

**QUALITY NEW YORK:
ASSESSMENT OF ITS CONTRIBUTIONS TO PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT
IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NEW YORK CITY**

*Prepared by S. A. Stephens, Ph.D.
Center for Assessment and Policy Development*

Prepared with support from the United Way of New York City



August 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to the many people who contributed their time and thought to this study – the directors and staff of the early care and education programs that participated in this study, the consultants who conducted the classroom learning environment assessments, and the Quality New York staff, especially Mary Hayes, who provided helpful comments and feedback on the study design and draft reports. I would like to thank the United Way of New York City for initiating and supporting the study. Of course, the contents of this report and any errors or omissions in fact or interpretation are the sole responsibility of the author.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There is a strong and compelling body of evidence linking the early experiences of young children in high quality early care and education settings with language, social-emotional, and cognitive development, with school readiness, and with early success in school. Unfortunately, most early care and education settings in the United States are of poor quality. Quality improvement can be a daunting task, and experience has found that teacher training, credentials and professional development are not sufficient to ensure sustainable comprehensive program quality. An approach focused at the program level is needed.

Quality New York (QNY) is a comprehensive initiative to support development and learning of all New York City's young children by assisting early care and education programs to improve teaching and administrative practices. QNY uses a comprehensive program improvement model that includes two types of support for participating programs – group support activities and individualized support – both focused on the program administrators or directors.

This study sought to measure how the quality of participating early care and education programs improve during their participation in QNY, identify how components of QNY contribute to improvement, and, based on these findings, consider what components of QNY might be replicated and system-wide policies and practices adopted.

To carry out this study, 11 early care and education programs that had participated in QNY for at least 18 months and that had been assessed as having substantial weaknesses in their learning environments and program administration participated in a set of data collection activities. These activities included repeat assessments using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and the Program Administration Scale as well as measures of participation in QNY activities. In addition, both program administrators and QNY staff for each of the programs were interviewed.

QNY's two types of support for early care and education programs – group support provided in professional development workshops and program administrator network meetings, and individualized support provided by consultation with an experienced early childhood education professional and on-site training – were both found to be effective in contributing to quality improvement. Each type of support contributed to a different area of quality. Individualized, on-site support contributed to improvement in the overall quality of programs' classroom learning environments. Group support – particularly program administrator professional development workshops and network meetings – contributed to improved management and administrative practices. At the same time, the two types of support reinforced each other and both contributed to reducing the differences in quality among classrooms within the programs.

Implications for replication of the QNY model by public agencies charged with funding and monitoring early care and education programs and for policies related to quality improvement initiatives are discussed in the final section of this paper.

INTRODUCTION

Early Care and Education Program Quality and Children's Outcomes

There is a strong and compelling body of evidence linking the early experiences of young children in high quality early care and education settings with language, social-emotional, and cognitive development, with school readiness, and with early success in school. Unfortunately, most early care and education settings in the United States are of poor quality. This is especially true for those that serve low-income, immigrant, and other vulnerable children. These children can not only benefit the most from high quality early care and education, but they are also the most likely to be harmed by poor quality.¹

What makes early care and education of high quality is increasingly understood to be much more than the provision of a safe environment with trained staff. High quality early learning environments have physical attributes that encourage child-directed exploration and play with a wide variety of materials and activities, opportunities for children to interact with each other in large and small groups, relationships with adults that are nurturing and promote the development of social and language skills, and supports for each child's individual developmental needs. Quality has many interrelated dimensions, and regulations alone are not sufficient to ensure quality across these dimensions.

Quality improvement can be a daunting task, especially for providers relying on limited resources provided by public subsidies and contracts. Many center-based programs are also plagued by high staff turnover and limited leadership capacity. These factors make it difficult to improve the quality of early care and learning across the board within a program. Experience has found that teacher training, credentials and professional development are not sufficient to ensure sustainable comprehensive program quality.² An approach focused at the program level is needed.

Quality New York

Quality New York (QNY) is a comprehensive initiative to support development and learning of all New York City's young children by assisting early care and education programs to improve teaching and administrative practices, provide high quality learning environments for young children, and engage in continuous self-monitoring and quality improvement. QNY selected the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) program standards and accreditation process as the framework for its work because of their comprehensiveness, basis in research, and acceptance in the field.³ QNY,

¹ An influential summary of research findings on early childhood development and interventions, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development* was published in 2000, based on reviews conducted by a panel of experts convened by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine.

² See Bogard, Traylor and Takanishi, 2008.

³ The ten Program Standards in the NAEYC accreditation system cover all aspects of early childhood programs that affect the experiences and development of young children. The system requires that accredited programs demonstrate that each

a collaboration between Bank Street College of Education, Child Care, Inc. (CCI), and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA),⁴ is a registered Accreditation Facilitation Project with NAEYC and is considered a leading model for accreditation facilitation.⁵

QNY uses a comprehensive program improvement model that is implemented by an experienced and dedicated staff.⁶ The QNY model includes two types of support for participating programs – group support activities and individualized support. The group support activities include opportunities for facilitated peer learning among directors through monthly program administrator network meetings and professional development workshop series for both program administrators and teaching staff. Individualized support is provided by Quality Advisors, experienced early childhood professionals, usually former program administrators themselves, who assist in program assessment, improvement planning, consultation with the program director, and on-site training for staff.

QNY has been successful in guiding many New York City early care and education programs of all kinds through a program improvement process, using the NAEYC standards and self-study tools. As of mid-2009, QNY has worked with 214 programs, with 101 having achieved NAEYC accreditation and another 7 awaiting assessor visits to determine the results of their candidacy application. Another 18 programs are currently working toward candidacy and 51 programs are working with QNY less intensively.

