

E2: Exploring an Integrated Implementation Study Framework: From the Frontline to Systems

Thursday, February 8, 2018

1:30 p.m. – 2:45 p.m. | Washington II

1. Descriptive Information

E2: Exploring an Integrated Implementation Study Framework: From the Frontline to Systems

Administrators at multiple levels of the ECE system wonder how variations in policy or program implementation alter effectiveness of services for children and families, and about differential affects for vulnerable populations. Meanwhile, researchers study implementation through multiple frameworks. In this session, we explore the question, “How can we develop a stronger body of knowledge on ECE program/policy implementation that accounts for multiple levels of implementation?” We will start with an overview of frameworks, including policy implementation frameworks, intervention and implementation fidelity frameworks, and implementation science frameworks. We will provide discussion questions, and kick off discussion with remarks from a representative of the National Center on Program Management & Fiscal Operations regarding bridging research to practice.

Facilitator

Tamara Halle, Child Trends and **Teresa Derrick-Mills**, Urban Institute

Panelists

Pam Joshi and **Kate Giapponi Schneider**, Brandeis University | *Using Policy Implementation Evaluation Frameworks to Study State Child Care Subsidy Policy Changes*

Michelle Maier, MDRC | *Using Intervention and Implementation Fidelity Frameworks to Study Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI)*

Noreen M. Yazejian, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill | *Using Implementation Science to Evaluate Educare’s Implementation*

Discussant

Jacque Davis, National Center on Program Management & Fiscal Operations

Scribe

Chandra Curtis, ICF

2. Documents Available on Website

- Exploring an Integrated Implementation Study Framework: From the Frontline to Systems
- Using Intervention and Implimentation Fidelity Frameworks to Study Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI)
- Using Implementation Science to Evaluate Educare's Implementation
- Evaluating the Implementation of Child Care Subsidy Policy and Administrative Changes
- The Management Wheel

3. Brief Summary of Presentations:

- **Introduction to Presentations: Tamara Halle:** Implementation is not an event, but a process. There are several frameworks for capturing implementation of early childhood programs and policies. One such framework, used by several presenters today, integrates the stages of implementation with three critical components of implementation: implementation teams, data and feedback loops, and implementation infrastructure.
- **Summary of Presentation #1/Panelist: Michelle Maier:** Variations in Implementation of Quality Interventions (VIQI).

- Project goals: Examine causal effect of dimensions of quality on child outcomes; determine whether there are thresholds (non-linearity) in this effect; and understand variation in impacts and implementation across different ECE settings and initial levels of quality
 - Approach (pilot study): Three-group, random assignment design. Will include Head Start and community-based early care and education centers serving mixed aged children. Child outcome data will be collected on 3-year-olds. Centers will be randomly assigned to receive one of two different curricula or to a business-as-usual control condition.
 - VIQI's process study research questions focus on sample characteristics, implementation systems, fidelity of implementation, and the service contrast.
 - We developed an overarching conceptual model that guides the implementation and impact sides of the study. It highlights multilevel drivers of implementation, or inputs, outputs or activities and services delivered from installing the intervention, and shorter and longer-term outcomes.
 - Implementation framework takes an ecological systems approach and uses the NIRN framework as a base to provide an understanding of the proximal and distal drivers of implementation (macros/community level, administrative level, and center-level including the implementation system. Discussed various drivers.
 - Talked through a visual providing a deeper dive into the implementation framework.
 - Competency drivers are mechanisms to sustain staff ability to implement an intervention (competencies, education, experience).
 - Organization drivers create and sustain an organization infrastructure (supportive, enabling environment).
 - Leadership drivers include leadership style, buy-in, and facilitation of professional supports.
 - The implementation system includes professional development activities, curricular materials, assessments tools, and data infrastructure.
 - As intervention is being put into place, the framework shows the associated outputs, or services delivered and received. Visual highlights the importance of fidelity of implementation -- Is the intervention delivered as intended? Finally, we can ask does implementation of the intervention show the intended effects/outcomes for children?
 - VIQI measurement approach. Focused presentation on examples of center-level constructs we plan on assessing and how they map back onto the implementation framework presented.
 - In summary, we created a conceptual model—framework that guides the research and measurement approaches and we plan on using it to help interpret findings.
- **Summary of Presentation #2/Panelist: Noreen Yazejian:** Using Implementation Science to evaluate Educare's implementation.
 - History of Educare started in south side Chicago.
 - Partnered with Buffett Early Childhood Foundation and Ounce Prevention to create the Educare Network, a nationwide network.
 - Serves more than 3,000 children who are at risk.
 - Educare model = Core Features; Child and Family Outcomes. Data utilization component set Educare apart from other programs.
 - How are the data used? Each center/site has a local education partner (from a University) to improve practice. Participation in a national implementation study.
 - Three core elements must be considered for implementation: implementation teams, data and feedback loops, and implementation infrastructure.
 - Conducted a utilization study.
 - Findings—not relevant for this session; the process is more relevant. Challenges related to aligning evaluation with stage-based framework—different stages of implementation depending on when the school joined the network. Staff come together as part of the Educare Learning Network—structure changes and evolving learning components (not a static system).
 - We learned the importance of aligning evaluation questions and approaches.

