

## From All to Each and Every: The Intentional Journey of Georgia's Quality Rated System

By Camille Catlett and Laura Johns

As the quantity and quality of tiered quality rating and improvement systems in the United States grows, so do the lessons about how to be intentional about what quality means. Persistent gaps in achievement between children of different socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, and ability backgrounds remind us that, since one size clearly does not fit all, states need to be explicit in the ways in which they address quality for each child and family. This article will highlight the ways in which one state is actively working to make that priority a reality.

In January 2012, Georgia launched Quality Rated, Georgia's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), which is a systematic tiered approach to assessing, improving, and communicating the quality of early and school-age care and education programs through the alignment and coordination of system-wide initiatives. Along with increasing the *quality* of early care and education, Quality Rated is also committed to increasing the ways in which families both understand and demand the systems and supports that are available to support their child.

In late 2011, BUILD and the QRIS National Learning Network announced a new professional development opportunity for states. Based on survey results indicating that over 30 states were interested in more systematically addressing issues of cultural, linguistic, and ability diversity, BUILD offered states the opportunity to participate in a sequence of professional development and planning related to building quality services and supports for young children who are culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse and their families. Viewing this as an opportunity to focus more explicitly on how the Quality Rated system addressed issues of diversity, staff in Georgia's Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) submitted an application and were selected (along with California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Oregon, and Pennsylvania) to participate in a "learning table" from March – August 2012. A learning table is a topic-focused sequence of professional development designed to support both knowledge acquisition (e.g., new resources, methods, models, and ideas) and knowledge application (e.g., homework, discussion, priorities for change, improvements) for each team of participants.

This Learning Table was organized in six content segments related to designing and implementing quality systems that are reflective of and responsive to children who are culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse and their families (see below). Each segment included:

- A Live Session (webinar) to facilitate learning about and discussion of evidence-based approaches to a specific aspect of supporting young children who are culturally, linguistically, and ability diverse
- Access to an electronic collection of resources related to the topic of each interactive event (known as a Landing Pad)
- Access to a discussion area to support exchanges among state team members, Learning Table staff, and invited speakers.

An initial step in participation was the identification of a team of leaders to participate in the Learning Table. Laura Johns, Director of Quality Initiatives at DECAL, was selected to lead a team that included other DECAL staff members (e.g., statewide inclusion coordinator, director of

research and evaluation) as well as representatives from the Atlanta Metro YMCA (Lydia Thacker), the Latin American Association (Isabel Perez), the Interfaith Children’s Movement (Pamela Perkins Carn), and United Way of Metro Atlanta (Charmaine Godley).

Table 1 Learning Table Content

Session	Learning Table Content	Learning Table Resources <sup>1</sup>
1	Evidence-Based Practices and Models for Serving Young Children who are Culturally, Linguistically, and Ability Diverse	<a href="http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-1-why-do-it">http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-1-why-do-it</a>
2	Measuring Quality in Outcomes for Young Children who are Culturally, Linguistically, and Ability Diverse	<a href="http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-2-measuring-quality">http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-2-measuring-quality</a>
3	Improving Experiences for Young Children who are Culturally, Linguistically, and Ability Diverse	<a href="http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-3-improving-experiences">http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-3-improving-experiences</a>
4	Improving Experiences for Young Dual Language Learners (DLLs)	<a href="http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-4-dual-language-learners">http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-4-dual-language-learners</a>
5	Growing the Capacity of Your Workforce to Support Young Children who are Culturally, Linguistically, and Ability Diverse	<a href="http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-5-growing-capacity">http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-5-growing-capacity</a>
6	Growing the Capacity of Your Professional Development Providers to Support People who Work Directly with Young Children Who Are Culturally, Linguistically, and Ability Diverse	<a href="http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-6-professional-development-providers">http://build.fpg.unc.edu/session-6-professional-development-providers</a>

Team members worked together on homework (prior to each session), attended each Live Session, discussed how the content could be applied to enhance Georgia’s evolving Quality Rated system, and identified priorities for change. Each segment of the Learning Table provided information about evidence-based practices, models being employed in other states, and resources to support new ways of addressing quality. The list of priorities for enhancement of the Quality Rated system grew with each subsequent session and with Georgia’s growing appreciation of how to support shifts that would make Quality Rated more responsive to the needs of each child and family. As an additional support for Georgia’s participation, BUILD provided a consultant to assist Georgia in addressing those priorities for change.

