Aligning Professional Development to Continuous Quality Improvement: A Case Study of Los Angeles Unified School District's Beyond the Bell Branch

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Abstract: There is a strong, empirical link between facets of afterschool program quality and a range of positive youth outcomes. However, implementing quality programs that are more likely to produce positive youth development require a high-level of knowledge and expertise among program staff. Training staff on the critical components of high-quality programming requires approaches that are systematic, ongoing, data-driven, inclusive of all staff, embedded into their organizational roles, and supported by organizational leadership. We present a case study of a preliminary continuous quality improvement (CQI) system at the Beyond the Bell (BTB) Branch of the Los Angeles Unified School District. We discuss the components of a CQI system (i.e., strategic planning, development of tools, staff development and data use) as well as reflect on important organizational factors that promote CQI.

Keywords: after school programming, program quality, professional development, continuous quality improvement

Program Quality in Afterschool

Afterschool program quality is a critical mechanism for promoting positive outcomes among youth attending afterschool programs (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2007; Lauer et al., 2006). According to leading afterschool researchers, afterschool program quality relates to a range of positive youth outcomes (Cross, Gottfredson, Wilson, Rorie, & Connell, 2010; Little, 2007). However, program quality is an elusive concept that is both difficult to describe and to assess (Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, & Reisner, 2007; Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010). Program quality has been defined by identifying the structural features (e.g., student-to-staff ratios, staff qualifications and education level, environmental features) and process features (e.g., student-staff relationships, peer relationships, opportunities for skill-building, supportive emotional climate, appropriate staff practices) that make afterschool programs successful (Birmingham, Pechman, Russell, & Mielke, 2005; Little, 2007). Other research has characterized quality in after school programs as engaging in

effective partnerships to promote learning and community engagement, providing academic content that complements school-day learning, and conducting evaluation for continuous improvement (C.S. Mott Foundation Committee on After-School Research and Practice, 2005). Recently, consensus has begun to emerge around critical program quality elements that are most predictive for enhancing positive youth development: activities that are sequenced, active, focused, and explicit (SAFE features; Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2007), giving youth choice and voice (Ward & Parker, 2013), and strong student-staff relationships (Vandell et al., 2005).

Collectively, these elements of program quality are difficult to implement, requiring a high-level of expertise and facilitation among program staff. In fact, Cross, Gottfredson, Wilson, Rorie, and Connell (2010) argued that staff knowledge and expertise might be the "single most important characteristic of program success" since program staff influence the quality of other aspects of implementation (p. 378). Findings from Cross et al.'s (2010) study suggested that staff members who were highly educated, well trained, and employed long-term were more likely to implement high quality afterschool program practices. Similarly, Grossman, Campbell, and Raley (2007) suggested that staff play an essential role in activity management and provide positive adult support, both of which are important predictors of engagement and learning among youth. Thus, if program staff are the primary mechanism for creating high-quality experiences for youth afterschool, how can we equip staff members with the tools, knowledge, and resources to implement high-quality programming afterschool? And, as a corollary, how does professional development need to be organized for maximum effectiveness?

The purpose of this article is to answer these questions by providing a framework for integrating staff professional development and evaluation into a continuous quality improvement (CQI) cycle. First, we argue against traditional approaches to staff professional development (e.g., one-day workshops, end of year reviews), especially if the goal is to improve program quality so that youth development outcomes are maximized. Second, we introduce the concept of continuous quality improvement as a mechanism for promoting staff knowledge about program quality. CQI processes intentionally involve varied staff members in active and reflective data collection to capture the nuances in program quality that can then be fed back into staff professional development opportunities. Finally, we present the framework for one CQI system that is in the early phases of implementation at the Beyond the Bell (BTB) Branch of the Los Angeles Unified School District, a large multi-site afterschool program. Details related to the development and early implementation of BTB's CQI system are described to introduce the conceptual underpinnings of CQI and to highlight its role in the professionalization of afterschool staff. At the time of this publication, BTB is initiating its CQI process and fine-tuning the components of the CQI system. As such, this article will focus on the preliminary steps in creating and implementing a CQI system because there is limited information currently available about the effectiveness of this system to date.

The Need for Continuous Quality Improvement in Afterschool Programs

Staff play a pivotal role in creating and maintaining high quality afterschool environments and activities; however, staff must possess knowledge about program quality and the skill to implement high-quality activities with youth. Unfortunately, traditional approaches to staff professional development around program quality are plagued by two critical issues: (1) staff professional development typically takes place once a year with limited follow-up or reflection, and (2) this professional development is informed by limited data about program implementation strengths and weaknesses, or not informed by evaluation data at all. These traditional 'one stop shop' workshops, 'sit-and-get' sessions where staff members patiently sit and listen to an instructor for several hours, or annual end of year reviews, are not sufficient for changing staff behavior, staff attitudes, or student performance (NSDC, 2001). Training staff on the critical components of high-quality programming will require more than attendance at an annual workshop; rather, it will require approaches that are systematic, inclusive of all staff, embedded into their organizational roles, and supported by organizational leadership. Furthermore, these training opportunities should be tied to program quality evaluation data from the afterschool program to ensure that staff are gaining knowledge and strategies to address their own unique challenges around offering high quality programming. To support this process, afterschool programs should engage in ongoing data collection from multiple data sources to inform professional development opportunities. As Sheldon and Hopkins (2008) indicated, professional development should be re-envisioned away from "one-shot" trainings with little or no follow-up and only periodic observations – to a continuous system that supports program quality improvement. This shift is intended to have a significant impact on program quality (Sheldon & Hopkins, 2008).

