

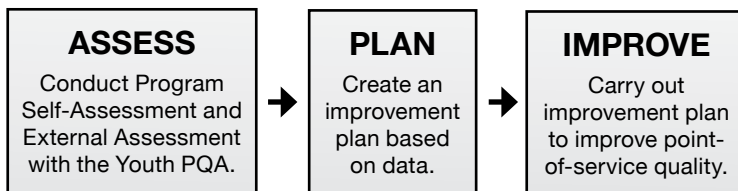
The Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI)



Introduction

The Youth Program Quality Intervention, recently found effective in a randomized trial (Smith et al., in preparation), is the basis for numerous improvement projects around the country. The YPQI follows the Assess-Plan-Improve sequence depicted below to help programs focus on and improve the quality of program offerings they provide for youth.

The Youth Program Quality Intervention (YPQI)



In this technical assistance brief we describe the YPQI, focusing on how it can be implemented in a city, county, or state network. The YPQI targets three levels of setting: the policy context, the organizational setting, and the instructional setting (represented in diagram below). In the policy context, networks adopt YPQI elements and commit their resources to the process. In the organizational setting, managers implement a set of continuous improvement practices focused on the quality of instruction. In the instructional setting (or “point of service”), staff in a high quality program provide youth with opportunities to meet important developmental needs. Thus, while the YPQI is designed to produce change at both the policy and

Background

The David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality, a joint venture of the Forum for Youth Investment and HighScope Educational Research Foundation, is committed to helping out-of-school time (OST) programs collect and utilize meaningful performance data to create change in the instructional context.

organizational settings, the real goal is to improve quality in the *instructional* setting—the quality that youth experience.

The Assess-Plan-Improve Sequence

The following steps guide the YPQI process:

Step 1: Prepare

Weikart Center staff help network leaders make decisions about how the system will work, based on local considerations and resources. For example, one network might train a large cadre of external assessors; another might focus more on Technical Assistance (TA) coaching. Network leaders identify participating sites and work with Weikart Center staff to map out trainings and other parts of the intervention.

Step 2: Assess

Managers and site staff attend training to learn to use the Youth Program Quality Assessment (Youth PQA)¹ for program self-assessment and external assessment. Managers and site staff conduct program self-assessments at their sites using the Youth PQA,² and select sites host external assessment visits. All data can be stored online using the Weikart Center's Scores Reporter,³ which can also be used to generate reports.

Step 3: Plan

We encourage all staff who participated in self-assessment to attend a full-day Planning with Data workshop, facilitated by Weikart Center staff or local endorsed trainers. This workshop aims to demystify the assessment process so that staff feel empowered to implement changes aimed at improving quality of their programs. Participants leave the workshop with a draft improvement plan to take back to their sites, with goals designed to be attainable, measurable, and time-tracked.

Step 4: Improve

In this step, managers and staff carry out their improvement plan. Staff also may attend aligned Methods workshops designed to strengthen skills and improve quality at the point of service. Managers may attend Quality Coaching workshops to learn how to better support their staff to implement quality practices with youth. Some networks have identified regional coaches who provide ongoing support and mentoring to program staff.

Step 5: Repeat

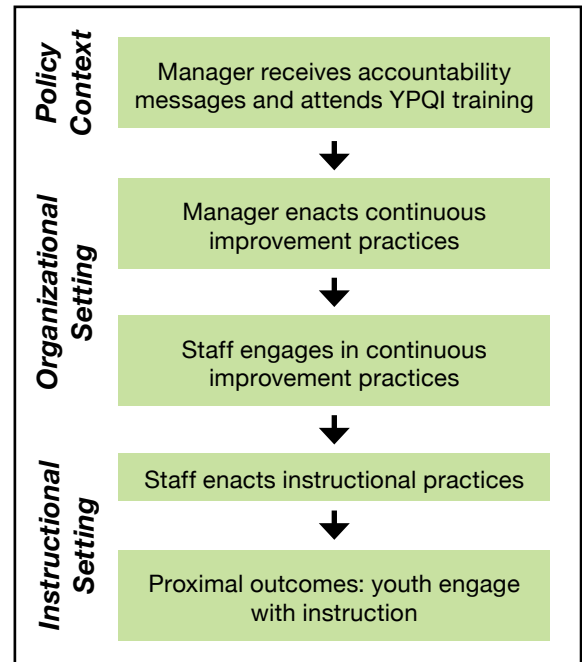
The Assess-Plan-Improve sequence can initiate a cycle of continuous program improvement. When focusing on the process of program improvement in

