

## Investigating Leverage Points in Quality Rating and Improvement Systems: Profiles of Quality and Professional Perspectives

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### Project Description

The main purpose of this study is to understand key aspects of theory of change undergirding Quality Rating and Improvement Systems. This research project is two-fold, and includes both a quantitative and qualitative study. The quantitative study will identify leverage points of quality through a profile analysis approach. This project will seek to also understand the unique experiences of ECE professionals along the pathway to quality improvement through their involvement in Nebraska's QRIS (Step Up to Quality; SUTQ). The qualitative study is taking a phenomenological approach to describe the experiences of ECE professionals participated in the first year of Nebraska's SUTQ and will inform key improvements and changes to SUTQ.

### Research Questions

- What profiles of quality exist within the Midwest Childcare Research Consortium and Study and State-Wide Early Education Programs (SWEEP) data sets?
- Which characteristics of providers, settings and supports for quality predict profile membership?
- Will experience, training, provider beliefs and attitudes, and program characteristics predict membership into higher quality profile groups?
- Will providers perceive a QRIS as helpful?
- What are ECE professionals' motivations for participating in SUTQ and engaging in quality improvement?

### Sample

Quantitative Study: The SWEEP data (2003-2004) set includes detailed information on pre-kindergarten teachers, children and families five states: Massachusetts, New Jersey, Texas,

Washington, and Wisconsin (N = 465 sites). The Midwest QRS Pilot Study (2005-2007) includes observations of quality, teacher/provider and director surveys, and administrative data. The participants were ECE programs in Nebraska, Missouri, Kansas, Iowa and parents of enrolled children (N = 600 classrooms, 2,200 child care providers and 200 child care directors).

Qualitative Study: Focus groups were conducted in April & May 2015 for Early Care & Education (ECE) professionals participating in SUTQ during the first year of implementation to gain their perspectives of QRIS. Separate focus groups were conducted for in-home and center-based ECE programs. There were six total focus groups; two comprised of family child care providers and four were center-based providers. One focus group was specifically for centers required to participate in SUTQ (due to their high level of CCDF funding). There were approximately 10 participants in each focus group. Additionally, all focus groups occurred at convenient times and locations for providers.

### Methods

This research study employs a multi-methods research study is to examine potential processes by which QRIS may drive improved quality in ECE. The quantitative secondary data analysis of the Midwest Childcare Research Consortium and Study and SWEEP data sets, as well as a phenomenological qualitative study of providers' experiences of participating in the newly implemented SUTQ program. The qualitative and quantitative components of this study will identify leverage points of quality that can inform key changes during initial implementation of the Nebraska QRIS, as well as be applied to quality

improvement of ECE programs. Professional perspectives of QRS will also be examined through a profile analysis approach.

### **Progress Update**

For the *quantitative* study, data sets were cleaned and prepared with chosen variables to be analyzed. SPSS software was used to conduct some initial frequency analyses. We are having regularly scheduled meetings with a methodologist from the MAP Academy (Nebraska Academy for Methodology, Analytics and Psychometrics) regarding the latent profile analysis of the SWEEP and Midwest QRS data sets.

For the *qualitative* study, UNL collaboratively worked with the Nebraska Department of Education's Director of Step Up to Quality (QRIS), the contracted QRIS evaluator APA Consulting (Augenblick, Palaich and Associates) and First Five Nebraska to draft and approve a data sharing agreement that allowed UNL to both attend provider focus groups as well as obtain focus group transcriptions for use in this research project.

UNL also worked with APA to develop focus group questions, scripts and informed consent forms to be used to conduct the ECE provider focus groups. Although APA took the lead on conducting all 6 focus groups, we were actively involved and attended the ones conducted in the Lincoln and Omaha areas of Nebraska. APA transcribed all of the focus groups using the computer software QuickTime Pro and was shared with UNL for exclusive use in this current research study. We have started coding the transcribed focus group documents, and will soon be moving into a qualitative analysis approach that is in congruent with the phenomenological approach.

### **Implications for policy/practice**

This study will extend our understanding about factors associated with membership in ECE quality profiles, as well as examine patterns of these profiles. This combined with obtaining qualitative data about professionals' perceptions of QRIS, will help to better inform focused professional development and investments in quality improvement by the newly-implemented Nebraska SUTQ. The qualitative analysis can provide valuable information about key aspects of the theory of change undergirding QRIS in general, specifically the assumption that parents will use ratings to obtain better quality care for their children and ECE professionals are motivated to achieve the highest possible ratings in order to maintain or improve their enrollment will strive to provide better quality care.

### **Implications for research**

This study is a multi- methods approach. By including both a quantitative and qualitative research study we can more fully extend our learning about which factors impact membership within profiles, as well as examine patterns of these. As we learn about the providers' experiences of SUTQ, we hope to inform key refinements to the Nebraska QRIS; as well as increase research in the field surrounding the voices of participants in a QRIS.

### **Contact**

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