These approaches focused on embedded and continuous learning are referred to as Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). CQI differs from traditional quality improvement methods in its emphasis on understanding the key underlying processes and systems necessary for program improvement, instead of identifying and correcting mistakes after the fact or on a yearly basis (Shortell, Bennett, & Byck, 1998). CQI systems are complex; they involve a range of practices, supports, structures, and resources that need to be thoughtfully and meaningfully incorporated into program operations for programs to continuously improve. CQI systems involve iterative and ongoing cycles of goal setting about quality programming, using effective training practices to support staff learning and development, frequent program monitoring and data collection, follow-up coaching for staff, analyzing data to identify strengths and weaknesses in program quality, and implementing improvement plans (Blumenthal & Kilo, 1998). Once these goals are met and programs have addressed their challenges related to program quality, the process starts over again at the assessment stage, to begin a new cycle of quality improvement. As CQI systems begin to make their way into the afterschool program sector, some CQI strategies that can be adopted by afterschool programs include: hiring a senior staff member to serve as a point person for program quality improvement efforts, providing targeted staff training

sessions throughout the academic year, conducting on-site observations and coaching, and conducting ongoing analysis of program quality data to identify and address implementation challenges (Sheldon, Arbreton, Hopkins, & Grossman, 2010). Although there is little empirical research on the effectiveness of CQI systems, preliminary research suggests that these CQI strategies can produce improvements in the quality of afterschool activities (Sheldon et al., 2010).

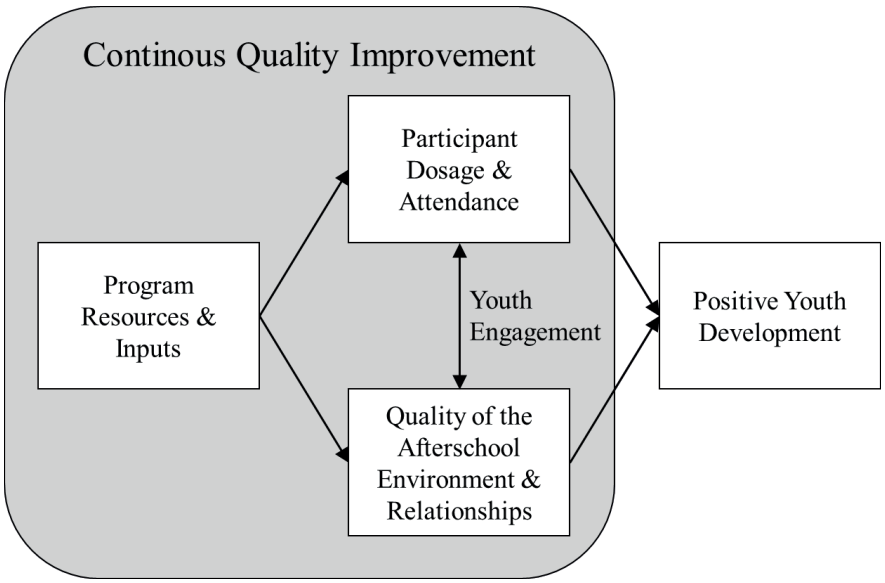
Continuous Quality Improvement Afterschool in California

The impetus for CQI systems for afterschool programs in California stemmed from Senate Bill 1221, which required expanded learning programs in California to "submit evidence of a data-driven program quality improvement process that is based on the department's guidance on program quality standards, as specified" (CDE, 2014). This legislative mandate shifted reporting requirements from attendance rates and standardized test scores to program quality and CQI, and provided a concise outline of the "Quality Standards for Expanded Learning Programs." This policy change mirrors a shift in the broader afterschool field focused on emphasizing positive youth development beyond academic performance (Yohalem & Wilson-Ahlstorm, 2010; Vandell, 2013) and promoting program quality as the key mechanism for producing positive youth outcomes. That is, although test scores can be useful indicators of program success, they are not well aligned to the experiences youth typically receive in afterschool enrichment programs (e.g., community service, career or technical education, job readiness, mentoring opportunities, service learning, arts, computer technology, physical fitness, and sports).

