Using Continuous Quality Improvement Methods to Support Practice Change and a Culture of Continuous Learning

Tuesday, August 4, 2020

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Culture of Continuous Learning Project:
A Breakthrough Series Collaborative for Improving Child Care and Head Start Quality

Partners:
Acknowledgements

OPRE Project Officers:

• Nina Philipsen Hetzner
• Ivelisse Martinez-Beck
• Sarah Blankenship
• Amy Madigan

Funding for this project comes from research set-aside funds from the CCDBG Act of 2014 and from the Office of Head Start
Goals for this Presentation

• Build awareness about a new, promising quality improvement (QI) approach.

• Promote an initial understanding about the mechanisms by which this approach improves quality in ECE settings.

• Share early findings about opportunities and challenges of implementing this QI approach in ECE settings.
The Challenge of Quality Improvement in ECE

A. ECE directors, teachers, and staff need support in putting training into practice.

B. Coaching or TA on QI is often not provided at the program or organizational level.

C. Difficult to sustain changes over time.

D. Content is not adapted to the context of the program.
Poll

Which of these challenges has been the hardest for you to address?
The Culture of Continuous Learning (CCL) Project

Implemented an innovative quality improvement (QI) method, the Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC), in early care and education (ECE) settings.

Designed and implemented a study to learn how the BSC methodology worked in these ECE settings and assessed its feasibility as a QI method for ECE.
BSC Methodology: The 5 Core Strategies

The Breakthrough Series Collaborative (BSC) methodology is an action-focused quality improvement and implementation project that helps move training into practice. The BSC engages teams to work towards a shared, measurable goal.
• Design classrooms in responsive ways
• Develop and maintain predictable schedules, routines and activities to promote smooth transitions
• Design activities to promote engagement
• Provide directions
• Teach behavior expectations
• Teachers develop nurturing, meaningful relationships with children and colleagues

• Teach children to express emotions appropriately
• Teach children problem solving skills
• Teach children positive peer relationship skills
• Encourages children’s autonomy
• Embed opportunities for children to practice skills in daily routines and interactions
• Use effective strategies to respond to challenging behaviors

• Use open, consistent communication with families
• Invite and support parent participation in the classroom and center
• Develop positive, respectful, meaningful, culturally affirming relationships with families
• Connect families to concrete supports in times of need
• Collaborate with families to support the parent-child relationship and the families’ promotion of their child’s social and emotional competencies
• Support/promote parent confidence/competence (parental resilience)

• Have and use a system to collect and review data by race/ethnicity, language, gender, and ability
• Provide ongoing professional development and reflection opportunities for staff on cultural responsiveness, implicit bias, and race equity
• Honor and reflect diverse identities and families in the classroom and center environment
• Develop clear policies and guidelines for preventing challenging behaviors that are free from bias, and ensure equity and fairness

• Create a culture of collaboration in the classroom and center
• Use facilitative leadership and reflective supervision
• Support healthy staff, stress-reduction, adult relational competencies, self-regulation
• Use data systems to track behavior and social and emotional competence
• Ensure access to mental health consultation
• Maintain effective staffing patterns
• Nurture a positive workplace climate where staff feel supported and valued
• Provide ongoing training and coaching
Not “training as usual”: Action ➔ Organizational Change

A. Honors the importance of cross-team collaboration.
B. Uses data to drive improvements.
C. Continuous focus on changes that result in improvements.
D. Focuses on the organizational system and culture.
E. Mobilizes leadership at all levels (teachers, administrators, and parents).
F. Intentionally draws upon the social dynamics of change.
G. Promotes an inquiry mindset.
Poll

Which of these is most exciting to you?
What is the Breakthrough Series Collaborative?

https://www.childtrends.org/project/culture-of-continuous-learning-project
The CCL Project Process and Timeline
Theory of Change: the underlying concepts, structures, and processes

**STRATEGY**

The BSC on SEL

- Shared learning environment
- Cross role teams
- Model for improvement
- Change framework based on the Pyramid Model
- Expert faculty