Framework and Goals for this Study

This study was designed in a “community impact” framework, defined by the United Way of America as the process of “improving lives by mobilizing communities to create lasting changes in community conditions,” which are changes in policy, practice, resource allocation, or other aspects of a community

is met and provide annual evidence of continued compliance and progress toward improvement. For detailed information on the NAEYC standards, see www.naeyc.org/academy/standards/. Evidence for the association between accreditation and program quality is summarized in a QNY-commissioned paper (Stephens, May 2006) and in McDonald, 2007.

⁴ Bank Street College, a recognized leader in early childhood education, is an independent, fully accredited graduate institution. Child Care, Inc., a child care resource and referral agency, works to expand the supply of quality child care and school-aged education in New York City through public policy, training, and technical assistance to home- and center-based programs. The Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies is a leading social service support organization in New York City and an advocate for the poor and underserved. As one of its many programs, FPWA provides technical assistance and training to child care centers.

⁵ Accreditation Facilitation Projects were developed as a response to the need of early childhood programs for more intensive and sustained support in the accreditation process than was possible for NAEYC staff to provide. See Flis (2002) and Goldfarb and Flis (1996) for descriptions of the role of Accreditation Facilitation Projects.

⁶ More details on the QNY program improvement model can be found in “Supporting Program Quality Improvement: QNY’s Approach” available at www.QualityNewYork.org or www.capd.org.

system, institution, or other community entity.⁷ As applied to QNY, the community outcome to be impacted is the healthy development and readiness to succeed in the early grades of school among young children in New York City and the community condition that needs to change in order to achieve this outcome is the quality of early care and education programs in the City.

To ensure quality of early care and education at the program level, early childhood education program administrators need to be knowledgeable about what is needed to provide a quality early learning environment, skilled in management of program staff and resources to promote such an environment, and capable of setting up efficient operations that maximize the effectiveness of resources. Programs need to have in place policies and management systems that support efficient operations and sustained attention to maintaining and improving the quality of the learning environment. Program early childhood education teaching staff need to be knowledgeable about child development and individualized assessment, skilled in implementing developmentally appropriate practices, culturally competent, and capable of planning and implementing an appropriate curriculum and learning environment. Programs also need resources sufficient to implement policies and practices essential to program -- such as hiring and retaining qualified staff, providing professional development to staff, purchasing developmentally appropriate equipment and materials, and setting up a facility that supports a developmentally appropriate learning environment and ensures health and safety.

To ensure quality early care and learning opportunities across many programs at the community level, policymakers and public sector agencies need to be aware of the importance of providing quality early childhood learning environments, particularly to vulnerable children, and be willing to commit resources to the goal of ensuring quality for every child. In addition to resources for operations, funding and regulatory agencies need to ensure that professional development, training, and technical assistance resources are available to program directors and their staff to improve their knowledge and skills and to develop and implement program-wide quality improvement.

There are two ways in which an initiative like QNY can contribute to community impact related to quality early childhood education programs -- by developing efficient and effective tools and practices that can be adopted by other initiatives or projects to assist early childhood education programs improve quality, and by developing and implementing training and tools for those involved in managing, supervising, and/or monitoring to make program, agency, and/or system-wide changes that support quality in early childhood education programs.

Within the community impact framework, this study sought to measure how the quality of participating early care and education programs improve during their participation in QNY, identify

⁷ See the following United Way of America documents: "Connecting Program Outcome Measurement to Community Impact" (2007); "Program Outcomes and Community Outcomes: What Are the Differences?" (2005); and "How Program Outcome Measurement Contributes to Community Impact" (2005).

how components of QNY contribute to improvement, and, based on these findings, consider what components of QNY might be replicated and system-wide policies and practices adopted.

Study Methods and Data Sources

To carry out this study, a set of early care and education programs that had participated in QNY for at least 18 months were asked to participate in a set of data collection activities. The intent was to include programs that had had the opportunity to receive QNY supports for sufficient time so that it would be reasonable to expect that program improvements could be made.

When programs initially enrolled in QNY, specially trained consultants and QNY staff administered two standardized assessments measuring the quality of early care and education programs. One assessment, the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale- Revised Edition (ECERS) measures the quality of the classroom learning environment, and the other, the Program Administration Scale (PAS), measures the quality of the program's management and operations.⁸ Programs participating in the study were among 28 that had low scores on several dimensions of quality as measured on one or both of these assessments.⁹ The intent of this selection criterion was to include programs in which quality improvement was needed and in which improvement could be measured by a follow-up administration of the same assessment tools.

In all, eleven programs agreed to participate. These programs represent the diversity of early care and education programs in New York City. They include:

- 5 programs located in Manhattan, 4 in The Bronx, 1 in Brooklyn, and 1 in Queens
- 2 programs funded solely privately, from parent fees and other private sources
- 3 programs that had Head Start grants (one also operated a UPK program)
- 2 programs that operated UPK (the state-funded University Pre-Kindergarten program)
- 2 programs that served primarily children with special needs with public funding
- 2 programs that were contracted with the City's Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to provide subsidized child care for low-income families

⁸ The ECERS consists of 43 indicators that can be aggregated into 7 subscales – space and furnishings; personal care routines; language-reasoning; activities; interactions; program structure; and parents and staff. The scoring for each indicator is from 1 (lowest) to 7 (highest). More information on the ECERS and ITERS is available on the website of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute (www.fpg.unc.edu) where they were developed. Also see Harms, Clifford, and Cryer (1998, updated in 2005). The PAS consists of 25 indicators that can be aggregated into 10 subscales – human resources development; personnel cost and allocation; center operations; child assessment; fiscal management; program planning and evaluation; family partnerships; marketing and public relations; technology; and staff qualifications. More information on the PAS is available on the website of the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership Development (ceci.ni.edu), where it was developed. See also Talan and Bloom (2004). A concise summary of both the ECERS and the PAS is available in Halle and Vick (2007).