Structuring afterschool programs to promote a broader range of youth outcomes is drawn from the Positive Youth Development (PYD) perspective. Positive Youth Development (PYD) is an approach to youth programming and a philosophy of research that seeks to understand and promote positive characteristics possessed by youth (i.e., positive values, positive identity, commitment to learning, and social competence) through developing environments where youth can build competence, confidence, compassion, character and connectedness (Damon, 2004; Lerner et al., 2005; Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blythe, 2000). The PYD framework in practice aims to support broad developmental outcomes (e.g., moral, social, cognitive, emotional, and physical) (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczek, Hawkins, 2004). Informed by this more holistic approach to youth development, the authors argue that although academic test scores are important indicators of cognitive development, this is only one facet of developing the whole child in afterschool programs. Structured afterschool activities exemplify the characteristics of PYD and whole child development by creating opportunities for youth to develop a broad range of skills, become more involved in the school and broader community, strengthen peer relationships, and achieve goals as individuals or groups (Eccles, Barber, & Stone, 2003; Larson, 2000). By providing autonomy and decision-making opportunities, youth can select activities that best showcase their developing competencies, and allow for the cultivation of new talents across developmental domains (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

As Figure 1 depicts, improving afterschool program quality is designed to result in better PYD outcomes. However, to maximize youth development outcomes, afterschool programs should focus on strengthening the processes of program implementation, including (a) critical resources to operate high-quality environments, (b) participant dosage and attendance, and the (c) quality of the afterschool environment and relationships. The components included in Figure 1 present the constructs of interest for broadly defining program quality that undergird staff development, data collection about program quality and reflections about the current level of quality provided by partner agencies. These components are the focus of continuous quality improvement, as each is theoretically important (Granger, Durlak, Yohalem, & Reisner, 2007; Hirsch, Mekinda, & Stawicki, 2010), occurring daily, and can be measured in an on-going manner.

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Afterschool Programs & CQI



CQI systems focus on measuring these three components continuously so that staff receive real-time feedback about whether they are implementing a program with sufficient quality to warrant a change in youth development outcomes. Given the empirical links between program quality and youth outcomes (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Kataoka & Vandell, 2013; Pierce et al., 2010; Vandell et al., 2005), coupled with the success of CQI systems in healthcare for promoting patient outcomes (Blumenthal & Kilo, 1998), it is plausible that afterschool programs with a strong CQI system around program quality will produce better youth development outcomes than programs with no explicit system for CQI. However, that is an empirical question and can only be answered as afterschool programs begin to develop strong and effective CQI systems. Thus, the remainder of this article describes one approach to CQI that was undertaken by a large afterschool program provider and highlights the challenges encountered and lessons learned along the way.

A Case Study of Continuous Quality Improvement in Beyond the Bell

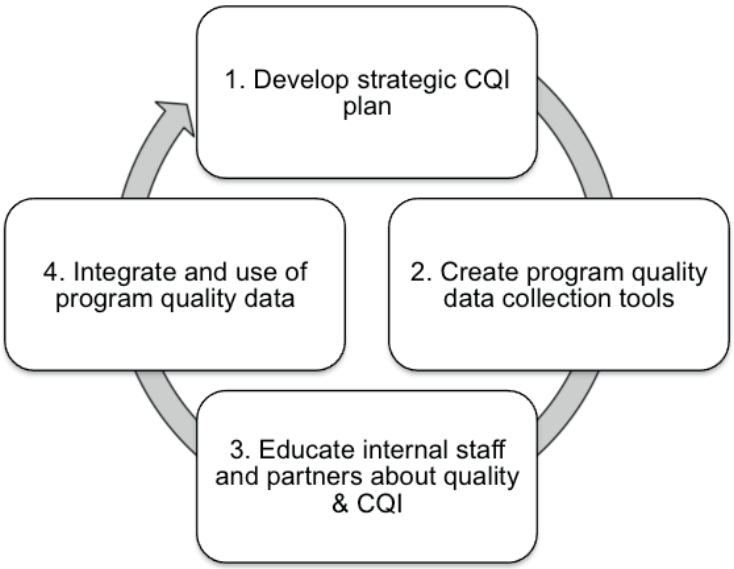
One of the largest afterschool providers in California, the Beyond the Bell (BTB) branch of the Los Angeles Unified School District, has begun to initiate Continuous Quality Improvement. BTB operates structured grant-funded Out of School Time (OST) programs in over 600 schools serving over 100,000 K-12 students daily with before and after school programs. The programs are delivered in partnership with 34 organizations (e.g., some agencies are individual entities, while other agencies are managed by internal BTB staff) in many low-resourced, high-poverty schools. BTB is funded with an annual budget of 100 million dollars from a combination of state funding, federal funding, state smoking prevention funds, and foundation grants. BTB implements daily academic assistance (homework assistance and academic support), academic enrichment (activities that provide standards-based enrichment opportunities such as the service learning, leadership, career exploration, arts and STEM programming), and recreation/sports.