¹ The Youth PQA is a research-validated instrument designed to assess point of service quality in out-of-school time programs. It is both an evaluation and a learning tool: robust enough for research and high stakes accountability, and user-friendly enough for program self-assessment. For validation information see Smith & Hohmann (2005).

² For more information about Program Self-Assessment with the Youth PQA see the brief in this series with this name, and Sugar, Devaney, & Smith (2008). For technical information, see Smith (2005).

³ For information about the Youth PQA Online Scores Reporter, see www.cypq.org/products_and_services/assessment_tools

Three Target Levels of the YPQI



every aspect of youth programming, at every level, higher quality programming is a byproduct.

Leading a successful YPQI

Our research indicates a few key considerations when making decisions about leading a successful YPQI.

Intensity matters

In the randomized trial of the YPQI, the largest positive outcomes were found in networks where leaders integrated the YPQI deeply into existing structures, and pursued the Assess-Plan-Improve cycle at every level of the organization. By embedding the process into existing staff requirements, performing evaluations on a regular basis, and providing training and technical assistance to staff in the process, network leaders were able to minimize resistance to the intervention, as well as helping managers and staff see the benefit in the assessment process.

The YPQI requires local reinvention

The YPQI is designed to support network leaders as they work to improve the quality of the programs in their system, and as such, remains

a flexible process. We encourage network leaders to adapt the YPQI to local realities. Many components of the YPQI are customizable: e.g., whether or not External Assessment is included; how many assessments they require of their site staffs; what kind of offerings are observed.

A YPQI leads to many positive outcomes

As networks pursue the path of continuous improvement, they find that staff retention improves, staff ownership of the assessment process increases, and staff become more reflective about their own work (Smith, Akiva, Blazeovski, Pelle, & Devaney, 2008). When staff members hone the practices measured on the Youth PQA, they deepen relationships with the youth in their programs, and provide increased opportunities for youth voice and ownership. As youth have increased opportunities for key developmental experiences, they are able to cultivate critical thinking and other skills necessary for success in work, school and life.

Smith, C., & Hohmann, C. (2005). *Full findings from the Youth PQA validation study*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

Smith, C., Lo, Y.-J., Sugar, S. A., Akiva, T., Frank, K. A., Devaney, T., et al. (in preparation). *Continuous quality improvement in afterschool settings: Impact findings from the Youth Program Quality Intervention study*. Ypsilanti, MI: David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality.

Sugar, S., Devaney, T., & Smith, C. (2008). *2007-08 Michigan Department of Education report: A review of Youth PQA results for 205 21st CCLC grantee sites*. Ypsilanti, MI: David P. Weikart Center for Youth Program Quality.

Conclusion

The YPQI offers networks an opportunity to engage a process of continuous quality improvement with the goal of enhancing the experience of youth and the skills of those who work with youth. This multi-level intervention, combining training and assessment, informed by theory and supported by field research, can support programs to align their management, organizational, and instructional practices with a positive youth development model.

References

Smith, C. (2005). *Findings from the self-assessment pilot in Michigan 21st century learning centers*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Educational Research Foundation.

Smith, C., Akiva, T., Blazeovski, J., Pelle, L., & Devaney, T. (2008). *Final report on the Palm Beach Quality Improvement System pilot: Model implementation and program quality improvement in 38 after-school programs*. Ypsilanti, MI: HighScope Educational Research Foundation.