⁹ Programs eligible to be selected for the study had to have at least 2 or more subscales of the ECERS with scores less than 4 and 6 more or more indicators on the PAS with scores of less than 4. Programs were randomly selected for the study from those meeting these criteria; as necessary, replacement programs were randomly selected from this same list.

Information on how each program participated in QNY – the length of time enrolled, length of time in intensive support, average number of hours in trainings/meetings per month, average number of QA visits per month in intensive phase, average hours of on-site support (QA visits and on-site workshops) per month in intensive phase, number of QA visits, number of Bank Street workshop series attended by director and teachers, number of on-site trainings provided by QAs, number of director group meetings – was obtained from QNY records.

Repeat administration of the ECERS and PAS assessment tools were administered in each study program, with the exception of one program in which the PAS was not re-administered due to scheduling difficulties. These re-assessments were conducted by trained and reliable QNY staff and consultants who were assigned to programs in which they had not provided support as part of QNY.

Interviews were conducted with the program director in all but one of the study programs, and with QNY staff and QAs who worked with each program. These interviews focused on understanding the nature of changes in the program during the time it was participating in QNY and the contribution of specific components of the QNY model to those changes.

FINDINGS

The Quality of the Study Programs When Entering QNY

The quality of the early care and education programs participating in this study was assessed at two points in time – when they were first accepted into QNY and during the study period (March-April 2009). Two standardized measures of program quality were used – one measuring the quality of the classroom learning environment using the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised Edition (ECERS) and the other measuring the quality of the management and operations of the center using the Program Administration Scale (PAS). These two measures are widely accepted as valid and reliable ways of assessing the quality of early care and education programs.

Based on the initial assessment of program quality using these tools, the programs in this study were of low to moderate quality overall, with considerable variation both within programs and among them.¹⁰ The programs exhibited a wide range of both weaknesses and strengths in the classroom environments and in administrative practices. At the same time, the classroom learning environment and program administration and operations – as measured by the ECERS and PAS tools – were independent of each other. They represent two separate dimensions of program quality among these programs.

Initial Quality of the Classroom Learning Environment

Based on the ECERS scores obtained at entry into QNY, most of the programs in the study were of low to moderate quality – that is, the average ECERS score across all 36 dimensions was 3.89 on a 7-point scale, where 1 represents the lowest level of quality and 7 the highest. The range of initial ECERS scores for the eleven study programs was 2.54 and the maximum was 5.53.

These programs had a wide range of areas in which their classroom learning environments were weak – that is, had an ECERS score of 2 or less, indicating inadequate or substandard quality. On average, the eleven programs had a mean of 7 areas of weakness, with a range from zero to 18 out of 36 total areas. The most common areas of weakness, indicated by at least 4 of the 11 programs scoring a 2 or below, were:

- Routines for meals and snacks (for 8 programs)
- Routine for toileting (for 6 programs)
- Nature and science activities (for 6 programs)
- Routine for naps and rest time (for 5 programs)
- Health practices (for 5 programs)
- Music and movement activities (for 5 programs)

¹⁰ The two programs that did not receive any public funding had higher initial program quality compared to publicly funded programs (average of 5.2 compared with 3.6 on the 7-point ECERS scale). However, among programs with public support, there were no significant differences in program quality between those with a particular type of public support – Head Start, UPK, special education, or ACS contracts – and those without that type of funding.

- Furniture for relaxation (for 4 programs)
- Group time (for 4 programs)

At the same time, these programs had areas of strength identified on the initial ECERS – that is, there were areas with a score of 6 or higher, indicating high to excellent quality. On average, the eleven programs had 7.5 areas of strength, with a range from 2 to 18 among the 36 areas assessed. The most common areas of strength were:

- Furniture for routine care, play and learning (for 9 programs)
- Greeting and departing routines (for 7 programs)
- Room arrangement for play (for 6 programs)
- Safety practices (for 4 programs)
- Fine motor activities (for 4 programs)
- General supervision of children (for 4 programs)
- Discipline practices (for 4 programs)
- Interactions among children (for 4 programs)
- Group time (for 4 programs)

In all but one study program, two classrooms were assessed using the ECERS, both when the program first entered QNY and during the study period; one program had only one classroom with children in the age range for which the ECERS was developed. One measure of program quality is the extent to which the learning environment varies among classrooms; the ECERS scores for the two observed classrooms in each program were compared to determine differences in quality. Among the ten programs with two classroom assessments, the number of areas in which the assessments differed by 2 or more points on the 7-point scale averaged 12.2, with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 19 out of the 36 areas in which quality was assessed.¹¹

Initial Quality of Program Administration

Based on the initial PAS scores, the quality of the study programs in terms of operations and administration was also low to moderate, with a mean across 22 categories¹² of 3.94, and a range from 2.14 to 5.59. This is consistent with the evidence that many early childhood program administrators have had little prior management training.¹³ This measure of program quality generally varied across all types of programs, regardless of funding source. The two private programs had average PAS scores

¹¹ The average number of areas in which the ECERS score differed between the two classrooms differed by exactly 2 points was 5.3, with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 9, and the average where the two classroom scores differed by more than 2 points was 6.9, ranging from 2 to 11.

