
Building the Early Childhood Workforce:

Findings of First 5 Monterey County's Technical Assistance and Seminars to Early Childhood Centers

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By:

Raquel González, PhD

Social Policy Research Associates



Executive Summary

Building the capacity of practitioners and within systems is one of First 5 Monterey County's (F5MC) core roles. This report focuses on F5MC's investments in intensive technical assistance (TA) to early childhood centers and sponsorship of seminars and other capacity building activities.

It outlines key findings drawing on focus groups and interviews with participants in TA, including: one focus group with TA consultants, five focus groups with educators, one focus group with program supervisors, and interviews with administrators of four agencies that operate early childhood education (ECE) centers that receive TA.

F5MC wanted to learn about how TA and other capacity building efforts contributed to two outcomes of interest: 1) improved program quality and 2) increased alignment of best practices within the early childhood development (ECD) system. Key findings are presented around these two outcomes.

Key Findings

Improved Quality in ECE

TA and seminars supported the professionalism of educators.

TA built educator confidence and self-efficacy, improved communication, broke down siloes, and connected educators to a broader network of practitioners.

TA provided safe spaces for learning.

The TA consultant and educators established trust and “no judgement” spaces, which allowed them to talk openly and problem solve how to best support children. Part of this process included supporting a growth mindset. The safe spaces created opportunities for educators to try new practices and reflect on the work in real time.

Seminars reinforced and complemented the TA received.

Participation in the Dr. Martha Moore socio-emotional series was seen as enhancing TA support. Other seminars, such as the Infant Family and Early Childhood Mental Health (IFECMH) trainings were seen as providing new information about children.

Educators reported changing their practices as a result of TA.

Changes to practice included developing new transition plans to

introduce children into classrooms, increasing engagement with families, changing routines with infants, altering the physical set up of rooms and using new materials.

System Alignment in ECD

A shared understanding of best practices is increasing among ECE professional in the County.

Respondents suggested that the TA contributed to an increased shared understanding of best practices. These occurred at the individual level and within teams, with sustained changes in practice of educators. Administrators also reported using what they learned through TA and seminars to improve policy and practice within the centers they oversee.

While networks connecting ECE professionals exist, there is still a need for increased connections across ECD systems.

Respondents noted that increased connections are needed to support developmental screenings and assessments for young children and to better connect families to resources within the community. A few respondents also expressed the need

to have workforce connections for aspiring ECE educators.

Low wages and turnover will limit sustainability of best practices.

Respondents expressed continued concern about being able to attract and retain educators given the low wages in the field; an issue that is occurring not only in the County, but nationally as well.

Conclusion

These findings illustrate that F5MC is building capacity within the ECE workforce. Respondents described a thoughtful and intentional approach to the TA and its enduring impact on their work.

The TA and seminars supported self-care and mental well-being, self-efficacy, and peer collaboration, factors that research has shown support educator retention. While educator retention was not a focus of this study, future research by F5MC could explore if the TA provided protective factors that led to retention in the field.

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Introduction

In order to support children from birth to age five, First 5 Monterey County (F5MC) strives to build early childhood education (ECE) capacity by “developing common understanding and effective services” (p. 5).¹ To that end, in 2009, F5MC launched the Workforce Development Initiative (WDI) to support a high quality ECE workforce. This initiative includes Technical Assistance (TA) projects with ECE centers, as well as early childhood seminars.²

In the TA projects, consultants work with ECE centers, who have received a grant from F5MC, to improve quality, support professional development and leadership skills of staff, and promote collaboration among TA participants. The TA participants include educators, their supervisors, and center administrators. F5MC developed the TA to align with adult learning principles as well as the six core elements for effective professional development programs (Zaslow, 2010). Exhibit 1 below highlights how the TA aligns with these core elements. In addition to these elements, the TA is informed by a few interrelated principles: relationship based, reflective practice, connected to context, and systems thinking. Based on the understanding of parallel process, the TA projects also support and work with participants in ways in which one would want participants to work with children and families. In addition, the TA provided is intensive to support deep and sustainable change, with centers receiving between 100 to 600 hours of TA per year.

¹ First 5 Monterey County. (2018). Monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning (MEAL) for strategic plan 2017-2023.

² WDI also includes a Comprehensive Approaches to Raising Educational Standards (CARES) program which provides academic advising and supports for college students pursuing ECE permits and degrees. However, CARES was not a focus of this evaluation.

