SREE Symposium Overview

Title: Research to Practice and Back Again: Examples of University, Community, and Policy Partnerships in Urban Communities

Chair: Sophia Hwang  
**Paper Presenters:** Sophia Hwang, Natalia Rojas, Maia Connors, Ann Hanson, Stacey Alicea  
**Discussant:** Elise Cappella

Symposium justification:
To effectively close the education research-to-practice gap, there is a need for collaborative work that simultaneously emphasizes internal validity and methodological rigor *alongside* external validity and sustainability. The education workforce includes diverse professionals ranging from early childhood educators, afterschool instructors, nonprofit-based trainers, and traditional school teachers, all of whom share the goal of supporting positive youth development. Articulating what enables these educators to implement effective practices/programs allows researchers and policymakers to prioritize best practices in professional development and capacity building.

This symposium includes the perspectives of two university-based researchers and two nonprofit organization-based researchers engaging in cross-sector educational research serving low-income minority populations. Aligned with this year’s conference theme, each author will present an innovative model of partnership and collective decision-making to evaluate evidence-based educational programs using rigorous methods. Methods and findings will be discussed alongside the planning, adaptation, dissemination, and collaboration challenges. Each project focuses on a distinct educational setting and developmental stage – early childhood education programs, afterschool programs, and public secondary schools – highlighting relevant developmental and ecological considerations.

The first paper focuses on the partnership between a multidisciplinary university research team and a community organization. The partnership goals are to conduct rapid turnaround efficacy trials and enhance the capacity of the afterschool workforce serving urban youth. As one example of the broader partnership, the authors will present findings from a collaboratively-designed trial examining the impact of coaching in a cooperative learning and literacy program on afterschool setting quality and youth academic and psychosocial outcomes.

The second paper documents how a university-based research team supported a network of pre-K programs through the provision of initial training and resources for teachers to independently assess the executive functioning of their students and use the data for educational decisions. Moving away from “traditional” data collection, lessons learned around the sustainable transfer of skills to the community organization will be discussed.

The third paper focuses on a federally-funded, statewide early childhood instructional leadership professional development program implemented by a nonprofit organization and evaluated by university-based researchers. Within this multi-level and multi-sector partnership, regular “data dialogues” and strategic meetings ensured collaboration to support program implementation,
improvement, and scaling. Using rigorous mixed method approaches and implementation data, this presentation will frame current work on three evaluation studies.

The final paper presents the process of an organization forging school and district partnerships to develop a systematic school climate observation tool. The community-based organization provides expertise to the schools through professional development on behavior management. Capitalizing on these efforts, the organization co-developed a new setting-level climate instrument to inform continuous improvement and implementation of universal school strategies.

Dr. Elise Cappella, an expert in community- and school-based interventions and their implementation and evaluation, will facilitate a discussion highlighting project strengths and challenges and offer new perspectives on best practices and lessons learned. Common themes such as stakeholder engagement, hybrid leadership teams, practical measurement, use of technology, and dissemination of findings will be discussed. The ultimate aim is to increase and improve partnered research in education toward science-practice-policy benefits.
Title:

University-Community Partnership and Embedded Efficacy Trials: Putting “Science to Work” for Urban Afterschool Programs

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Abstract Body

**Background / Context:**
Afterschool programs have gained increasing attention as a setting to advance youth academic and social-emotional learning (Beckett et al., 2009; Durlak et al., 2010). Empirical research affirms that high quality out-of-school programs contribute to multi-dimensional outcomes (Vandell et al., 2007), particularly for low-income, ethnic minority youth. Yet, work remains to understand ways for out-of-school organizations to develop a workforce to implement effective practices, improve setting quality, and generate positive youth outcomes.

In the spring of 2014, a university-community partnership was formed to bridge the research-practice gap in understanding and promoting the effectiveness of the afterschool workforce to improve educational settings in urban, under-resourced neighborhoods (Cornett & Knight, 2008). The nonprofit partner, one of the largest providers of community-based academic programming in the city, has served the community for 150+ years. The organization’s afterschool division serves 5,100+ youth in 28 programs, implements evidence-informed models, and uses a *youth and family development approach* to address barriers to wellbeing. The university-based partner is an interdisciplinary team with complementary expertise in social-emotional learning, academic development, and intervention science.