¹² The PAS has 25 items, but because the study was unable to obtain information from several programs on staff qualifications needed for scoring 3 items, these items were excluded from the analysis.

¹³ A survey of the early childhood education workforce in New York City found that over 90 percent of current program administrators reported no prior experience or formal training in program management (New York City Professional Development Institute, Spring 2008, and Ochshorn and Garcia, 2007).

that were neither higher nor lower than publicly funded programs. However, Head Start programs scored higher on the PAS than programs that operated other publicly funded programs (averaging 5.2 compared with 3.3, respectively).

The study programs averaged 7.45 areas of weakness on the PAS – areas in which a score of 2 or less was given. The range of number of weaknesses was from 2 to 15, and the most common areas of weakness identified by the PAS were:

- Risk management (for 8 programs)
- Program evaluation (for 8 programs)
- Strategic planning (for 8 programs)
- Internal communications (for 7 programs)
- Staff orientation (for 5 programs)
- Staff benefits (for 5 programs)
- Screening of children for identification of special needs (for 5 programs)
- Staffing patterns and scheduling (for 4 programs)
- Child assessment in support of learning (for 4 programs)
- Budget planning (for 4 programs)
- Community outreach (for 4 programs)

The study programs also exhibited areas of strength in administration and operations, on average 7 areas were given a PAS score of 6 or 7. The range was from no areas of strength to a maximum of 15 areas of strength out of the possible 22 areas. The most common administrative strengths were in the areas of:

- Technological resources (for 7 programs)
- Use of technology (for 7 programs)
- Family communications (for 7 programs)
- Facilities management (for 6 programs)
- Accounting practices (for 6 programs)
- Family support and involvement (for 6 programs)
- Screening of children for identification of special needs (for 5 programs)
- Child assessment in support of learning (for 5 programs)
- Budget planning (for 5 programs)
- Staff patterns and scheduling (for 4 programs)

Program Participation in QNY

At the time of this study, the eleven programs were at different stages in the process of pursuing NAEYC accreditation and in participation in QNY. Two programs had enrolled in QNY but had dropped out due to the programs' directors leaving the program. Three programs were QNY affiliates; they had enrolled in self-study but had not advanced any further toward NAEYC accreditation. They were eligible to participate in QNY's professional development workshops for program administrators, peer

network meetings for program administrators, and professional development for teaching staff. A total of four programs were receiving intensive QNY services – that is, they were eligible to have the support of a Quality Advisor (QA) for on-site consultation and support, as well as to participate in the program administrator and teaching staff professional development and in peer network meetings for program administrators. Two of these four programs had applied for NAEYC accreditation and set a date for submission of their candidacy reports, and two had submitted their candidacy reports and were waiting for NAEYC assessor visits. Two of the study programs had received NAEYC accreditation by the time of the study, as a result of their participation in QNY.

Across these 11 programs, the period of participation in QNY – from the time of initial enrollment and the last date of participation in any QNY activities – averaged 41 months, ranging from 20 to 65. For selection into the study the programs had to have participated in QNY for at least 18 months; the dates of initial QNY enrollment were between November 2005 and August 2008. All of the study programs had received intensive QNY services at some point during their participation. On average, these programs were in the intensive phase of QNY for 27 months, ranging from 11 to 40.

On average, the directors and staff of the study programs spent an average of 3.4 hours per month while enrolled in QNY attending professional development workshops or program administrator network meetings. The programs varied in how much they took advantage of these opportunities, so that the average time per month varied from half an hour to 5.6 hours per month. During the time the programs were in the intensive phase of QNY, they received a visit from their QA on average once every other month (based on an average of .56 visits per month) and an average of 2.0 hours of on-site support per month, both QA visits and on-site training. Program utilization of on-site consultation and support also varied among the study programs. For all programs, the average number of QA visits per month during the intensive phase ranged from none to 1.1, and the average hours of on-site support per month ranged from none to 3.9. For programs that had been in the intensive phase of QNY and thus eligible for QA visits and on-site support, the average number of QA visits per month was once every 6 weeks and the average hours of on-site support per month was 2.3 hours.

The measures of individualized consultation by the QA (average number of QA visits per month while in the intensive phase) and on-site support including QA visits and on-site workshops (average hours of on-site support per month while in the intensive phase) are, as expected, highly related. However, programs that made extensive use of on-site supports and consultation with their QA did not necessarily take advantage of the program administrator peer network meetings and staff professional development training. These two aspects of QNY participation and services are independent and their relationship to program quality improvement can be examined separately.

It is also the case that the study programs' participation in QNY – in meetings or professional development and in on-site consultation and workshops – did not vary by how well or poorly they scored on the initial assessments of their quality. Neither the initial PAS scores nor the initial ECERS scores predicted how much the program director and staff participated in QNY activities. Both weaker and stronger programs participated at varying levels and in varying ways.

Changes in Program Quality

Overall, the study programs improved in the quality of their classroom learning environments and in administration and operations, as measured by changes in their ECERS and PAS scores between the time they initially enrolled in QNY and the spring of 2009. Improvements were evident in programs at all points in the accreditation process – regardless of how far they had progressed toward being awarded accreditation. However, programs that had submitted their materials to NAEYC or had been awarded accreditation showed improvement in classroom quality at about twice the level as did programs that were still in self-study or had just applied for candidacy.