Exhibit 1. Crosswalk of Core Elements of Professional Development Programs and the F5MC Approach to Technical Assistance

Six Core Elements	F5MC TA to Centers
1. Specific articulated objectives	Goals and strategies are co-developed based on observation and dialogue. Assessments are used to develop goals.
2. Focus on linking knowledge and practice	TA links the real-life work of the participants with theory through on-site observations, coaching and reflective discussions.
3. Collective participation of educators who work together	All participants of the program are involved in the TA process; educators co-develop goals; regular reflection meetings involve all educators and administrators; cross-center work and seminars support collective sharing of learning.
4. Intensity and duration is matched to the content	Flexibility allows varied on-site intensity as well as remote support. TA consultants use multiple modes of learning which include large and small groups or hands-on experiences as needed to focus on content.
5. Educators have the ability to conduct and interpret child assessments	Focused support for child assessment observation and documentation and hands-on working sessions to discuss and complete child assessments.
6. Appropriate for the organizational context and standards for practice	Connections and reflection on the multiple and varied requirements influencing the program.

To complement the TA program, F5MC provides **early childhood seminars** to support learning, collaborative thinking, and networking among educators, supervisors, and administrators. These include a small reflective practice group for Center Directors, the Martha Moore socio-emotional series, and the Infant Family

and Early Childhood Mental Health (IFECMH) trainings.³ These capacity building strategies have a strong mental health focus. The socio-emotional series, for example, connects the participants with 10 mental health consultants facilitating small reflective groups. The IFECMH training also provides opportunities for cross-sector professional development. Cross-sector training opportunities “can foster common understanding among professionals and appreciation of their respective contributions to the successful care and education of young children” (p4).⁴ The early childhood seminars, thus, serve as both a vehicle to increase knowledge about early childhood development (ECD)⁵ and promote connections across the ECD field. Prior evaluation of F5MC’s TA found that educators reported that the reflective practice approach of the TA consulting allowed them to regularly reflect on their classrooms, their choices, and their observations of children.⁶ These activities and services resulted in a number of changes in the classroom. For example, educators reported that they made changes to their curriculum and classroom operations based on children’s interests and needs. Educators shared how participating in TA positively impacted children, families, their school, their relationships with their colleagues, and the center-based early childhood field.

In 2020, F5MC contracted with Social Policy Research Associates (SPR) to build on these prior findings and explore two key outcomes of interest. **The first outcome**

³ WestEd has conducted numerous evaluations of IFECMH. As described in their 2019 report IFECMH “is designed to strengthen the capacity of the diverse workforce of partners across systems serving children, prenatal through age 5, and their families, to build mental health expertise along the continuum of promotion, preventive intervention, and treatment” (p4). To learn more, see Tirado-Strayer, N. & Mathur-Kalluri, M. (2019). *Foundation of Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Program: Year 7*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

⁴ Ochshorn, S. (2011). *Forging a New Framework for Professional Development: A Report on the Science of Professional Development in Early Childhood Education: A National Summit*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/eceducator/forging.pdf>

⁵ Early childhood development (ECD) supports children’s development from birth to age five and it encompasses looking at the development of the child holistically, including health, nutrition, play, and learning.

⁶ Harder+Company Community Research. (2015). *Cultivating quality early learning environments: An evaluation of First 5 Monterey County’s child signature project*. Retrieved from <https://www.first5monterey.org/download/library/2014-2015-reports-and-publications/cultivating-quality-early-learning-environments-an-evaluation-of-first-5-monterey-countys-child-signature-project-42.pdf>

would explore the extent to which participants of the TA and seminars report higher levels of quality as evidenced by participants having greater self-awareness and ability to act on that awareness; having greater use of skills, practices, and resources; and having trust in F5MC as a collaborator and partner.

F5MC also wanted to understand the systems level impact of this work. Therefore, the **second outcome** of interest would determine if ECD systems in Monterey County are better aligned as evidenced by organizations having a shared understanding of best practices, and increased networks and engagement in the early learning field in the County.

To explore these outcomes, we designed a qualitative study that included a series of interviews and focus groups with the TA consultants, educators, their supervisors, and administrators of the TA centers (See Appendix for a full discussion of methods). The interviews and focus groups, which were an hour each and included a range of questions to help explore the outcomes of interest, included:

- **One focus group** with the TA consultants
- **Five focus groups** with educators participating in TA; two were held in English and three in Spanish
- **One focus group** with the immediate supervisors of the educators participating in TA
- **Four interviews** with administrators of agencies that operate ECE centers that receive TA.

The report is divided into two sections, each covering one of these key outcomes:

- **Outcome 1: Improved quality in ECE.** In this section, we describe how the TA and seminars supported the professionalism of educators and the ways in which educators changed their practice as a result of the TA. We also discuss how the seminars reinforced and complemented the TA received.
- **Outcome 2: System Alignment in ECD.** This section describes how there is an increasing understanding of best practices for educators in early learning in Monterey County. It also discusses the challenges the ECD field faces in creating system alignment within the County.

We provide key findings related to each outcome, integrating data from the various respondents throughout the discussion. Please note to further protect confidentiality of participants, we generally do not highlight which quotes have been translated into English.

Outcome 1. Improved Quality in ECE

A primary goal of F5MC's TA and seminars is to improve ECE quality by building the capacity of the ECE workforce in Monterey County. As one respondent noted, the goal is "to really enhance what early childhood education looks like." Administrators of centers participating in TA described how TA supported the professional development and growth of staff and several acknowledged the need for this additional "outside support" provided by F5MC.