Community-partnered research strategies applied to the implementation context (Wells et al., 2006) were used to develop the university-community partnership structure, content, and process. A leadership advisory board with equal representation from the organization’s research and practice divisions and the university’s interdisciplinary team (Figure B.1) met monthly to establish expectations, generate research questions, and track progress. Long-term goals were to advance education science and practice through: (a) quick turnaround research rooted in the education literature and organization’s mission, and (b) building the organization’s internal capacity for ongoing process and outcome evaluation.

**Purpose / Research Questions:**
The presentation has two aims. Aim 1 is to present a model for partnered university-community research aligned with education science, organizational capacity, and population needs. Toward this aim, we describe the partnership stages, processes, and products via mixed method analysis of existing documents (meeting agendas, electronic/verbal communication, completed products).

The partnership model provides the context for Aim 2, which is to present a pilot randomized control trial conducted as a quick turnaround research project. The study evaluated a community-designed afterschool workforce development model focused on the use of cooperative learning within academic and social-emotional curricula. Cooperative learning is an evidence-based practice with demonstrated positive effects on interactions, academic skills, and social competence among heterogeneous groups of students (Slavin, 1990). However, to date, its implementation and impact has not been systematically studied in afterschools.

Based in implementation science (Fixsen et al., 2005), literature on effective teaching (Borko, 2004), and studies of workforce development (Garet et al., 2001), the partnership team launched a short-term longitudinal study focused on cooperative learning in afterschool literacy-based
activities. The nonprofit partner suggested that it be a group-randomized study and the research team pursued a rigorous design aligned with the organization’s afterschool logic model and theory of change. The study tested the following research questions:

1. Effects of coaching in cooperative learning on ethnic and language minority youths’ academic and psychosocial skills;
2. Implementation of cooperative learning in afterschool activities and its relation to afterschool setting quality.

**Population / Participants:**
The pilot trial research participants are educators \((n = 91)\) and youth \((n = 271)\) from five afterschool programs in one low-income urban area. The sites serve primarily Latino (69%) and African-American (21%) students. Approximately half of the students (grades 3-8) are female and one-third identify as language minority. Afterschool educators are primarily female (60%) and Latino/a (63%). The majority (53%) of staff are under 25 years old (Table B.1 and B.2).

**Research Design / Data Collection:**
Partners engaged in a one year planning process to (a) pursue research and program funding opportunities, (b) build relationships among stakeholders, and (c) pilot new instruments for the afterschool setting. Partnership meetings were held regularly to assess progress, problem-solve challenges, and make real-time research modifications.

In the second year, multi-method data were collected at three time points by multiple reporters. Afterschool instructors were randomized to treatment (cooperative learning workshops + intensive coaching) or control (cooperative learning workshops + coaching as usual), which offered a less stark treatment-control contrast but balanced the research design with organizational needs. Measures include systematic observation of teaching practices (PPRS: Vandell et al., 2005); peer-reported social networks (CSS: Krackhardt, 1987); oral reading skills (CBM: Alonzo et al., 2006); self-concept (SPPC; Harter, 2012); and student-reported social and academic behaviors. Staff-reported surveys regarding job satisfaction and student behaviors were also collected.

Implementation data and fidelity measures were collected during the study period. Semi-structured qualitative interviews and focus groups were facilitated in June 2016 allowing afterschool educators to share open-ended reflections.

**Analysis / Findings:**
No significant baseline differences were found between groups randomized to intensive versus usual coaching. Implementation data indicate educators assigned to intensive coaching received a higher dosage and fidelity of coaching interactions and used more cooperative learning strategies than educators assigned to coaching as usual. Descriptives of baseline classroom characteristics and youth social and academic skills are presented in Table B.3. Multi-level intent-to-treat analyses (student nested within groups) with covariates at the student (gender, ELL status) and group (staff education, size) level are underway to estimate impacts of coaching in cooperative learning in urban afterschool programs. Because the pilot RCT was underpowered to detect small effects on outcomes, analyses focus on the magnitude and precision of effect sizes, rather than statistical significance alone. Such estimates will be help determine the intervention’s potential
to improve outcomes and inform subsequent evaluations. Social network data at the individual (centrality, homophily) and setting (density, equity) level to test differences in social ties across groups (see Figure B.2 for sample network maps analyzed via UCINET).