Overall, the quality of the classroom environments improved more than did administrative practices. Further, the initial quality of the classroom environment did not predict the level of classroom quality in 2009. That is, regardless of how good or poor the classrooms were rated when the program first joined QNY, being in QNY improved the quality of the learning environment offered to children in these programs. However, this was not the case for the quality of program administration and operations. The initial rating of this aspect of program quality was strongly correlated with how well program administration and operations were rated in 2009. This suggests that changing policies and practices at the program level is more difficult than improving classroom practices. At the same time, programs that became stronger administratively had reduced variation across their classrooms in the quality of the learning environment, an indication that strengthening management and operations is needed to improve consistency in what children experience in the program.

Changes in Quality of Classroom Learning Environments

Overall, by the spring of 2009 the study programs' average classroom quality, as measured on the ECERS, was 5.0, ranging from 3.6 to 6.1. Thus, overall the study programs moved from being in the low to moderate quality range to the moderate to high quality range. These programs averaged 17.9 areas, out of a possible 36, in which they reached high levels of quality (scores of 6 or 7 on the ECERS). At a minimum, these programs were at high quality in 6 areas and reached a maximum of 28 areas of high quality. On average, the study programs gained high quality ratings in, on average, more than 10 areas (10.4), and in as many as 23 areas.

Program directors and QNY staff noted other kinds of changes in teaching and learning in their programs. One director noted that “teachers are more willing to take ownership for what goes on in their classrooms and for how children are doing. Teachers are not waiting for me to tell them what to do and they are able to articulate why they are doing certain things in the classroom.”

On average, the study programs' rating of the quality of their classroom environments improved by just over one point (1.03) on the 7-point scale used in the ECERS. The range was from a very small decrease (-.13) to almost three points (2.75). On average, the study programs improved their scores by 2 or more points on the ECERS in more than 12 out of the 36 areas (12.2). The areas of greatest improvement were in:

- Using language to develop reasoning (for 8 programs)
- Toileting routine (for 7 programs)
- Staff-child interactions (for 6 programs)
- Interactions among children (for 6 programs)
- Informal use of language (for 5 programs)
- Furniture for relaxation (for 5 programs)
- Promoting the acceptance of diversity (for 5 programs)
- Supervision of gross motor activities (for 5 programs)
- Group time (for 5 programs)
- Space for privacy (for 4 programs)
- Space for gross motor activities (for 4 programs)
- Gross motor equipment (for 4 programs)
- Greeting and departing routines (for 4 programs)
- Safety practices (for 4 programs)
- Encouraging children to communicate (for 4 programs)
- Discipline practices (for 4 programs)
- Schedule (for 4 programs)
- Free play (for 4 programs)

The quality of these programs' classroom learning environments became more consistent between the initial ECERS assessment and the 2009 assessment. On average, the number of items that differed by 2 or more points on the ECERS decreased by almost 3 (2.8). One way in which participation in QNY and the NAEYC accreditation process increased consistency in quality across classrooms was by providing a framework and language for teachers to discuss quality issues and support each other in making change. As one program director noted, "The focus on developmentally appropriate practices has us talking about improvements in quality." The same program director noted that her own understanding of quality had improved through her participation in QNY – "I've become more aware of what standards need to be improved upon within the program, what's working, and what needs to change." According to the QNY staff, there is "stronger continuity of services and a more standardized curriculum" in this program. Another program director noted that "we are much more conscious of what we're doing – about curriculum and planning better for the needs of the children. Everyone is on the same page."

Changes in Quality of Program Administration

By early 2009, the study programs had improved their administrative policies and practices, as measured by the PAS, by a small amount, less than one point (.67) on the 7-point scale. On average, these programs had improved their PAS scores by 2 or more points on just over 6 items out of a total of 22. The areas in which there was the most improvement were:

- Internal communications (for 6 programs)
- Staff orientation (for 5 programs)

- External communications (for 5 programs)
- Staff supervision and performance appraisal (for 4 programs)
- Staff development (for 4 programs)
- Staff benefits (for 4 programs)
- Staffing patterns and scheduling (for 4 programs)
- Risk management (for 4 programs)
- Program evaluation (for 4 programs)

Just as important as improvements in specific areas of administration and program operations were changes in directors' understanding of their own leadership role. One director noted, "I've been in the field a long time, starting as a teacher. This process has helped me recognize areas in my own practice that I needed to look at. I have become more organized, more focused." Another noted, "It's given me a range of professional goals to be aware of – I'm now trying to step back as an administrator and understand what the impact of my actions is, thinking about the program holistically."

Contribution of QNY to Improvements in Program Quality

As described earlier, there are two major types of support that early care and education programs can gain from participation in QNY. One type includes the professional development workshops for program administrators and teaching staff and the program administrator network meetings. These opportunities provided administrative and teaching staff, but especially program directors, with information and tools as well as opportunities to interact with their peers in considering how to apply these resources in their programs and classrooms. The other type includes the individualized consultation from the QA with the program director and on-site trainings tailored to the specific interests and needs of the program staff.

These two types of supports are both valued and viewed as contributing to quality improvements by the program directors. The comments from program directors (emphasis added) illustrate this:

- "The [*professional development*] workshops have been the most valuable for us – they are very rich in content. The networking opportunities for the teachers has been great."
- "Definitely the teachers getting the *ongoing training* has been invaluable. It has given my teachers a sense of professionalism. It has allowed us to continue the conversation here."
- "The [*program administrator network*] meetings are so informative. Meeting with the other directors is helpful. We touch base, send each other materials, and learn from each other's experiences."
- "Going to the *monthly [network] meetings* – I have met a lot of people, listened to the experiences of other directors. Their experiences have put a face on what I'm trying to do and has really encouraged me to continue. It's helpful to go to the meetings and listen to people at various stages of the process. The way I learn is to listen and pick up ideas to use as I need them."