BTB was selected as a case study of CQI systems for three reasons. First, BTB is a large, diverse, and complex organization. Showcasing a large organization that has begun to shift towards meaningful CQI, despite numerous hurdles and roadblocks, is intended to inspire and educate other agencies that may experience similar challenges to CQI. Second, BTB had organizational systems in place (i.e., an internal observation team who regularly visited sites, biannual agency meetings with partner organizations, on-going staff training sessions, etc.) that could be leveraged for CQI implementation. These systems provided the building blocks in which CQI could flourish in this large organization. Third, and most importantly, BTB had the motivation to change from a compliance-driven organization to one that fostered quality improvements among partner organizations and within afterschool program sites. Prior to SB 1221, BTB implemented a compliance model that was centered on monitoring student program attendance, improving student outcomes (measured by standardized state tests and regular school day attendance) and compliance with state and federal directives and regulations. BTB recognized the limitations of that approach, given that little direct information was being fed back into programs to improve quality. The motivation to change among BTB leadership is an important antecedent for effective CQI systems to emerge (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008).

BTB partnered with the authors to re-conceptualize their organizational quality systems and begin creating a culture of continuous quality improvement in 2014. BTB's CQI process centered around four primary steps (refer to Figure 2): (a) developing a strategic CQI plan to serve as the foundation for this work, (b) creating evaluation tools to gather data about program quality through inclusive meetings with BTB staff, (c) educating partner agencies about CQI and the indicators of program quality, and (d) engaging in meaningful interpretation and use of program quality data to inform improvement plans. These goals were chosen to capitalize on the knowledge of BTB staff and providers, and were intended to be responsive to the priorities of BTB and aligned with their existing evaluation systems. While the concepts included in the conceptual model in Figure 1 outline the content of how we

are defining and conceptualizing the major components of quality, Figure 2 outlines the process of improving quality through strategic CQI efforts at BTB. These steps are expanded in the following sections. It should also be noted that given the early stages of implementation of this CQI process, BTB has made significant progress on both developing a strategic CQI plan (steps 1) and creating the data collection tools (step 2), but less organizational effort has focused on steps 3 and 4.

Figure 2. Primary Steps in the CQI Process for BTB



Step 1: Planning for the CQI Process

The first step in the CQI process for BTB was to create a three-year strategic quality improvement plan. This plan served as a guide for future quality improvement processes for BTB providers, by outlining the purpose of this process, identifying the necessary data sources, timelines, and data reporting/use mechanisms within the organization. The authors and BTB engaged in thoughtful collaborations to understand the current evaluation systems and organizational priorities that motivated the development of this strategic quality improvement plan. The overarching objectives of this quality improvement process were three-fold: (a) to capitalize on current evaluation and data collection systems, (b) develop additional data sources where necessary to capture critical elements of program quality, and (c) foster strong alignment across evaluation systems and data sources with the ultimate purpose of using these evaluation data sources to inform quality improvement efforts. Table 1 provides an example of the data sources, both new and existing, identified to support BTB's CQI process, including data collection timelines, data availability, mechanisms for data use and data presentation formats.

Table 1. Details of Strategic Data Use for Selected Quality Improvement Data Sources

Data Source	Data Collection Timeline	Data Availability	Mechanisms for Data Use	Data Presentation Format
Program Observations	Ongoing	Ongoing	Twice-yearly meetings with agencies; ongoing internal improvement	External evaluation reports; data dashboard; accountability reports
Principal & Site Coordinator Interviews	Ongoing	End of academic year	Twice-yearly meetings with agencies; external evaluation	External evaluation reports
Self-Assessment for Continuous Improvement	Based on site preferences	Based on site preferences	Twice-yearly meetings with agencies; ongoing internal improvement	Self-assessment protocols; action plans for improvement
Attendance Data	Ongoing	Ongoing/End of academic year	Twice-yearly meetings with agencies; external evaluation	External evaluation reports; data dashboard; accountability reports
Youth Survey	Fall/Spring survey administration	End of academic year	External evaluation	External evaluation reports
District Archival Data	Ongoing	End of academic year	External evaluation	External evaluation reports; Accountability reports

Strategic plan development was informed by creating a conceptual model of positive youth development (PYD) in afterschool programs. This conceptual framework identified activities that were essential for high-quality implementation (e.g., positive adult-student relationships, responsiveness to student needs, active/engaged learning, youth choice/voice) and intended outcomes associated with those activities (e.g., intrinsic motivation, social competence, leadership, and academic persistence). This model ensured that the BTB CQI system captured the indicators of program effectiveness that were identified by the research and theory surrounding positive youth development in afterschool programs.