**OUTPUTS**

The BSC produces these outputs:
- Learning Sessions, Monthly Metrics,
- Action Periods (calls, website posting, PDSAs),
- Consultation with teams.
These outputs establish new structures and work processes for teams

**Structures** that support relationships (routines for collaborative professional learning: team and affinity group meetings)

**Work processes/routines** (adoption of protocols for collaborative learning and improvement: organizational self-assessment; PDSAs to test changes and adaptations in practices in the local context)
ECE Program Engagement with BSC Structures and Processes

Programs were able to participate in the BSC-SEL, but there was variation within and across programs:

• In-person activities (e.g., learning sessions, site visits).
• Senior Leader calls.
• Parent participation.
• Submission of monthly metrics.

Participants had very positive perceptions of their experiences with the BSC-SEL, noted it was different from other trainings, and saw benefits.
The Importance of Senior Leader Engagement in BSC-SEL Activities

Figure: Senior Leader Calls attended by Program

Source: CCL implementation team records.
“[The Senior Leader Track] was helpful if I could have participated more. I think that my position here and having to attend meetings - or impromptu meetings sometimes- ...prevented me from participating in the BSC as I wanted to as a team leader [senior leader].” (Director)
“I like the conference calls personally because it makes me feel important. Because your voice is being heard... You'd be surprised when you hear different centers going through the same thing you're doing. And most of the time, you're really helping someone out when they hear your voice. And when you hear their voice, they're helping you out.” (Senior Leader)
Examples of Improvements Tested and Implemented by Teams through PDSAs

Driver 1: Relationships and Environments

- **Consistent caregivers to ease transitions**
  - At drop off;
  - During nap times; and
  - When moving to a new classroom

- **Environmental cues to support engagement**
  - Mirrors
  - Funny faces
  - Soothing music

- **Getting outside (regardless of weather)**
  - Add a co-teacher
  - Set clear goals
  - Streamline diaper changes
  - Plan activities with minimal messes before outside time

- **Smooth transitions between classrooms**
  - As child transitions, teachers send along the strategies that work for that child and create a key ring with pictures for the schedule and other strategies.

- **Smooth transitions between activities**
  - Give 2 minute / 1 minute warnings
  - Use singing, bells, singing bowls, music

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Spreading and Sustaining Practices through PDSAs

“Take a walk, have a talk, take a minute just to think, have a cool drink, stretch your back, blow some steam, we know what you mean. Just TAKE 5”

MADE PERMANENT!
The entire center embraced the strategy of TAKE 5 to promote staff wellness and support. The policy was communicated to the entire staff. Teachers know that if they need a break they can call the non-teaching staff to step into the classroom for 5 minutes in order to ensure appropriate ratio. The team created a catchy name – TAKE 5 -- and a poem to share the policy.

STARTED SMALL AND DEVELOPED THE IDEA
Center focused on center climate and staff wellness. One Teacher tested the idea of working with her co-teacher on a system to be able to step out for a 5-minute break if she needed. The team learned about the strategy from a training.

BROADENED TEST AND CONTINUED TO LEARN
The team learned that strategy was really helpful for staff to stay present and calm. It was spread to other teachers to test.
Tell us in the Chat

• 1. Why does organizational change require you to pay attention to organizational system and culture?

• 2. What happens if you don’t?
Testing Small Changes can Result in Measurable Improvements Over Time

Preschool Classroom: # of Challenging Behaviors Observed during one 2-hr period each Week
Programs Collected and Submitted Monthly Metrics at Varying Levels

Figure: Two-way teacher-family communication metrics submissions by program

Source: CCL implementation team records.

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Barriers and Facilitators for Documenting Monthly Metrics

We were doing it [collecting data] before the BSC program, but...unfortunately, we've been very short of staff for quite some time now. We are just getting ourselves situated...so we are surely doing as much as we can, and I hope we do do a lot better.

Director
Barriers and Facilitators for Documenting Monthly Metrics

"...using the observations and the collection [monthly metrics]...That's where the special project person was really good. He was good at taking the data, analyzing it. Because if they can't see the analysis of something, it makes it hard from them to understand why do we keep doing this."