**Conclusions / Next Steps:**
Two goals drove the research agenda: (1) contribution to scholarship in workforce development, implementation science, and afterschool program quality; and (2) enhancement of organizational capacity to improve educator skills and youth outcomes via effective practices and sustained internal evaluation. Future directions for maintaining community-university partnerships and conducting quick turnaround research projects to guide science and practice will be discussed.
Appendices

Appendix A. References


Appendix B. Tables and Figures

Figure B.1  
*University-Community Partnership Structure*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>69.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian / Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary (Grades 3-5)</td>
<td>74.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School (Grades 6-8)</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Spoken at School</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>91.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Spoken with Friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>88.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Spoken at Home</td>
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<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
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Table B.2
*Staff Demographic Information (N = 91)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Characteristics</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>60.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity/Race</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>25.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian / Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma/GED or less</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or associates degree</td>
<td>63.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's degree</td>
<td>13.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some graduate work or higher</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 years or younger</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25 years</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35 years</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36 years or older</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational Experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had experience working in school settings prior to current afterschool position</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Currently working at the day school where the afterschool program is based</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth Experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learning during their K-12 experience</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended this afterschool program as a youth</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
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Table B.3
Baseline Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Observed Min</th>
<th>Observed Max</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Classroom Setting Quality (n = 19)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff Self-Reported Satisfaction a</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Classroom Interactions a</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.93</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Afterschool Activity Instruction a</td>
<td>2.36</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Classroom Environment a</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observed Classroom Discourse a</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student-reported Social and Academic Skills (n = 271)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work habits a</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy a</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1.71</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misconduct b</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>3.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prosocial skills b</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer Affiliation a</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Support a</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy/Privacy a</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholastic Competence a</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Competence a</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Conduct a</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>0.66</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of social ties</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Item response ranges from 1 – 4.
b Item response ranges from 0 – 4.
Figure B.2  
*Sociograms for Two Elementary School Classrooms at Baseline*

Legend:
- Yellow = female
- No fill = male
- Square = Latino
- Circle = African-American, other
- Purple line = Primary language Spanish
- Black line = Primary language English
- Size of node = Network centrality

Classroom A at Baseline:

Classroom B at Baseline
Title:
Partnering to Build Capacity for Educational Technology and Measurement within a Community-based Organization

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Abstract Body

**Background / Context:**
Public and private investments have called for greater rigor in educational research, thus increasing the need of educational providers to implement evidence-based programs. However, the gap between research and practice remains large (Tseng, 2012). Scholars, practitioners, and policymakers have increasingly called for greater usability of research (Tseng, 2012) and greater innovation in the ways social science is deployed to solve educational problems (Bryk, 2009; Easton, 2014; Raver, 2013). Often times, due to lengthy process of translating research to practice, current data is not available for actionable program-level decisions.

Developing university-community partnerships may be a uniquely effective strategy for producing relevant research findings and supporting practice and policy (Easton, 2014; Tseng, 2012). In the spring of 2015, a university-community partnership was established to bridge a gap in measurement expertise. The university and community-based organization (CBO) partners worked together to enhance capacity for designing evaluation and documentation tools, protocols, and building in sustainability through investing in the development of workforce skills. Goals for the partnership focused on building upon a collaborative process and focusing on the transfer of skills to CBO staff.

Prior to our partnership, the researchers successfully built assessments of pre- academic and executive function (EF) skills onto easy-to-administer tablet-based PCs and used these assessments. Data collection in typical university settings are often costly and delivered with highly, trained data collectors, which makes it difficult for community-based organizations without the resources and expertise to conduct. However, the tablet-based assessments lessen the burden of data collection through the ease of training and administration. Additionally, the tablet-based assessments allow for “rapid turnaround” data collection, aggregation, and analysis. The partnership focused on building the CBO capacity to conduct assessments and use their data to inform practice. In this way, the agency would experience both short-term and long-term benefits from the collaborative relationship.

**Purpose / Research Questions:**
We will discuss our partnership with a community-based non-profit providing comprehensive supports to children and their families in targeted high-needs New York City neighborhoods. The CBO delivers a comprehensive pre-K program that gives low-income children the opportunity for health development and the tools to prepare for school success.

