

Research on Technical Assistance Models & Frameworks

Technical assistance (TA) has been used to describe a wide variety of behaviors used by professionals as a way to help state and program staff build capacity to engage in quality improvement efforts. A meta-analysis was prepared for ECPC, by Puckett Institute, to describe the core elements of technical assistance that lead to sustainable program and organizational change (Dunst et al, 2018). Twenty-five technical assistance models and frameworks were analyzed in order to identify the essential elements of TA that facilitates program and organizational change. Through this analysis, authors determined that there is no one consistent definition that clearly conveys the essential practices used by a TA provider; rather, there are components of TA practice utilized among the various models and frameworks that have shown positive outcomes for quality improvement.

Findings from this analysis contribute to the improvement of TA efforts used to support early childhood (EC) and early intervention (EI) professionals focused on improving the quality of organizations, programs and teachers to deliver high quality early childhood experiences.



The Purpose



The purpose of this brief is to introduce the findings of a meta-analysis which focused on describing the essential elements of TA used to help quality improvement efforts of early childhood organizations and programs. Having a common understanding of the critical elements used in TA contributes to efficient and effective planning, implementation and sustainability of TA outcomes.

The Findings



Results of this research yielded five critical components of TA, which include twenty-five core elements or practices. The details of each core element will be further explained in subsequent briefs. The five TA components include: Preparation, Plan, Implementation, Evaluation, and Sustainability.

Collectively, the findings showed that more intensive TA was associated with greater effect size compared to less intensive TA. Features of intensive TA include: clarity, frequency, intensity, duration, integrity, and accountability. Intensive TA was shown to improve teacher adoption and use of practice, regardless of particular practices that were the focus of this investigation.

The findings also showed the importance of fidelity (accuracy and consistency of use) for both TA practices and intervention practices. When TA practices were consistently used as described, TA was shown to be most effective. Additionally, when TA used the components of fidelity, program staff were more likely to use instructional practices with accuracy and frequency.

Why are these Findings Important?



Using known practices that result in effective practitioner change not only leads to improved instruction intervention, but can also have a profound impact on the quality of early childhood educational services provided in programs and organizations that seek to engage in sustainable systems changes.

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Preparation describes the initial set of activities that technical assistance providers use to prepare staff to engage in planning for technical assistance. Five practices were described in Technical Assistance Models and Frameworks: needs assessment, practitioner decision making, visioning, readiness for change, and organizational capacity.

The Practices



Needs Assessment – the process used to determine gaps between current conditions, practices or outcomes, and desired conditions. EC programs conducting a needs assessment would consider the current training and professional development of personnel, EC quality initiatives in place, and policies and procedures outlining the expectations of EC personnel to implement high quality practices

Visioning – the process used to determine what an EC/EI organization and/or classroom would do or “look like” if it was to make desired changes towards supporting the development of EC personnel to implement high quality EC/EI practices

Readiness for Change – the process used to obtain staff commitment to change EC/EI program, organizational or systems practices improving the effectiveness in order to achieve desired changes or outcomes

Practitioner Decision Making – the process used to involve EC/EI program staff in identifying the options or priorities that best fit the organization's mission or goals

Organizational Capacity – the ability of an EC/EI organization to commit the human, program, and other resources needed for program, organization, or systems changes to produce desired results

Why are these Findings Important?



Technical assistance providers can use one or more of these practices to ensure that programs and program staff are prepared to collaborate with them in making shared decisions and outcomes for their work together.

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Planning describes the written documentation of EC/EI professional development activities and sequence that a technical assistance provider facilitates with their learner. This would include an action plan for EC/EI program administration and plans to support EC/EI classroom personnel.

The Practices



Objectives and Goals	The immediate (objectives) and long-term (goals) EC/EI program changes and outcomes that are the desired benefits of technical assistance.
Intervention Practices	The particular EC/EI evidence-based intervention practice or best practices identified (targeted) to affect desired EC/EI program, organizational, or system change.
Fit Assessments	Determining how well the targeted intervention practice matches the EC/EI program or organization's mission priorities, desired changes, personnel beliefs, etc. and how well the proposed TA practices fit the EC/EI program's ecology.
Logic Model or Theory of Change	A description or graphic representation of the relationship between desired EC/EI program, organizational, or systems inputs and resources; the intervention practices, actions or activities to affect desired change; and the intended outputs and outcomes of use of the practices, actions, or activities.
TA Resources	Technical assistance resources made available to and/or provided to EC/EI program personnel to improve the use of targeted EC/EI evidence-based or best practices.
Staff Roles and Responsibilities	Specification of the roles and responsibilities of individual staff and how enactment of those roles and responsibilities is expected to contribute to desired change.