Director
MECHANISMS

The Strategy and its Outputs activate these mechanisms:
- Shifts in the relational dynamics within and among organizational members,
- Shifts in participants’ mindsets about changing their professional practices

Relational dynamics within organizations
- Psychological safety
- Team member efficacy
- Parallel process
- Intra-organizational learning

Relational dynamics among organizations
- Inter-organizational (vicarious) learning

Mindsets
- Inquiry mindset
Activation of Mechanisms

• There is **mixed evidence** that hypothesized mechanisms were activated in programs through participation in the BSC-SEL. Some programs started and stayed at high levels on:
  - Psychological safety.
  - Teacher and director efficacy.

• Evidence of **cross-team learning** and shifts in **organizational dynamics** as programs reported learning from and sharing strategies with other participating programs.

• Participants demonstrated an **inquiry mindset** in their approach to addressing challenges at their programs.
Psychological Safety: Some Programs Start and Stay High

- Psychological safety measured whether work environments were a safe space to try new ideas, make mistakes, and provide input or ask for help.
- There was not much change in reported levels of psychological safety, but there appear to be group differences:
  - Robust participation group started and stayed higher in psychological safety over time.
  - Moderate participation group showed some growth in psychological safety over time.

Source: CCL feasibility study Time 1 and Time 2 survey.
Director and Teacher Efficacy: Group Differences Diminish Over Time

Figure: Director/assistant director efficacy by participation group
Maximum possible score = 135

Figure: Teacher efficacy by participation group
Maximum possible score = 180

Source: CCL feasibility study Time 1 and Time 2 survey.
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Activation of Cross-Team Learning

It [the BSC] was a lot of fun. All the games were so fun. To have a whole group running and laughing [at Learning Sessions]...” “What I liked was switching it up and talking to people, and give you thought provoking questions. I learned a lot about other people’s culture.

Two Core BSC Team Members
Activation of Inquiry Mindset

I see the staff [Core BSC Team members]; they take notes when things are being shared by all the participants [on calls]. And they say, ‘Okay, great. Let me do this in my classroom. Let me see how that will go in my room.’

Director
Activation of Inquiry Mindset

They are approaching things as a PDSA. I didn't get the sense that [they] were tracking that but...it changed the way [they] approached [their] projects as leaders. [They were] telling other programs about [their] experience with it, spreading the community that way.

Faculty Member
Leadership Support for Inquiry Mindset

[It’s about] really talking to people more as a supervisor and saying 'I'm not asking you for perfection. I'm asking you to look at one thing you think you can change and work on and let's check in about that and see how it goes.' You know? I think it makes people feel that they are better supported too.

Director
Leadership Support for Inquiry Mindset

Getting them [Core BSC team members] involved in this is scary because they think they are failing. It's not failing; it's a learning process. They need to learn how to use it. Once you learn how to do all that, you will better yourself and children can learn from it. It's not a fast-paced thing. It's baby steps...I involve myself in it and tell them it's okay and to keep trying.

Director
Theory of Change – Outcomes and Impact

**SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES**
- Increased knowledge, skills, beliefs, and attitudes about SEL, family engagement, racial equity and cultural responsiveness, and how to make and sustain improvements
- Improved organizational climate and culture
- Stronger leadership at all levels of the organization
- Increased sense of individual and collective efficacy

**LONG-TERM OUTCOMES**
- Supportive relationships and environments
- High-quality SEL teaching practices
- Strong family partnerships
- SEL practices rooted in racial equity and cultural responsiveness
- Organizational capacity to support continuous learning for improvement

**IMPACT**
- Improved SEL quality in classrooms and program wide
- Increase in children’s social and emotional competence
- Decrease in challenging behaviors
Observed Short-term Outcomes of the BSC-SEL

- Individuals’ **knowledge, skills, attitudes about social and emotional learning** were very high at Time 1 with little room for growth over time.

- Some evidence of **spread of quality improvement practices**.

- **Organizational culture** improved in some of the participating programs.