As a university-community partnership, our research aims are not set *a priori*. Instead, we work to jointly develop research questions and analyses that inform program practice while building the research infrastructure of community-based organization. Our presentation will provide an overview of (a) how the partnership developed over time, (b) our analyses of tablet-based executive function assessments and development classroom-, school-level data “dashboards” to help teachers, center directors, and leaders understand findings through the use of clear visual displays, (c) and a description of the efforts to develop workforce skills and management in order to build in sustainability.
Research Design / Data Collection:
The data collected on the tablet-based assessments (see Appendix B) provide the CBO with a low-cost set of tools to understand how children are faring in their programs and the effects of a program-wide intervention aimed at improving children’s executive functioning skills. For the long-term sustainability of these tools for monitoring and evaluation, we shifted these assessments into the ongoing work of teacher assistants.

The researchers and community organization worked together to support pre-K teachers’ assistants, across multiple sites throughout New York City, collect executive function assessments in a staged, collaborative process. Rather than training lead teachers, the researchers and community-based organization decided that training teaching assistants would be more feasible from a workload and professional development perspective. After training pre-K teacher assistants to collect assessment data, the researchers shared the information collected from children to help teaching assistants understand the purpose of the data collection. This provided the researchers with the opportunity to understand to what extent the data that are collected was useful to teachers. Additionally, workshops were conducted with teaching assistants to learn how to appropriately embed authentic assessments into teacher’s practice through the development of a visual dashboard (see Appendix C). The development of the dashboards was conceptualized as a way for senior leaders at the CBO to conduct their own descriptive analyses of children’s EF skills in real time.

Analysis / Findings:
In the presentation, we will highlight three unique lessons-learned in our partnership:

- The ways in which our innovative assessments can play a part in organizational fundraising, and decision-making and how our research and process has played a role in staff professional development and capacity building.
- The opportunities for leveraging the university-community partnership to develop and workshop classroom-, school-level data “dashboards” intended to help teachers, center directors, and leaders understand findings through the use of clear visual displays.
- The challenges of our particular university-community partnerships including: the need for rapid turnaround of data on the ground, staff turnover, and partner’s competing needs and interests.

Implications, Conclusions, and Next Steps:
This presentation will illuminate our joint overarching aim to embed research activities into the practices of the community-based organization. We will highlight our effort to assess the EF gains for children who participated in the preschool program and the process of building the research capacity of the CBO beyond the collaboration with the university. Such innovative partnerships, we believe, are best built on the foundation of partnership trust and research infrastructure that are key components of this collaborative project.
Appendices

Appendix A. References


Appendix B. Screenshot of the H&F tablet assessments

Appendix C: Examples of the visual dashboards
How well did 3- and 4-year olds perform on Executive Function at Site 1?

3-Year Olds: 25% Trouble following simple directions, 50% Partial understanding of same and opposite, 25% Understands same and opposite but has trouble switching.

4-Year Olds: 8% Trouble following simple directions, 8% Partial understanding of same and opposite, 34% Understands same and opposite but has trouble switching, 50% Can flexibly switch and inhibit.

Snapshot of Executive Function in Class 40:

- 40% Trouble following simple directions
- 40% Partial understanding of same and opposite
- 20% Understands same and opposite but has trouble switching
- 20% Can flexibly switch and inhibit

Counts:
- Trouble following simple directions: 9,734
- Partial understanding of same and opposite: 9,711
- Understands same and opposite but has trouble switching: 12,449
- Can flexibly switch and inhibit: 12,284
Paper 3: Abstract Title Page

Title:
Evaluation in Action: Forging Partnerships to Improve and Scale Early Childhood Instructional Leadership Development

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Background / Context:
Increasingly, early childhood education (ECE) programs are required to meet rigorous quality standards, yet instructional excellence proves persistently challenging. A promising body of evidence suggests that program leadership is associated with organizational improvement and high-quality instruction (Dunlop, 2008; Rodd, 2012). Improved instruction is more likely when leaders who provide instructional guidance and facilitate evidence-based job-embedded professional development than those who rely on traditional, ad hoc professional development (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999; Elmore & Burney, 1999; Fullan, 2000).

In 2013, the Governor’s Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) leveraged Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge (RTT-ELC) funds to solicit proposals to increase instructional quality in ECE programs from ‘adequate’ to ‘good’ and ‘good’ to ‘great’ (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Recognizing leadership as a key lever, OECD funded our nonprofit organization to implement an instructional leadership professional development program statewide and commissioned a team of university-based researchers to conduct an external evaluation. A research-practice partnership emerged among our organization’s program implementation and research teams, and the university-based evaluators.