- “The QA has been very valuable to us – she was the one who followed through and never gave up on us.”
- “[QA] is very knowledgeable about the standards and very informative. If I have questions, I talk with her.”
- “The [QA] who came here was very persistent and came frequently. She got me to work.”

While both types of support are valued, each appears to play a different role in contributing to program quality improvement. The measure of individualized consultation and training provided on-site at the program was strongly associated with improvement in the classroom learning environments. The correlations between the average on-site support time provided per month with measures of classroom quality were moderately high -- .58 with improvement in average ECERS score, .56 with increased number of areas in which the program scored high on the ECERS, and .63 with decreased variation in classroom quality between QNY enrollment and 2009. This type of support, however, was not associated with improvement in program administration and operations, as measured by the PAS.

Participation of program directors in professional development workshops and program administrator network meetings was, on the other hand, strongly associated with improvement in program administration and operations, as measured by the PAS. The average time spent in these workshops and meetings was correlated with improvement on the overall PAS score (.71), with increased number of areas in which the program scored high on the PAS (.75), and with decreased variability across classrooms on the ECERS (.66). New program directors, in particular, noted the importance of their participation in QNY in the development of their knowledge and skills in administration. One such director stated, “I’m a lot better informed. I was a brand new administrator when I started here [at the program]. QNY and the NAEYC process have taught me a lot. I made use of the information provided at the [program administrator network] meetings and went over the criteria again and again. I learned so much of what I had to do from QNY.”

Teaching staff participation in QNY professional development was strongly associated with improvements in their program’s PAS scores (correlated at .66 with change in average PAS score and .71 with change in number of PAS areas rated as high quality). This suggests that, as directors gain greater understanding of their leadership and managerial roles in quality improvement and in staff supervision skills, they take advantage of the professional development workshops for their staff. The fact that the participation of teaching staff in professional development workshops was not associated with improvement in the quality of classroom environments, as measured by change in the ECERS scores, reinforces the observation that even high quality professional development for individual teachers may not be sufficient to produce broad, program-wide quality improvement.¹⁴

These patterns of the different contributions of QNY supports to early childhood education program improvement hold even when the initial level of quality is taken into account. That is, when controlling

¹⁴ The teachers who participated in the Bank Street professional development workshop series may not have been those in charge of the classrooms in which the quality of the learning environment was assessed. While their individual classrooms may have improved, the benefits of individual teacher professional development did not appear to carry over to the program as a whole.

statistically for the initial ECERS level, the amount of on-site support received by a program remained strongly associated with improvement in classroom quality. Similarly, when controlling for initial PAS score, the time spent in professional development workshops and program administrator network meetings was strongly associated with improvement in administration and operations.¹⁵

As noted earlier, an important measure of both the quality of the learning environment and the strength of program management is the extent to which classrooms in the same program differ in quality. When examined together in a multiple regression analysis, both types of QNY support -- individualized on-site support and participation in professional development workshops, and program administrator network meetings -- were associated with decreased variability across classrooms in ECERS ratings. Both types of support appear to contribute independently to this improvement and appear to be complementary as well. Based on reports from program directors and QNY staff, workshops and network meetings support improvement in such administrative practices as supervision, internal communication, and professional development, while on-site consultation assists teachers and the director identify and improve specific areas of the classroom experience.

Tellingly, when asked to rank the types of QNY support in terms of value to her program, one administrator was initially unable to do so. She then noted that each has served a different purpose and has been valuable for that purpose. "The meetings with the QA have been more for hands-on guidance – I get direct feedback on my program from the QA. The [professional development workshops] are informative about best practices – they give us the knowledge of the standards and the process of implementing and documenting them. The [program administrator network] meetings provide overviews and opportunities for general discussion of the standards – we come together as a group of directors to discuss different strategies."

In addition, analysis revealed that it was the QNY services themselves, not simply time elapsed since joining QNY and committing to program improvement, that made the difference. Duration in QNY (total months and total months in the intensive phase) was not associated with change in PAS scores, change in ECERS scores, or change in classroom variability in ECERS scores. Intensity of QNY services (average on-site time per month by the QA and average number of workshops and director meetings attended per month), not length of participation, was associated with improvements in quality.

¹⁵ Multiple regressions that included the initial ECERS score along with the hours per month of on-site consultation and support in predicting both the change in ECERS scores and the change in the number of ECERS items scored as high were statistically significant and explained 74 percent and 54 percent of the respective variances in these measures of program improvement. Similarly, multiple regressions that controlled for the initial PAS score and included the hours per month that program staff participated in professional development workshops and director meetings were statistically significant in predicting change in PAS scores and in the number of PAS items scored as high, explaining 60 percent and 58 percent respectively of the variance in these measures of program improvement.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY IMPACT

What makes the QNY approach effective? What appear to be key elements of the approach?

QNY's two types of support for early care and education programs – group support provided in professional development workshops and program administrator network meetings, and individualized support provided by consultation with an experienced early childhood education professional and on-site training – are both effective in contributing to quality improvement. Even programs that began with substantial areas of weakness when they enrolled in QNY – the criteria for inclusion in this study – improved the quality of their classroom learning environments and administrative policies and practices.

Each type of support contributed to a different area of quality. Individualized, on-site support contributed to improvement in the overall quality of programs' classroom learning environments. Group support – particularly program administrator professional development workshops and network meetings – contributed to improved management and administrative practices. At the same time, the two types of support reinforced each other and both contributed to reducing the differences in classroom quality within the programs.