- **Summary of Presentation #3/Panelist: Pam Joshi and Kate Giapponi Schneider:** Federal Policy implementation evaluation research — often focuses on the “black box” between policy changes and policy outcomes (included in legislation or regulations).
 - Federal policy implementation research includes multiple methods and purposes. Theory informs research design, measures and interpretation of findings. At this point, there is not one Meta framework because researchers approach policy implementation evaluation from different vantage points such as an organizational management/performance lens or political theory (example: street level bureaucracy). The implementation evaluation design will depend on whether policy implementation research is conducted retrospectively or prospectively and whether the research questions are exploratory or explanatory.
 - One policy framework developed by Werner (2004) that has informed the team’s implementation evaluation includes three meta research questions):
 - What is happening?
 - Is it expected/desired?
 - Why is it happening?
 - Discussed data source examples for Massachusetts. Implementing CCDBG Admin changes in Massachusetts (switching the location/entity conducting voucher reassessment) beginning in 2012.
 - Impetus for change is that it was supposed to be a family-friendly process and reduce workloads for the child care resource and referral agencies (CCR&Rs) by transferring CCR&R voucher reassessment responsibilities for children who attended contracted providers to the child care providers/umbrella agencies that they attend (e.g. YMCA).
 - Research approach—a mixed methods evaluation that was retrospective (policy change had already happened before the implementation evaluation) and exploratory (there was little information about the policy changes and no specific performance management goals).
 - Implementation research study was key to understanding the results of the impact study focused on how these changes affected stability of subsidy receipt (small positive impact) and informed the development of measures included in the impact model (specifically travel distance measures – found that families did not have to travel due to remote reassessment and outpost options).
- **Summary of Presentation #4/Discussant: Jacquie Davis:** Shared the Head Start Management Wheel as an example of how research on implementation is translated into the practice of Head Start programs.
 - National technical assistance centers such as the National Center on Program Management & Fiscal Operations have the role of translating implementation research into useful and practical knowledge for Head Start.
 - The Head Start Management Systems Wheel echoes the importance of the big picture perspective. Its overall message is: When innovative leadership, strong management systems, and well-designed services are working together, quality child and family outcomes are the result.
 - The implementation framework drivers of competency, organizational, and leadership are the foundations to program operations.

4. Brief Summary of Discussion

- Question: We don’t want implementation to be in the “black box” forever—how do we translate this research into practitioner-focused processes or build knowledge in this field?
- Question: Regarding metrics—is there a potential pathway to markers that will highlight the drivers. What metrics have come from implementation?
- Response: Pre-K to 2nd grade Early Learning Network study funded by IES focuses on the early learning experiences of children. Created a curriculum fidelity tool. Still working on what kind of metrics you can gain—but it’s data rich. Trying to use implementation research to inform the district. How can we give back information that’s useful to them?
- Response: NIRN has a measure to look at implementation drivers best practices—not a rapid research tool—but there are some tools for folks doing research. Educare does have an implementation checklist.

- Question: Implementation data seems descriptive. We need to go past descriptions. What packages of implementation are quality rich? How soon are we going to be going beyond describing?
- Response: We're thinking how can we link implementation to impact: MIHOPE (Mother and Infant Home Visiting Program Evaluation) is a larger national study with thousands of programs, linking implementation to impact.
- Comment: Plenary session today talked about getting to the measurement of implementation within ACF framework.
- Response: There's a lot of latitude in service delivery—hard to deliver a performance metric—easier to do it from site to site as opposed to national.
- Question: Mentioned structured observations of caseworker-client interactions—can you talk more about that?
- Response: [The child care subsidy study] designed an observation tool that included structured and unstructured components. The main goals of the client-caseworker observations were to figure out the child care voucher reassessment service delivery model in CCR&Rs and contracted providers and how the model varied across the state and to document the family friendly practices of caseworkers at CCR&R's and contracted providers as experienced by families. The team shadowed agency workers and observed how that process played out. Observe the process and document it (unstructured) but also check off whether required activities/paperwork/rules were implemented (structured).
- Question: About implementation science—what do you think about framing implementation research around implementation science for this work?
- Response: Implementation science was created to improve implementation—taking that framework and funneling it to improve our work creates a more structured lens (professional development, policies, procedures, etc.). We still need to get better at the descriptive side—covering all the different angles.
- Response: You need to know what you need out of implementation science. If you have a very well defined model and you implement it well, you will get results. Whatever the “it” is. It's a lens to look through—varying angles and topics.
- Response: It also shows if the theory of change is correct.

5. Summary of Key issues raised

- Implementation frameworks can help us understand *why* we get the results that we do for early childhood programs and policies.
- Implementation frameworks can be helpful in systematizing what to examine, but sometimes important processes or stages are not known and the work needs to be more exploratory.
- Implementation frameworks should go beyond mere description to *explaining* the relationships between program or policy components and desired or expected outcomes. But, exploration is needed before explanation.
- Although some implementation frameworks suggest that design occurs before implementation, some programs or strategies are designed and implemented at the same time making more exploratory work important (this is particularly likely in a policy implementation environment).
- Prospective studies that document processes as they unfold are better positioned for future explanatory development than retrospective studies.
- A challenge that remains is embedding measures of implementation supports, and implementation quality, within program and policy evaluation models.