

Quality Topics Relevant for Policy and Practice

Description

Panelists in this plenary session presented findings, questions, and issues addressed in recent work funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation and during a series of working meetings on the topic of measuring quality in research, policy, and practice. The plenary consisted of the following three presentations:

1. Findings of associations between observations of quality and child outcomes (Margaret Burchinal). This presentation briefly summarized the results of a coordinated set of analyses looking at the relationship between measures of quality in early childhood settings and child outcomes—a meta-analysis of published studies and secondary analyses in multiple major data sets with observational measures of quality as well as child outcomes. Both of these analyses conclude that the relationship between widely used measures of quality and child outcomes is statistically significant but modest. Possible bases for this pattern of findings and the implications for measures development were discussed.

2. Work toward developing new quality measures (Martha Zaslow). Recent findings indicate that widely used measures of quality provide the basis for only a modest prediction regarding the measures of child outcomes. One interpretation of this finding is that the current measures of quality are not capturing aspects of early childhood care and education settings that are important to development in particular domains with enough detail or specificity. This presentation described steps that are being taken by six working groups to build on recent developments in both basic and intervention research in early childhood to build toward greater specification of the aspects of early childhood environments that support children's development as well as family functioning. The presentation introduced the leaders and members of the working groups who were present and noted breakout group sessions at the Child Care Policy Research Consortium meeting that focus on the discussions of some of the working groups. Cross-cutting themes from the discussions of the six working groups were noted.

3. Evaluation of quality initiatives (Kathryn Tout). As States continue to develop and refine quality rating systems and other quality improvement initiatives, the opportunity to discuss implementation issues and evaluation findings is critical. This presentation summarized key themes from a recent meeting of States convened for this purpose. The presentation emphasized the need for strategic planning to guide program activities and the evaluation of quality initiatives, described new research that is needed to inform State efforts, and highlighted cross-State resources that could be useful with planning, implementation, and evaluation.

2008 CCPRC Meeting
Session 7 (Plenary Session 2)
July 31, 2008, 1:00-2:15 pm

Moderator

Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, ACF/HHS

Panel Members

Margaret Burchinal, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Kathryn Tout, Child Trends
Martha Zaslow, Child Trends

Scribe

Bridget McElroy, Research Connections, National Center for Children in Poverty,
Columbia University

Documents in the Session Folder

Discussion Notes

Ivelisse Martinez-Beck

- A roundtable discussion in December 2006 helped bring forth group consensus that more research is needed on the topic of quality and outcomes.
- Specifically, it is important to examine further the measurement of quality
- Link quality to kids outcomes: what do we already have?
- Obvious that the issue of the measurement of quality was very important for several initiatives.
- Selections of measures/outcomes/impact on measures etc. need to be examined.

Margaret Burchinal: Findings of associations between observations of quality and child outcomes

- Reason to embark on the research is because quality suggests positive outcomes.
- This question was further examined with Meta analysis of studies and secondary data analysis.
- Research that suggested a link between quality and outcomes help promote policies regarding: QRS; tiered reimbursement for subsidies; quality enhancement programs; and public pre-k/head start.
 - *Meta-analysis-20* studies identified (associations between widely used measures of quality and outcomes; more than 10 classrooms; association between quality and outcomes; published in a journal; and multiple reports per study. Findings: “Modest associations, albeit highly statistically significant” relationship between quality and outcomes. Partial correlation of .1 in describing association between quality and outcomes .1 considered a small association *In sum, Meta analysis data suggests: “highly statistically significant relationship” but tends to be small.*
 - *Secondary data analysis* (Child care quality and outcomes for low income children; 4 studies examined.) Question asked using secondary data analysis: How large is the association child care quality and child outcomes for low-income children for 4 year olds? Found a relatively “modest” association.

Specifically at individual levels there was a great variability across different associations (aligned quality and language outcomes; aligned quality and reading outcomes; aligned quality and social skills; and quality and behavior problems) *In sum, using secondary data analysis: relatively “modest” association between outcomes (even more modest than using meta-analysis).*

- *Question: Is there evidence of nonlinear associations between child care quality and child outcomes? Nonlinear association: some evidence but not consistent evidence for a relationship. FACES 97 found language skills were higher when education was higher. In sum, “growing evidence of non-linear associations: quality related to child outcomes only when quality is relatively high. Caution: Evidence is suggestive.”*
- In conclusion: higher program quality is associated with positive outcomes however, modest associations for two reasons:
 - True association is modest.
 - Measurements may constrict the associations of quality.
- Argues: not measuring something well, probably because the language of quality measures is not well developed.
- Argues: More specific aligned measures are needed and quality measures that have psychometric development (i.e. wider set of items, item response theory).
- Implications: Do not move away from quality associations, as they still provide best predictions of child care outcomes. However, hopefully psychometric development will facilitate better predictions.