Why are these Findings Important?



When planning EC/EI technical assistance activities, providers should work with their learners to establish outcomes, goals and objectives. Describing the TA practices, ensuring they are the right match to the learner to help ensure that the learner will be able to implement the EC/EI practices with fidelity.

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Implementation describes five core elements for the provision of technical assistance. The five core elements include technical assistance provider credibility, professional development, coaching & mentoring, consultation, and provider support/feedback. These elements were found throughout the frameworks reviewed; however, not all frameworks included all five elements.

The Practices



TA Provider Credibility – practices used by a TA provider to establish staff trust, respect, rapport, and beliefs that the provider is acting in the best interests of the program receiving technical assistance

Professional Development – the evidence-based professional development practices used by a TA provider to build and strengthen staff, program, organization, and systems capacity to use targeted intervention practices

Coaching and Mentoring – TA provider use of either or both coaching and mentoring as part of the provision of technical assistance in interactions with staff to build and strengthen their capacity to use targeted intervention practices

TA Provider Consultation – tailored responses to individual staff, small groups of staff members and other program staff in response to questions/concerns about staff adoption and use of targeted intervention practices

TA Provider Support/Feedback – TA provider acknowledgement, encouragement, and feedback on staff efforts toward and accomplishment of changing program practices consistent with the objectives and goals of the plan

Why are these Findings Important?



Using known practices that result in effective EC/EI personnel change not only leads to improved teacher instruction but can also have a profound impact on the quality of educational services provided in EC/EI programs and organizations that seek to engage in sustainable systems change. As providers implement professional development and systems for supporting EC/EI personnel, they should seek information related to evidence-based strategies that are shown to be effective in helping EC/EI personnel to adopt and use EC/EI practices and strategies.

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Evaluation refers to the practices used by technical assistance providers to understand what changes have been made as a result of their work with an EC/EI program. Evaluation supports understanding if goals have been achieved and if plans were implemented with fidelity.

The Practices



Process Evaluation - methods for determining if the TA practices, activities, or interventions specified were implemented as planned and resulted in identifiable outputs

Outcome Evaluation - methods of determining if the practices, activities, or actions have resulted in desired changes and affect progress or benefits in the EC/EI program, organization, or system

Fidelity of Use of Intervention Practices - the extent to which the key characteristics of targeted EC/EI practices that are the focus of technical assistance were implemented in a manner in which they were designed to be used and consistently delivered

Fidelity of Use of Technical Assistance Practices - the extent to which the core elements of TA were used as intended and in a consistent manner with EC/EI program staff responsible for use of the EC/EI intervention practice constituting the focus of technical assistance

Lessons Learned - learnings gained from use of technical assistance to promote EC/EI program staff use of the targeted EC/EI intervention practice(s) constituting the focus of technical assistance and the use of that information to make changes or improvements in the overall implementation of program activities

Why are these Findings Important?



Evaluation provides necessary data allowing TA providers and their EC/EI partners to adjust/change their approach and/or strategies to accommodate unexpected challenges along the way. Evaluation also provides the necessary data that shows if technical assistance was effective in helping EC/EI personnel/ programs to make improvements in their work and to achieve the goals and outcomes planned. The studies reviewed for this analysis showed that when TA providers used measures evaluating both technical assistance fidelity and implementation fidelity, the results had a greater impact on program improvement.

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The Purpose



Sustainability of technical assistance facilitated change requires EC/EI programs, organizations and systems to plan activities to maintain changes once formal technical assistance activities have been completed. Most models and frameworks describe these practices as capacity-sustaining activities, continuous quality improvement, ongoing technical assistance provider support and follow-up activities.

The Practices



- Capacity-Sustaining Activities** – the EC/EI program, organization, or systems resources, activities, and professional supports that are used to sustain or maintain the changes that have been put into place as a result of technical assistance related practices
- Continuous Quality Improvement** - processes used to ensure ongoing improvements in an EC/EI program, organization or system that were the focus of technical assistance
- Ongoing TA Provider Support** - procedures used to provide, either or both, informal and formal technical assistance supports to EC/EI program personnel after the completion of technical assistance related activities
- Follow-up Activities** – planned activities used to provide EC/EI program personnel opportunities to share concerns and accomplishments and to obtain input, feedback, and suggestions, etc. from a TA provider

Why are these Findings Important?



Sustainability planning is a key element to ensuring that changes, made as a result of technical assistance efforts, are maintained by the EC/EI program personnel. Prior to ending TA activities, TA providers should work with EC/EI programs and organizations to engage in creating a sustainability plan using the core practices outlines.