These findings are consistent with other research on quality improvement strategies in early childhood education and related fields. Coaching and peer exchange has been found to be effective in encouraging application of new practices (Burkhauser and Metz, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Training offered in multiple sessions with opportunities to implement introduced behaviors is more effective than single-session workshops (Metz, Burkhauser and Bowie, 2009; Buysse, Rous and Winton, 2008; Chen and Chang, 2006).

Further, the value of QNY's focus on supporting program administrators to act as change agents within their organization is also consistent with related research. For example, in a pilot study of a quality rating and improvement system, programs that experienced the most improvement had directors with strong professionalism, personnel management and leadership skills, and willingness to be accountable for change (Ackerman, 2008). This study noted that "...coaching needed to focus on helping a director improve her administrative skills as a means for bringing about change at the classroom level..." Another study of the relationship between program management and leadership with classroom learning environments (McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership, 2008) also noted that "...the director...is an important key to classroom quality. Directors provide the support system that teachers need to create quality educational settings for the children in their classrooms." (See also Collins and Metz, 2009.)

What would be needed to faithfully replicate key components of the QNY approach?

Replication of effective components of the QNY model need to take into account the details of how these elements are designed, delivered, and supported. Faithful replication of these components is the key to replication of the positive results.

The group supports provided by QNY were carefully designed to support leadership capacity among the program directors and application of new knowledge and skills in the program.

- The professional development workshops for both program administrators and teaching staff had multiple sessions spread over a several month period. This allowed reinforcement and further discussion of concepts at follow-up sessions, experience in trying out new skills and knowledge between sessions, and relationship-building between the workshop presenter and participants and among the participants. Professional development workshop series for teaching staff began with a session for the program directors at which the topic was introduced with suggestions for how the director could support the participating teacher in making changes in his/her own classroom and diffuse the knowledge and skills gained to the rest of the teaching staff. The director also joined the participating teacher at the final session of each series to celebrate and reinforce changes that the teacher had implemented and to support ideas for expanding these changes to other classes in the program.
- The program administrator network meetings were regular, frequent, and facilitated by a QNY staff member. The meetings were organized around topics relevant to the specific interests and needs of the directors and related to the early childhood program standards embodied in the NAEYC accreditation process. The QNY staff member provided information and resources and facilitated group discussion on the topic, focusing on deepening directors' understanding of that area of program quality and on sharing specific challenges and successful strategies in making improvements in that area.

The individualized supports provided by the Quality Advisor included observation and feedback on individual classrooms and program operations, consultation and advice to the program director in dealing with challenges and supporting change, and on-site training on topics of particular interest to the program staff. The individuals who served as QAs were all highly experienced in the administration of early childhood education programs and very knowledgeable about best practices in both the learning environment and program management. Their work with program directors was sustained and systematic; that is, they made multiple visits on a regular basis, they provided written feedback as well as verbal coaching and modeling, they used the NAEYC standards and accreditation tools as a framework for identifying areas for improvement and working methodically through an improvement process. To do this, the QAs were provided with considerable support by the QNY staff. This support included training on the accreditation standards and on strategies for working with program directors and staff, monthly peer group meetings, professional development workshops on early childhood development and education, and individual consultation with senior QNY staff.

What challenges would be faced in replication, particularly by public agencies?

Broad community impact requires broad implementation of effective programs and practices. Applying this to improving and sustaining the quality of early care and education programs in New York City, with its multitude of early education programs, is likely to require some involvement of public

agencies responsible for regulating and funding these programs. Some challenges to replication apply regardless of whether through non-profit organizations, like the current QNY partners, or public sector agencies like ACS and the Board of Education. Others are unique to replication by public agencies.

All replication efforts will face resource and staffing issues related to implementing QNY supports. This is especially true for the individualized support provided by expert and experienced early education consultants. Not only are these individuals in short supply, but to be effective they must spend the time needed to interact regularly with program directors. In addition, these consultants themselves must be trained and supervised so that consistent standards are applied and effective consultation strategies used.

Replication by either private or public organizations would also need to organize professional development activities to maximize learning and application. Specifically, one-shot workshops and professional development focused solely on classroom staff are likely to be ineffective.

Finally, replication efforts should also provide regular opportunities for program directors to build relationships with peers and take the time from their many program duties to reflect on and strengthen their own leadership capacities. Such meetings need to focus on substantive issues, be relevant to immediate as well as longer-term improvement goals, and have facilitation support.

The special challenges that would face public agencies that wish to use their staff to provide the kind of individualized support that QNY has found effective relate to a key factor in their relationship with programs. Public agencies that regulate or contract with programs have a very different relationship with program staff than does a private, voluntary effort such as QNY. A major factor in the ability of QNY's QA consultants to help program directors make the changes necessary to improve quality was the nature of the power dynamics in their relationship. The QAs were able to be mentors and coaches to the program directors, not only because they had the time to develop a level of trust over multiple, frequent interactions but also because they were interacting as peers. The QA – unlike a program monitor or supervisor – has no authority or responsibility over contracts, funding, licensing, and so on. Public agencies may find that it will be difficult to use their staff to replicate this effective strategy for program improvement.

What are some policy implications of the QNY experience?

This small-scale study of Quality New York also has potential policy implications related to how resources are used to ensure that young children have access to high quality early childhood care and education environments.

Federal funds as well as other public and private resources are allocated to early childhood quality improvement initiatives. Based on these findings, QNY's experience, and research in the field, these resources would be more effective if targeted to supporting program improvement strategies than dedicated to reimbursing or paying for training for individual teachers. These strategies could include providing programs with funds to pay for coaches for the program administrators, program-wide staff

development and mentoring, technical assistance to program staff in implementing new practices or policies, and/or opportunities for administrators and teachers to connect with peers and model programs.