Step 2: Assessing Quality at BTB Provider Agencies

The second step in BTB's CQI process involved developing an internal system to assess program quality systematically, guided by the evidence-based conceptual model and the strategic CQI plan. This internal assessment system attempted to create a shared understanding of program quality, provided evaluation data about the current state of BTB programs and participants, and identified areas for targeted improvement efforts. BTB already had an established data collection process for tracking participant attendance and dosage in their afterschool programs as reported by the partner agencies, so this system was already in place. As an initial step towards assessing quality, the evaluation team developed two new data collection tools: (1) a provider self-assessment and (2) an internal observation system. To supplement attendance and dosage indicators, these data sources were intended to capture the program resources/inputs, and the quality of the environment/relationships, as major components of program quality outlined in Figure 1. These data were intended to fuel data-driven decision-making to support the CQI process by identifying the organizational, or agency-specific, strengths and areas to target for quality improvement. The purpose of developing data collection tools specific to LAUSD BTB, as opposed to using publically available tools, was to ensure tools and processes were tailored for the BTB evaluation context. Although publically available observational and self-assessment tools existed, these tools did not include all of the quality indicators laid out by the CDE and many required extensive off-site training that were time and money intensive (Bialosiewicz & Newhouse, 2014). Additionally, allowing staff to co-construct the data collection tools would facilitate their buy-in to the content and processes. At this time, these data collection systems are in preliminary implementation and thus the authors have limited information about the measurement properties (i.e., validity, reliability) of these data collection tools. However, the authors present the conceptual components as examples of the indicators that were selected for this context.

Provider Self-Assessment. The provider self-assessment tool allowed program providers to reflect on the quality of their program's structures and processes and rate themselves across dimensions of program quality. The self-assessment development process began with scanning previously published self-assessment tools from similar organizations. Existing self-assessment tools were evaluated across two primary criteria: (1) alignment with California Department of Education (CDE) "Quality Standards for Expanded Learning Programs," and (2) alignment with research on Positive Youth Development (PYD) perspectives in organized youth programs. Our environmental scan yielded useful insights around tool content (i.e., indicators of quality) as well as tool processes (i.e., timing, frequency, involvement). Although there were a number of published tools available, none of these tools were strongly aligned with the criteria set by the CDE, the specific BTB context, or with the research in youth development more broadly.

Based on the environmental scan, the authors identified the need to develop two self-assessment tools, one for line staff (Point of Service) and one for program managers (Effective Program Management). Given the limited time afterschool for staff to engage in these conversations, it was important to focus staff time around the

things they could actually control. Line staff should focus on improving their direct service whereas program managers should focus on improving the structures of support so that line staff can do their work effectively. Thus, the purpose of the Effective Program Management tool was to engage program leadership, management, and supervisors in discussions about relevant programs structures that most effectively support implementation quality (i.e., collaborative partnerships, quality staff hiring). Point of service quality (i.e., active engagement, positive relationships) focuses on the intentionality of program activities, the delivery of those activities, and the nature of interactions between students and staff. The purpose of the Point of Service Quality Tool is to engage front-line program staff in conversations surrounding evidence-based practices to improve the quality of student interactions and engagement that have been empirically linked to improved PYD outcomes in youth participants. Table 2 outlines the primary self-assessment tool categories for both tools and sample indicators. To maximize feasibility, these tools are brief, but deep in their coverage of program quality facets. By creating and piloting two tools aligned to the BTB context with input from BTB leadership and staff, this process was more cost effective for BTB and required less time commitment from staff to begin to reflect on program quality.

Table 2. Self-Assessment Tool Categories & Sample Items

Tool Categories	Sample Indicator
Effective Program Management Tool	
Clear Mission, Purpose & Planning	The program has a written statement of mission and goals. Program staff are aware of and understand the program's mission and vision.
Program Funding & Sustainability	The program has an effective marketing strategy that is used to promote the agency, its programs, and its value to youth and the community.
Quality Staff	Staff are recruited and hired based on competence, experience, and interest in working with youth.
Physical Environment	Staff and program participants have access to sufficient indoor and outdoor space.
Collaborative Partnerships	Program provides meaningful opportunities for family participation.
Program Attendance	The program encourages consistent attendance to ensure that students attend enough to reap the benefits of participation.
Continuous Quality Improvement	Promising practices in the program are identified and share internally and externally.

Point of Service Quality Tool	
Active & Engaged Learning	The program engages participants with a variety of diverse activities to promote engagement in all children and youth.
Youth Voice, Choice & Leadership	Activities and experiences that promote youth leadership are incorporated into program components.
Positive Relationships & Social Norms	Staff members intentionally promote psychological and emotional safety through a culture of support, inclusion, and mutual respect to nurture a sense of belonging in all children and youth.
Intentional Activity Structure	Activities are thoughtfully sequenced into smaller, simpler components to enhance learning over time.
Developmental Opportunities	Youth have the opportunity to learn and practice new skills, and build competence with support from staff.

At internal agency meetings, self-assessment teams would rate themselves on each indicator on a scale from one (not adequate) to four (exemplary). The self-assessment team would need to come to a consensus surrounding each rating by engaging in dialogue regarding each indicator and presenting evidence (i.e., observations, anecdotes, program documents) for their ratings. Not only did this process encourage agencies to reflect on their implementation across the critical features of program quality, these ratings suggested areas to target for improvement. Short-term, solution-oriented action plans could then be developed for self-assessment items that received low ratings. Self-assessment teams would create action plans, indicating who will take the lead on supervising the action plan, and the proposed timeline.