Objectives:
This partnership has two primary goals. First, ensure that the evaluation is comprehensive, accurate, and meaningful. Second, leverage evaluation infrastructure and findings to inform programmatic improvements and strategies for program sustainability and expansion; including:

1. Embedding robust data collection, analysis, and dialogue into program administration to facilitate data use in implementation; and
2. Supporting strategic programmatic decisions and scaling by translating findings into evidence-based recommendations.

In this presentation we will discuss the research-practice partnership, initial evaluation findings and their programmatic use, and the successes and challenges of leveraging evaluation to support program improvement and strategy.

Research-Practice Partnership:
Our cross-institution research-practice partnership includes three teams: program implementation, research, and evaluation (Figure B.1). The organization-based implementation team includes trainers, coaches, and operations staff who are responsible for implementing the program. The university-based evaluation team includes faculty and students from the college of education responsible for the evaluation design and execution. The organization-based research team includes doctoral and master’s level researchers who function as liaisons—supporting accurate understanding of the program and data by evaluators and accurate interpretation and application of evaluation findings by implementers. The partnership work is guided by a steering committee convened within our organization and supported by routine meetings among partners (Table B.1). This infrastructure creates ongoing feed-back loops that enable collaborative and timely review, interpretation, and application of data and evaluation findings.
**Instructional Leadership Professional Development Program:**
The current program grew out of an approach developed with the support of a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation grant, and is designed to strengthen ECE leaders’ capacity to improve the quality of classroom instruction through routine implementation of job-embedded professional learning for teachers. To do so, it engages leaders in training, coaching, and peer learning, and provides access to practical tools and resources, across 16 monthly learning cycles. This design is consistent with recommendations from the Institute of Medicine (Allen & Kelly, 2015) and is aligned to the state’s quality rating and improvement system.

**Research Design, Data Collection, and Participants:**
The evaluation was designed and executed from an implementation-improvement science perspective (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LaMahieu, 2015), striking a balance between independent, summative evaluation and collaborative, formative evaluation. The two-and-a-half-year evaluation includes three studies: (1) mixed methods implementation study; (2) pre-post outcomes study of instructional leadership mindsets, methods, and practices; and (3) matched-comparison study of impacts on instructional quality. Data for these studies come primarily from existing sources, including state administrative data on context and quality; program administrative data on demographics, attendance, and implementation; and participants’ reflections on their learning. The evaluation team collects additional data via field observations; interviews; and monthly surveys of participants’ satisfaction and implementation of instructional leadership practices.

Participants include 214 instructional-, systems-, and teacher-leaders, and T&TA providers who support ECE classrooms in a diverse set of 59 public school systems and 57 community-based, licensed child care centers across the state. Leaders are primarily White (71%) or Black (17%) and speak only English (85%). More than 90% earned a bachelor degree and have ECE teaching experience; more than half have been leaders for 6 or more years. On average leaders report allocating limited time to instructional matters at baseline.

**Findings / Results:**
Interim Year 1 evaluation results suggest that all program components were implemented with fidelity in terms of content, frequency, and duration of activities offered. Overall, participants were satisfied with the organization, content, and efforts to sustain their engagement in training and peer learning groups, but participant engagement in peer learning groups and resources/tools was generally low. Still, about three-quarters of participants have already reported progress towards implementing key routines and practices with teachers.

The research-practice partnership resulted in frequent collaborative dialogues among researchers, evaluators, and implementers that have driven meaningful changes in administrative data collection practices and program design, implementation, and scaling strategy (e.g., target audiences and policy contexts). Successes include evaluation-informed programmatic changes, including peer learning group facilitation and timing; differentiated supports; and refined administrative data collection tools. The partnership has also strengthened our ability to collaboratively present evaluation findings and programmatic insights to stakeholders (including local and state policymakers) to promote understanding, integration, and improvement of the program and of state systems/policies.
Our primary challenge echoes that of many research-practice partnerships: there is a fundamental difference in the pace at which research and practice operate. As a result, we have had to make decisions about program iterations and scaling strategy before outcome or impact data can be fully collected and analyzed.