Marty Zaslow: Work toward developing new quality measures

- Describing a meeting that attempted to take in the above considerations:
 - Context that could implement new research and research approaches.
 - Later session in the day that will go into detail about the breakout sessions of the meeting that aimed to develop these new measures.
 - Roundtable on developing the Next Wave of Quality Measures for Early Childhood and School Age programs was held in January 2008; sponsored by OPRE and SPE/DHHS; involved 44 researchers and 20 fed partners.
- Purpose: “identify strategies for developing and strengthening measures of quality.”
- Each working group was provided a list of questions to be discussed.
- Possible child outcomes discussed were: language and literacy; socioemotional development; math, science and cognition; health, safety nutrition and physical activity; families and culture.
- Within these possible outcomes, each working group was supposed to examine the following in terms of developing measures: Important constructs; Strengths; Limitations
- Significant findings from roundtables:
 - Language and Literacy: Very little measurement information exists for children under 2; challenge in how to approach for young ELL learners and questions about the possibility that new measures need to be developed.

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- Math: Early math is now being recognized and intervention research is beginning, but lack of measurement focusing on support within the environment; challenge, caregivers/teachers lack content knowledge and are threatened to talk about the topic in this area.
- Social-Emotional: emerging body of descriptive research; existing measures provide strong starting points; challenge, do not know what the unit of analysis should be; changes of age and the constructs that may support them; measures may not examine different times during the day (recess/meal time etc.).
- Health: Checklists need to build from; issue of index versus scale; may need large samples.
- Families: Strength is that states are focusing on this aspect; do have a research base to draw upon however; link between family involvement and child outcomes in early childhood is limited.
- Culture: More work is needed specially in designing constructs; very few measures to draw upon.
- Cross Cutting Themes and Challenges:
 - Need to not only develop measures but must THINK about implementing them.
 - Need to validate teacher report data.
 - Resources: states must allocated limited resources to quality measurement, improvement and dissemination of information. Will this take away from improving quality?
 - Professional Development: must be aligned with measures developed; must balance demands for professional development with measures.

Kathryn Tout: Evaluation of Quality Initiatives

- Evaluating quality initiatives: meeting with both states and researchers sponsored by OPRE.
- Laying a foundation for evaluation: use of logic model or theory of change will strengthen planning evaluation; logic model helps find unintentional consequences.
- Program design goals: Meaningful differences in QRS design and structure; multiple targets of QRS; emphasis on different subgroups; QRS as a “hub” to promote systems change.
- Evaluation: use of the logic model showed that states are at different stages in development; agreement could help in the develop of research strategy.
- Consensus on Outputs and Outcomes: outputs are what is done, outcomes are a result of what is done, some States emphasize outputs some outcomes and some both; importance of a feedback loop.
- Cost of QRS: states would like information on how much it will cost and balance costs with incentives and there was a general concern of maintaining QRS overtime

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- Unintended consequences: such as movement of low income families from regulated to unregulated; exit of licensed professions---these items were discussed as being important when designing research on QRS design.
- Coming soon:
 - Paper to summarize QRS Evaluation Roundtable
 - OPRE QRS Researcher Consortium
 - OPRE-funded research project looking more in-depth at QRS.

Questions/Comments

- Questions about the influence of poor programs on research outcomes.
- General question on the association of child outcomes with quality and the dosage of attendance for low-income kids. The databases used kids who were enrolled for at least one calendar year. Actual attendance is one issue that could be factored in. Not sure if they were attending regularly but they were assumed to be enrolled at least one calendar year.
- Penn State Admin: STARS program has been generally successful in terms of bringing previous programs working in silos together. Helps providers move up through the STAR level and also have the parents understand quality.
- Maine State Admin: Special Needs must be considered; working groups were tasked with discussing their inclusion. Further work on incorporating special needs is needed.