Internal Program Observations. To supplement self-assessment findings, a BTB internal observation tool was developed and piloted to provide objective, high-quality data about program operations. Similar to the self-assessment tool development process, there was no single, existing observational tool that addressed all of these indicators and priorities. Additionally, many of the published observational tools available were accompanied by extensive costs for use, extensive trainings for observers before implementation, or lengthy observation indicators requiring large time commitments, none of which were feasible for BTB given the short observation timeline. Thus, a BTB-specific observational protocol was created. This short and user-friendly tool was intended to equip internal BTB staff with the resources to operationalize, monitor and support program quality at the sites and at a broader organizational level. This observational system documented quality related to two primary facets: (a) program compliance (i.e., sign in/sign out, resources, and attendance ratios) and (b) program quality (i.e., active and engaged learning, skill-building opportunities). More specifically, the observational system examined several facets of key program activities as outlined in BTB's conceptual model, including indicators falling under the larger umbrellas of program quality, adult-student relationships, and program environment. Table 3 displays the observation tool categories and sample indicators.

Table 3. Program Quality Observation Tool Categories & Sample Items

Tool Categories	Sample Indicator
Active & Engaged Learning	Students are actively engaged (e.g., concentration, enjoyment, interest)
Student Leadership	Students take authentic leadership roles in activities and decision-making efforts
Student Choice	Students make choices about what to do (activity content) and how to do it (activity process)
Student Voice	Students have opportunities to express their ideas, concerns, and/or opinions
Welcoming & Supportive Environment	Program staff creates a welcoming environment through inclusion and mutual respect
Positive Feedback	Program staff provides positive, constructive feedback to students or groups
High Expectations	Program staff sets high expectations for students' interpersonal behaviors and performance
Fairness	Program staff provides equitable access to activities for all students
Positive Peer Interactions	Program staff encourages positive peer interaction skills (e.g., cooperation, teamwork, shared goals, conflict resolution)
Intentional Activity Structure	Activity is sequenced to build upon previously learned skills and behaviors
Developmental Opportunities	Activity content allows students to explore new academic and/or career interests in real world applications
Diverse Activities	Activity content reflects diverse ethnic, cultural, gender, and/or geographic settings
Tangible Resources	Program provides adequate student access to resources and materials needed for activities
Adequate Physical Space	There is sufficient indoor and/or outdoor space for program activity
Campus & Classroom Safety	Campus and classroom perimeter is secure (e.g., gated perimeter)

Internal BTB staff provided ratings from one (not evident) to four (highly evident) to reflect the frequency and quality of each indicator on the protocol, as well as providing written notes to supplement numerical ratings. An observational rubric was also created to describe the rating for each observational indicator to reduce the ambiguity around individual ratings and promote consistency across raters. Once this tool was finalized, BTB programmed this tool into an online system for use at agency visits in the field. The program quality data collected via these two primary methodologies served as the foundation for strategic revisions to program processes and activities to enhance the ability for BTB to effectively improve program quality. Observational data is particularly important to the CQI process because these data are collected in an ongoing manner, as BTB staff members visit program sites throughout the academic year to observe their activities. As such, these data are regularly collected, entered into an online system, and displayed in real-time. This allows BTB leadership to constantly digest and explore trends in program quality as the observations occur over the academic year to address emerging issues and challenges at provider agencies.

Step 3: Professional Development around Program Quality

The third step in the CQI process was to engage BTB internal staff and provider agencies in professional development around program quality. This was the primary means through which BTB staff and partners learned what were the most important features of program quality and reflected on their own abilities to craft these developmental experiences for youth participants. As a first step, the authors hosted meetings with BTB internal staff to discuss each data collection protocol and explained the purpose of activity observations, the meaning/definition of each quality indicator, and the ideal processes for use. Upon finalizing these tools, the evaluation team conducted trainings with internal BTB leadership to discuss the critical features of high quality programming that BTB staff will assess during site visit observations. Additionally, the authors hosted a staff meeting with the BTB traveling supervisors who would use this observation tool during their regular visits to afterschool provider agencies. The purpose of this training was to gain a shared understanding of the features of program quality that appear on the observation protocol. This shared understanding promoted consistency and accuracy of program quality ratings. During these conversations, protocols were also revised given BTB staff feedback.

After BTB internal staff members received training on the tools, they used it to structure their monthly observations to each afterschool site. This process served as the informational bridge between the larger BTB organizational leadership and the agencies themselves. During observations, BTB staff would provide each agency with a copy of the observational system and the CDE quality standards to structure conversations about what they observed, the quality ratings they assigned to the site, and engage in conversations about strengths and areas of improvement. This was the primary pipeline through which agencies could critically think about program quality and initiate efforts to foster higher quality services. In the coming year, BTB will host additional professional development for agency representatives to clarify how

BTB is defining a high quality program, the observation protocol categories, and how to transform observational data into actionable program improvement practices.