**Conclusion:**
By leveraging a unique research-practice partnership opportunity created by RTT-ELC, we aimed to collaboratively support strong program evaluation and evaluation-informed efforts to improve and scale an early childhood instructional leadership program. Future directions for sustaining our partnership and extending it to include public sector partners and funders—and implications for informing policy/systems change and resource allocation—will be discussed.
Appendices

Appendix A. References


Appendix B. Tables and Figures

*Figure B.1. Partnership structure.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nonprofit Organization</th>
<th>Local University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steering Committee</strong></td>
<td><strong>College of Education</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Practice &amp; Policy Divisions</td>
<td>Evaluation Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Implementation Team</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches &amp; Trainers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Team</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table B.1. *Partnership processes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meeting</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Steering Committee</strong></td>
<td>Guide ongoing development, pilot, and scale-up of the program including implementation, evaluation, and learnings for future work; product development; reflect on project-level data; monitor overall progress toward benchmarks; strategic partnership building and funder engagement.</td>
<td>Organizational leadership from: -Implementation team -Research team -Program development divisions -Instructional design division -Business strategy &amp; marketing divisions -Executives</td>
<td>Biweekly, 1.5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Implementation Team Data Meeting</strong></td>
<td>Examine and reflect on key data to inform implementation and improvement; and to review and provide feedback on quarterly reports from the evaluation partner.</td>
<td>Implementation team Research team</td>
<td>Monthly, 1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Data Dialogues</strong></td>
<td>Facilitated reflection for coaches and trainers on data from their own documentation as well as evaluation data and findings. Specific topics, guiding questions, and/or data examined are jointly determined by the research and implementation teams.</td>
<td>Coaches &amp; Trainers Implementation team Research team (facilitators)</td>
<td>Monthly, 1.25 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation Management Check-Ins</strong></td>
<td>Obtain regular updates and manage the day-to-day operations of the external evaluation.</td>
<td>Research team Evaluation team</td>
<td>Weekly, 1 hour Monthly, 2 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation Report Meetings</strong></td>
<td>Opportunity to review and discuss quarterly evaluation reports, ask questions about evaluation data, reflect on findings, and address strategic issues.</td>
<td>Implementation team Research team Evaluation team</td>
<td>Quarterly, 1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scale-Up Project Team Meetings</strong></td>
<td>Collaborates and coordinates across functions to ensure high-quality design, development, implementation, and sustainability of the program; includes multiple sub-teams for dedicated work streams.</td>
<td>Organizational representatives from: -Implementation team -Research team -Program development divisions -Instructional design division -Business strategy &amp; marketing divisions</td>
<td>Weekly, 1 hour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OECD Program Monitoring Call</strong></td>
<td>Report implementation progress, budget status, and share next steps.</td>
<td>OECD project officer Implementation team</td>
<td>Monthly, .5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OECD Evaluation Monitoring Call</strong></td>
<td>Report evaluation progress, budget status, and share next steps.</td>
<td>OECD project officer Evaluation team</td>
<td>Monthly, .5 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Paper 4: Abstract Title Page

Title:

Building Community Organizations’ Capacity to Conduct Rigorous Program Assessment: Development of a School Climate Observational Tool to Measure Program Impact

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Abstract

Background:
The richness of research that indicates positive school climate – the quality and character of school life as it relates to norms and values, social interactions, and organizational processes and structures – directly and positively impacts teacher retention, student achievement, dropout rates and incidences of violence (Thapa et al., 2013). There are less behavior problems at schools when students believe their school is structured, school discipline is fair, and they have positive interactions with their teachers and peers (Wang et al., 2010). The US DOE (2014) encourages schools to engage in school climate improvement efforts in order to improve educational outcomes.

Community organizations focused on school climate change in “real world” settings often operate without the resources afforded to research-based institutions, and are in need of evidence-informed tools to more robustly measure program impact. In 2014, a non-profit organization with 95 years of direct service and professional development (PD) experience serving roughly 200 schools per year in the NYC tri-state area began the process of developing capacity to evaluate program impact. Organizational goals include more deeply grounding program and practice in theory and evidence, implementing continuous quality improvement (CQI) systems and cultivating staff and stakeholder buy-in of these approaches.

Purpose:
We have two goals in this presentation. The first is to present a model for building a community organization’s capacity to implement systems and processes that allow for CQI and program impact evaluation grounded in education science. The second is to describe lessons learned from a two-phase pilot to develop a school climate tool that can be used to develop, implement and evaluate tailored strategic action plans to support school climate change over time.

