-making process.
  - With regards to the Bromer study, there are agencies working in different policy and regulatory contexts, so those contexts should be explored.
  - There’s a lack of evidence for and measurement of “what works” in family child care and toddler care and a question of who is the change agent.
  - For RCE Coaching, pre-specifying the threshold for adoption or expansion of the pilot might add some agility to the decision-making process.
  - RCE Coaching should also evaluate the effects of a social-emotional supplementary curriculum on children’s protective factors and behavior concerns. It could use rapid cycle approach to make informed decisions about how and when to scale promising pilots.
    - Could RCE Coaching be more generic? Could be an early childhood version?
- *Recommendations about future ACF child care research directions and priorities?*
  - RCE Coaching should developing a more generic front end, incorporate continuous improvement modules, and determine whether specific customization is needed for child care
  - It should also do this by customizing levels of support for its consulting model, TA model (train/support the evaluator), and capacity building model (train-the-trainer).