- **Stronger leadership** across all levels of participating programs.
Spread of Quality Improvement Practices – Use of PDSA Cycles

Source: CCL feasibility study Time 2 survey.
Spread of Quality Improvement Practices – Solicitation of Ideas and Feedback

Source: CCL feasibility study Time 2 survey.
Tell us in the Chat

Share examples of structures and tools that people use in centers to promote change.
Organizational Infrastructure Supported Spread of Quality Improvement Practices

All of our classrooms are set up [with] a joining door between the two classrooms in the middle...What I found was that whatever the BSC team teacher was trying out, she would actually tell the other teacher that is not a part of the BSC team about it, and that it worked. Then the other teacher would try it too with a child...So it's like a ripple effect.

Director
“Take a walk, have a talk, take a minute just to think, have a cool drink, stretch your back, blow some steam, we know what you mean. Just TAKE 5”

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Organizational Culture: Some Programs Start and Stay High

Figure: Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey – Part I: Facets of Job Satisfaction by Participation Group

Source: CCL feasibility study Time 1 and Time 2 survey.
Leadership at All Levels

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Leadership at All Levels

I would say leadership, in our pre-k, afterschool, I/T [has improved]– [teacher’s name] takes the initiative to work with the children in the classrooms and share what she learned with other teachers…So adapting what they’ve learned, from what I’ve observed in the center, has made them better teachers compared to before.

Core BSC Team Member
Leadership at All Levels

She [a Core BSC Team teacher] has grown quite a bit because she asks a lot more questions, she wants to have the lead on a lot more things, she wants to get a lot more things done in terms of data collection and making sure others do the same. So, she has definitely grown and is taking a major step to becoming one of the leaders.

Senior Leader/Team Leader
The Opportunities and Challenges of a BSC for ECE Settings

• Breakthrough Series Collaborative is an innovative quality improvement methodology that **is feasible** to implement in ECE but **requires significant investment**:  
  - Commitment of 12-18 months for multiple members of a program, including parents.  
  - Full days out of the ECE setting 4-5 times a year.  
  - Commitment to collecting and sharing data on a regular basis, including monthly metrics.

• **Some programs** are able to engage with and benefit from the BSC methodology more than others. Characteristics of such programs:
  - Strong and/or innovative **organizational infrastructure**.
  - Supportive **senior leadership**.
  - High levels of **initial psychological safety** among staff.

• **Competing demands** (other meetings, staffing shortages, parenting responsibilities) can impede engagement with the BSC methodology.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Example items</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Job Satisfaction Survey (ECJSS; Bloom, 2010)</td>
<td>“I feel encouraged and supported by my colleagues”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 1999)</td>
<td>“If you make a mistake at this center, it is often held against you”</td>
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<td>Maslach Burnout Inventory Educators Survey – Emotional Exhaustion subscale (Maslach, Jackson, &amp; Leiter, 1997)</td>
<td>“I feel emotionally drained from my work”</td>
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<td>Perceived Problems (Johnston, 1984, as adapted by Bloom)</td>
<td>“I have a problem getting children to do what I ask them to do”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beliefs Around Social and Emotional Learning (Brackett et al., 2012, adapted)</td>
<td>“I feel confident in my ability to provide support for social and emotional learning”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran &amp; Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; VandeWiele, 2001, adapted)</td>
<td>“How much can you do to make positive changes in your care setting?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directors’ Efficacy Scale from the Directors’ Role Perception Survey (Bloom, 2019)</td>
<td>“I am often uncertain about how much authority I have”</td>
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<td>Self-report of BSC Activities*</td>
<td>“Please indicate the extent to which your team used the following during the course of the 12-month collaborative period: The use of plan–do–study–act cycles”</td>
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</table>

*Only collected at Time 2
Questions and Further Discussion

This Word Cloud was created by wordart.com using the words in the Collaborative Change Framework’s Primary and Secondary Drivers.
Thank You!

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Please respond to the two questions that pop up on your screen.

Also, please tell us in the chat box what was useful, significant, or new and how we can improve the webinar.