Step 4: Using Data to Reflect on Quality

The final step in the CQI process was to reflect on program quality and transform data-driven findings about program quality into action. This includes both (1) asking agency providers to review the data collected about quality at their sites and develop agency-specific strategies for improvement, and (2) reflecting on aggregate data at the BTB organizational level to define organizational priorities for quality improvement and staff development. In this step, BTB must systematically explore the program quality data collected and identify specific challenges that require action for program improvement. This requires staff time and effort be put forth to consume the trends in program quality data, both during formalized organizational time-points, as well as during informal daily programmatic processes. The three most prominent mechanisms for data use at BTB were: (a) the twice-yearly meetings with BTB provider agencies, (b) external evaluation results presentations and (c) on-going communication and internal quality improvement efforts by BTB-affiliated agencies. These instances were considered ideal times to reflect upon the data collected and engage in conversations about the current status of program quality, identify areas where improvement is needed, and develop plans to address these challenges. These opportunities for reflection should involve diverse members of the BTB team to encourage meaningful discussions about quality as well as drive strategy for professional development and site-specific improvement practices. In addition to these formal mechanisms, conversations about program quality and implementation practices should be taking place informally on a daily, weekly, and monthly basis. These continuous informal reflections on the evaluation data are the crux of continuous quality improvement processes because they occur much more frequently than formal meetings about quality and are more cost-effective. The overall success of this strategic quality improvement process is contingent upon BTB prioritizing data use to inform quality improvement efforts through these formal and informal approaches to continuous data reflection.

To support the reflection process, the authors conducted detailed analyses of the observational data collected via the revised observational system. These analyses examined data in aggregate to explore overall program strengths, and identify areas of improvement across all providers observed. Additionally, the observational data was disaggregated by relevant characteristics of the sites (i.e., age of site, provider, size of program). These sub-group analyses provided a more detail-oriented exploration of program quality trends. The evaluation team provided a comprehensive summary report of these data to BTB, as well as engaged in structured discussions about the most relevant and salient findings about quality at provider sites. During these conversations, strategies were discussed to support increasing program quality and directly inform professional development activities for line staff.

To supplement the aggregate findings, the authors also developed a data visualization system, or a modified data dashboard, to display the quality ratings over

time. A data dashboard can be conceptualized as real-time progress report consisting of simple, graphical presentations of the current status and historical trends of an organization's quality (as measured via observations). For BTB, the dashboard was linked to BTB's observational quality database, and allowed for real time updates as new observational data were entered into the online system. Data dashboards are useful tools for program monitoring because they provide timely feedback about whether actions designated for improvement are actually improving over time. Plus, dashboards can be accessed regularly between formal reporting intervals to encourage continuous reflection about program quality and drive professional development opportunities for afterschool staff.

Because this CQI system is currently in process, little information is available about the quality of data collected via these tools, the findings, and the consequences of CQI for BTB. As these data systems continue to be employed by BTB, the measurement properties, trends in data findings, and the translation of these findings into meaningful program improvement need to be investigated. Embedding systematic evaluation into the CQI process is an important next step for BTB; we must begin to identify whether CQI is working as intended, resulting in better professional development for staff, improved program quality at sites, and better outcomes for students.

Reflections About CQI Implementation from LAUSD BTB Administrators

BTB has begun to engage in the building blocks for CQI through developing tools aligned to empirical research and CDE standards, testing these tools out in the field, training staff on how to use the tools, and using data to initiate discussions about quality across the organization. However, engaging in CQI is more than just an accumulation of tools. Implementing continuous quality improvement practices is challenging work and many lessons have surfaced, including the importance of: (a) sharing an organization-wide commitment to CQI, from top leadership to line staff, (b) gaining staff buy-in and collaboration, and (c) maximizing resources (time, money, personnel, etc.) effectively. Each of these lessons learned will be described in detail below.

First, a collective organization-wide commitment was needed to shift the culture of BTB towards program quality. Prior to implementing CQI practices, long-term change in performance objectives was not being realized and program indicators, particularly attendance rates, would vacillate year to year without anyone understanding the underlying reasoning behind these changes. Thus, BTB began internal conversations with provider agencies and internal BTB staff about these data patterns, and the importance of program quality quickly emerged. The question then became how to prioritize program quality and incorporate the values of CQI into the structures, routines, and norms that collectively comprised their organizational culture (Schein, 2010). Given the passage of SB 1221, CQI was becoming the mantra of

how afterschool providers do business in California and BTB hoped to position itself as an industry leader and early adopter of these CQI values and systems.