Considerable attention has been paid to raising standards for early childhood teacher credentials and requirements for ongoing professional development. While regulations in New York City, as in many other jurisdictions, require that program directors have educational credentials and experience in early education, leadership and program management knowledge and skills are not required. The importance of program management and leadership to the quality of the learning environment, and the success of QNY's approach in improving administrative quality, suggests that a focus on directors is likely to be an effective program improvement approach. The QNY experience suggests that a combination of formal professional development – multi-session and with opportunities for application and feedback, peer connections to share field experiences and innovative practices, and individual coaching by an experienced administrator can be powerful in supporting growth in leadership and management.

Many states are developing Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRIS) to provide consumers with standard information (ratings) on early care and education providers and to encourage and support quality improvement among participating providers. A common feature of these systems is an assessment of the learning environment and practices. Given prior research and evidence from this study about the importance of the work environment, collecting and assessing systematic standardized information about management and administrative practices as part of a QRIS seems warranted. In addition, Quality Improvement Plans developed and implemented through a QRIS should include helping administrators improve their leadership and management skills as well as implement sound administrative policies and practices.

This study also suggests that variability among classrooms in early childhood programs is as important a measure of program quality as is the average rating across those classrooms. QRIS ratings and other program assessment and improvement initiatives could use measures of such variability within a program as a marker suggesting weakness in management and leadership. Program improvement strategies should strive to both “raise the bar” across all classrooms and “narrow the gap” among them, as the results they seek to achieve.

REFERENCES

- Ackerman, D. J. *Coaching as Part of a Pilot Quality Rating Scale Initiative: Challenges to—and Support for—the Change-Making Process*. 2008. Early Childhood Research & Practice.
- Bogard, K., Traylor, F. and Takanishi, R. *Teacher Education and PK Outcomes: Are we asking the right questions?* 2008. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, pages 1-6.
- Burkhauser, M. and Metz, A. J. R. *Using Coaching to Provide Ongoing Support and Supervision to Out-of-School Time Staff*. 2009. Child Trends.
- Buyse, V., Rous, B. and Winton, P. *What Do We Mean by Professional Development in the Early Childhood Field?* 2008. National Professional Development Center on Inclusion, University of North Carolina.
- Chen, J-Q, and Chang, C. *Testing the Whole Teacher Approach to Professional Development: A Study of Enhancing Early Childhood Teachers' Technology Proficiency*. 2006. Early Childhood Research & Practice.
- Collins, A. and Metz, A. J. R. *How Program Administrators Can Support Out-of-School Time Staff*. Child Trends.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Wei, R. C., Andree, A., Richardson, N. and Orphanos, S. *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession*. February 2009. The School Redesign Network, Stanford University.
- Flis, D. *A Relationship with a Purpose: Accreditation Facilitation Projects and Early Childhood Programs*. July 2002. Young Children.
- Goldfarb, J. G. and Flis, D. *The Accreditation Facilitation Project: A Community Climate Ripe for Collaboration on Quality*. 1996. In NAEYC Accreditation: A Decade of Learning and the Years Ahead, edited by S. Bredekamp and B. A. Willer. NAEYC.
- Halle, T. and Vick, J. E. *Quality in Early Childhood Care and Education Settings: A Compendium of Measures*. 2007. Child Trends for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families.
- Harms, T.; Clifford, R. M. and Cryer, D. *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale – Revised Edition*. 1998; updated in 2005. Teacher's College Press (www.teacherscollegepress.com).
- McCormick Tribute Center for Early Childhood Leadership, *The Dynamic Relationship between Child Care Work Environments and Learning Environments*. Winter 2008. Research Notes. (Summary of

“Child Care Work Environments: The Relationship with Learning Environments” by J.K. Lower and D. J. Cassidy, *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, Volume 22, Issue 2, 2007, pp 189-204.)

McDonald, D. *Elevating the Field: Using NAEYC Early Childhood Program Accreditation to Support and Reach Higher Quality in Early Childhood Programs*. 2007. NAEYC.

Metz, A. J. R., Burkhauser, M. and Bowie, L. *Training Out-of-School Time Staff*. 2009. Child Trends.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. *Academy for Early Childhood Program Accreditation*. www.Naeyc.org/academy/.

New York City Early Childhood Professional Development Institute. *Are They Prepared? Raising the Bar for New York City’s Early Childhood Workforce*. Policy Brief, Volume 1, Number 3. Spring 2008.

Ochshorn, S. and Garcia, M. *Learning about the Workforce: A Profile of Early Childhood Educators in New York City’s Community- and School-Based Centers*. 2007. NYC Early Childhood Professional Development Institute.

Shonkoff, J. and Phillips, D., eds. *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*. 2000. National Academy Press.

Stephens, S. A. *Making the Case for Accreditation as a Strategy for Improving the Success of NYC’s Young Children as They Prepare for and Enter School*. May 2006. Quality New York (www.QualityNewYork.org) and the Center for Assessment and Policy Development (www.capd.org).

Stephens, S. A. and Pepper, A. *Supporting Program Quality Improvement: QNY’s Approach*. Summer 2008. Quality New York.

Talan, T. N. & Bloom, P. J. *Program Administration Scale: Measuring Leadership and Management in Early Childhood Programs*. 2004. Teacher’s College Press (www.teacherscollegepress.com).

United Way of America, *Connecting Program Outcome Measurement to Community Impact*. 2007.

United Way of America. *How Program Outcome Measurement Contributes to Community Impact*. 2005.

United Way of America. *Program Outcomes and Community Outcomes: What Are the Differences?* 2005.