By the end of the six month sequence of professional development, Georgia’s team had turned the list of priorities for change into a to-do list and assigned responsibility for getting each job done. Here are some examples of the results that were achieved within six months of the Learning Table.

<sup>1</sup> All resources from the Learning Table (Landing Pads, PowerPoint presentations, session recordings) are available online.

Identified Need	Actions
Develop definitions of cultural competency and professional development	<p>The Georgia Learning Table team developed draft definitions. After distributing a series of drafts statewide through multiple networks for input, definitions were finalized and are now available to guide the Quality Rated system at <a href="https://qualityrated.decal.ga.gov/Content/Documents/QualityRatedCulturalCompetencyDefinitionandGuidingPrinciples.pdf">https://qualityrated.decal.ga.gov/Content/Documents/QualityRatedCulturalCompetencyDefinitionandGuidingPrinciples.pdf</a></p> <p><a href="https://qualityrated.decal.ga.gov/Content/Documents/CulturalCompetencyWorkgroupADefinitionofProfDev.pdf">https://qualityrated.decal.ga.gov/Content/Documents/CulturalCompetencyWorkgroupADefinitionofProfDev.pdf</a></p>
Develop guiding principles to support cultural competency	<p>The Georgia Learning Table team developed a draft that was shared widely for input and is now available for ongoing use at <a href="https://qualityrated.decal.ga.gov/Content/Documents/QualityRatedCulturalCompetencyDefinitionandGuidingPrinciples.pdf">https://qualityrated.decal.ga.gov/Content/Documents/QualityRatedCulturalCompetencyDefinitionandGuidingPrinciples.pdf</a></p>
Review Quality Rated standards for explicitness of emphasis on cultural, linguistic, and ability diversity	<p>A consultant was engaged to provide a detailed review of the standards. Findings revealed a variety of opportunities for more explicit attention to diversity issues. For example, the term <i>parent</i> was replaced with <i>family members</i> to honor the increasingly diverse configurations of caring adults in the lives of young children.</p>
Share the priority for emphasis on cultural, linguistic, and ability diversity in early childhood policy and practice, along with definitions and guiding principles to support that priority	<p>In January 2013 a Leadership briefing was held for DECAL Commissioner Bobby Cagle and other early childhood leaders from throughout the state. Participants heard about evidence-based practices that can support culturally and individually responsive early childhood practices, received tools to support their work (definitions, guiding principles), and discussed opportunities to be more intentional in how they address diversity.</p>

Plans are underway on the next wave of activities focused on incorporating an emphasis on cultural, linguistic, and ability diversity. These include:

- **Training for professional development providers** (faculty, coaches, trainers, consultants). A master class was held at the Georgia Association for Young Children conference in October 2013<sup>2</sup>. Additional tools and strategies will be developed and more master classes will be held in 2014.
- **Professional development for early childhood teachers and leaders.** Modules to support both knowledge acquisition and knowledge application have already been commissioned.

<sup>2</sup> PowerPoint slides and handouts from the Master Class are available at <http://fpg.unc.edu/presentations/supporting-early-care-and-education-providers-critical-change-agents-master-class>

- **Changes in the trainer approval system.** Revisions are underway that will require all approved trainers to participate in professional development on content and pedagogy that align with culturally competent practices. This will be followed by requirements that approved trainers incorporate an emphasis on cultural, linguistic, and ability diversity in the professional development they provide.

Additional steps, which will be supported with funds from Georgia's Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge grant, will include the development of modules on culturally competent practices to be offered widely to program directors and staff, and targeted resources to support higher education faculty in incorporating explicit attention to cultural competence within coursework and field experiences.

Fueled by participation in the Learning Table, and with continued leadership from Learning Table team members, Georgia is working on next steps that will continue progress on shifting Quality Rated from a system that supports *all* children to a QRIS that supports *each and every* child.