The key to developing an organization-wide commitment to program quality was strong front-end collaboration to develop the structures, routines, and processes necessary for CQI. Collaboration occurred through recognizing and rewarding early adaptors of a quality culture at partner agencies, reaching out to agencies who had demonstrated a high level of commitment to CQI so they could jointly develop a CQI implementation plan and serve as role models to other agencies, and promoting a shared vision for CQI during site visits, quarterly executive meetings, provider biannual review meetings, and in the annual external evaluation. Part of this collaboration also involved redirecting programming priorities from compliance to quality. Rather than impose external objectives on programs, BTB began encouraging provider agencies to develop their own internal quality objectives to examine their progress over time. In a similar sense, BTB leadership must continue to make time to reflect on the trends in quality and program attendance as these data are available to track changes and ensure that continuous improvement is promoted throughout the academic year.

To facilitate a shift towards a CQI culture, the second lesson learned involved the importance of gaining staff buy-in to the process. BTB understood that staff training was critical to improving program quality, given the correlation between staff development and high-functioning afterschool programs (Huang & Dietel, 2011). Further, BTB also recognized that few afterschool programs focused their improvement efforts specifically on staff performance (Smith, Akiva, Blazevski, Pelle, & Devaney, 2008). BTB needed to instill in their internal staff, as well as agency staff, that CQI was not the new "flavor of the month." BTB realized that the key element of CQI was to empower students, partner agencies, and internal BTB staff to own the program improvement process. This was partly accomplished by staff co-constructing the tools that were used, giving data back to agencies from observational visits promptly, and giving agencies autonomy for measuring program quality and developing their own strategies for quality improvement. The success of this system will continue to be contingent upon staff retaining a high level of information about what high quality programs are and BTB continuing to offer professional development and training, in a formal and informal sense, to agency staff to build their capacity and buy-in.

One persistent challenge related to staff buy-in was the high rate of staff turnover, a problem not unique to BTB (Shortt, 2002). In an effort to reduce staff turnover, some provider agencies began to hire staff based on the extent to which they bought in to CQI. Adding CQI to the process of hiring new staff members required considerable time and resources, but anecdotally seemed to result in staff members who were (a) committed to making CQI work at the school site, (b) better able to implement CQI practices, and (c) more connected to the organization, especially for the newest employees. Aligning CQI to the hiring practices of agencies encouraged BTB's youngest staff to understand their role in producing program outcomes, as well as supported their growth as educators to shape the outcomes of their students. With continued support and actively securing staff buy-in to CQI, BTB anticipates creating a cultural shift in the long-term that may decrease staff turnover. Research

suggests that staff who understand what it means to be part of the organization are likely to remain longer as employees (Huang & Dietel, 2011).

The final lesson learned is the importance of maximizing resources so that CQI does not bankrupt programs during the process. As a large afterschool provider, BTB needs to be cognizant of the costs that are incurred in CQI, and how it could be done effectively with the least amount of resources. During BTB's first year implementing CQI, they opted for tools that were aligned with their conceptual model, co-constructed with staff to increase buy-in, and could be rolled out relatively quickly and seamlessly. This saved costs, as did partnering with the CDE to attend and implement web-based trainings focused on educating staff to become proficient in the new organizational CQI processes while limiting the amount of time spent in costly face-to-face training. Further, many of the tools and techniques discussed previously were relatively inexpensive, as was changing directives from compliance to quality, collaborating with partner agencies, and soliciting structured feedback.

However, the ultimate challenge will be maintaining the momentum and resources required for organizational change and having staff internalize these values. Training costs and the inability to monetize improvements made based on this system remain barriers for BTB. To address the need for information about the success of this CQI system, BTB will place special emphasis on exploring program dosage and attendance indicators during the upcoming year of implementation. BTB believes that demonstrating a link between program quality and youth dosage will motivate continued interest in CQI and incentivize agency providers to invest in quality improvement given that dosage is tied to funding and sustainability. Sustainability and continued enthusiasm for the effort associated with CQI, despite the lack of concrete information on the benefit of CQI, are critical challenges that BTB will need to address moving forward. However, given that OST program quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the staff who deliver it, BTB is committed to CQI into the future.

Conclusions and Looking Ahead

The authors and BTB have outlined several important processes for future implementation of the CQI system. First, it is important that BTB explore the measurement qualities of data collection tools to ensure that the tools developed for this process are reliable and valid. Second, BTB should gather feedback from internal and external staff about the use of tools, including the internal observation team and agency providers engaging in the self-assessment. This feedback can be used to revise and finalize data collection tools to ensure use, viability, and relevance. Lastly, our team must ensure that BTB has the means and motivation to examine program quality continuously throughout the year to fuel training opportunities for staff, address implementation challenges, and ensure that quality improvement is indeed taking place as intended. In conclusion, although BTB recognizes the realities of their business model, staff shortages, and budget constraints, BTB believes that CQI practices have the potential to transform BTB so that staff continue to deliver

high-quality experiences for students afterschool. CQI is not implemented quickly, but rather is a long-term change in culture that will take a shared and sustainable commitment to prosper. This is important if we are to equip afterschool staff with the tools they need to move the needle on positive youth development.

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