Population / Participants:
Over the past two years, the organization has committed to deepening its research-practice connection. A team of five in-house staff (four PhDs, one MEd) came together to explore existing measurement tools that could be used in “real world” settings to more comprehensively assess school climate change associated with PD programming. Team members have interdisciplinary expertise across educational, sociological and psychological disciplines in research and PD practice arenas, and interfaces with the strategic planning department responsible for cultivating strong external relationships with individual, network and district schools.

Phase one work focused on developing and refining the climate tool occurred in 35 schools in one northeastern school district serving predominately Black and Latino students across the 2014-2016 school years. Two simultaneous phase two pilots of the climate tool will occur in the 2016-2017 school year: (1) a case study of a diverse NYC middle school (59% Hispanic, 18% Asian, 12% Black, 10% White; 26% special needs); (2) collection of pre- and post-intervention climate data at approximately 60 urban middle and high schools in the NYC and NJ.
Research Design / Data Collection:
The organization’s model incorporates best practices in PD, including collective participation, deepening content knowledge, active learning and goal-setting (Garet et al., 2001; Desimone, 2009). PD is focused on increasing adults’ behavior management skills and schools’ capacity to implement systemic changes that support inclusive environments that reduce reliance on exclusionary disciplinary practices found to negatively impact school climate (Gottfredson et al., 2005). Climate tool indicators are grounded in the organization’s PD model, which is organized into six evidence-informed content areas: (1) **Modeling** – adult behavior demonstrates to young people how to manage emotions, such as anger and frustration; (2) **Relationships** – personal relationships are essential to motivating behavioral change; (3) **Expectations** – explaining and posting specific, observable behavioral expectations is necessary to support adherence to community goals and values; (4) **Structures and Routines** – young people thrive in organized environments where routines teach, reinforce and celebrate desired behaviors, increase engagement, and minimize stress and triggers; (5) **Individual Adaptations** – young people who struggle to meet community expectations need targeted support; and (6) **Conflict Management** – restorative practices that allow for reflection and repairing of relationships are needed to effectively address conflict, crisis and behaviors that violate community expectations. Each content area is evidence-informed. For example, research on relationships has demonstrated that students with supportive teacher and peer relationships are more likely to internalize school values (Wentzel et al., 2004), exhibit on-task behavior (Battistich et al., 1997), have fewer conflicts and less oppositional and anti-social behavior (Durlak et al., 2011; Meehan et al., 2003).

Climate assessments are conducted by independent observers, and include interviews with school leadership and observations of shared spaces (e.g., hallways, libraries), transition times (e.g., lunch, recess), and classrooms. Data will be collected in the Fall and Spring. Fall assessments will inform strategic action plans grounded in the organization’s PD model to identify areas in need of improvement. Observers will share findings with school leadership and the organization’s coach, who will collaboratively generate and implement a feasible year-long action plan. The case study school will receive 20 PD days. Schools participating in standard programming will receive a range of PD days (5-20) based on individual contracts.

Analysis / Findings:
Phase one descriptive results suggest the pilot version of the climate tool captured several of the PD model content areas, allowing for development of strategic action plans to address identified whole school areas of need (See Appendix B). Lessons learned related to the process of building the evaluative capacity of a longstanding practice-based organization will be discussed. Baseline school climate data from phase two pilots conducted in the Fall of 2016 and themes emerging from resulting strategic action plans will be presented.

Implications:
Creating safe and supportive schools has been identified as a national priority (US DOE, 2014). There is a need for non-profit PD providers to continuously assess program impact. Organizations should understand where they are generating impact and where they may need to adjust methods or employ additional strategies. Evidence-informed school climate observational tools that provide meaningful data to support program implementation and evaluation in “real
world” settings are needed (Clifford, 2012). Addressing this gap will promote more robust program evaluation, which can be used to leverage funding and policy support for non-profit programing that can be readily scaled up and widely disseminated.
Appendices

Appendix A. References


Appendix B.
Phase one pilot of climate tool – Identified areas of whole school need (N = 35)

- Structured whole school action plans
- Individual behavior plans for students
- Behavioral data collection plan
- Support building relationships with disconnected students
- Clear classroom/school expectations
- Alternative discipline plans not involving suspension/expulsion

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