Throughout the interviews and focus groups, respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the TA they received. The TA consultants were described as supporting educators in their professional growth, providing resources and "guiding" educators towards "becoming better in our profession." They modeled techniques, gave advice, helped educators learn how to talk with children and engage families, and encouraged staff. As one educator noted,

"It's just a person there to ... I almost want to say a little angel on your shoulder just whispering things, 'You can do this,' encouraging you...I see it as a support system."

Educators spoke about how the consultants created safe and nurturing spaces for them to learn. They also spoke about the use of reflection as a critical component of the work. Notably, this is also an example of how consultants integrated a parallel process. They modeled how to establish a safe, nurturing, and reflective learning space to help educators create that same environment for the children in their care. Respondents also described how the other ECD seminars available to them complemented and reinforced what they learned through the TA.

In describing their experiences, respondents gave ample evidence of changes in their self-awareness, knowledge of ECD, and classroom practice. These changes occurred through intensive engagement with the consultant in which educators would try new things with the children, reflect, and adapt as needed, another example of a parallel process that educators should mirror in their classrooms.

Seeing the positive impact of the work on the children also provided evidence of the effectiveness of the new practices and helped solidify the learnings for educators. Below we share an example that illustrates how a consultant helped educators support a child named Jenny (pseudonym) who was struggling to form positive relationships with peers in her classroom. According to her teacher, Jenny

*“had a lot of anxieties and...would flap her hands and shake her legs a lot, and so some of the kids would get scared because of all that extra movement... **It was hard for [Jenny] to build friendships because of that and [the TA consultant] suggested some things...**we would set up a cutting table and then other children would join in. Just [bridge Jenny] into having at least one child parallel play with her...**then other children started adding and then they started inviting her to play so it was a gradual build to having more than one child playing with her... it really came out, it was beautiful.** It was like, ‘Wow.’ And that’s...[the TA consultant] helping us do this... **guiding us, but we were doing the work,** but it felt so good though that we were able to accomplish something...For the kids, it was like, ‘Okay, [Jenny’s] there.’ They already knew what she was going to do, it was normal, nothing stood out anymore where someone would say, ‘Oh, she hit me’...So it was really amazing.”*

As seen in this example, the consultant guided the educators on how to engage with Jenny, and in doing so the educators began changing how they worked with her. The educators expressed pride in the work and ability to help this child: “We were doing the work, but it felt so good that we were able to accomplish something.” Lastly, the classroom space became more inclusive as other children learned to be with Jenny. We offer this vignette to make concrete what is often hard to see in complex relational work such as TA: the challenge of supporting a young child, the gradual changes made to help this child and create an inclusive classroom, the collaborative nature of the work between the consultant and educators, and the feelings of pride from seeing the impact of the work. In the following section, we elaborate on the ways in which the TA and seminars improved quality in ECE.

Promoting Self-Care and Mental Well-Being

Several studies have documented elevated stress and higher rates of depression for ECE educators, and the impact of this stress on educators' engagement with children.* An important finding is that the TA and seminars promoted self-care and supported respondents' mental health. Both educators and administrators reported talking about self-care in the TA and Martha Moore socio-emotional series. They appreciated the conversations and described how crucial those discussions were in supporting their own mental health, especially during COVID-19. As one respondent noted, "They actually provided you with ideas and supports on how to be able to still be there, provide the service, but also learning to protect yourself from emotional drain."

*Smith, S. & Lawrence, S. (2019). Early childhood education teacher well-being: Association with children's experience, outcomes, and workplace conditions: A research to policy brief. Retrieved from http://www.nccp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/text_1224.pdf

TA and seminars supported the professionalism of educators

Our findings reveal that TA increased the professionalism of educators by building their confidence and self-efficacy; building teamwork and collaboration by creating team meetings and using reflective practice; and connecting educators to a broader network of practitioners in ECD.

Building confidence and self-efficacy in educators

Respondents described how the TA built educators' confidence and self-efficacy by allowing educators to be active participants in the process and helping them recognize and expand their knowledge of ECE. For example, in reflection meetings (described further in the following section), educators reflected on their practice in order to better support students. They also developed goals for themselves. As one educator noted, the TA consultant sought to center their voice, "empower" them, and make them key actors in their own growth from the start, something this respondent noted was atypical "in the early childhood setting."

“I remember from the beginning...our consultant came in and the first question she had for us was ‘What do you want to work on and what are your goals?’ And we were like, ‘Wow, we never get asked that question’... And it seems simple but really, you don't have that opportunity usually. In the early childhood setting, you're told about all these requirements and all the things you need to do and all these expectations you have to meet and they're very specific.”

Beyond being active participants in the work, consultants also built educators' confidence by helping them recognize the knowledge and skills they already possessed. Presenting and contributing to discussions in seminars also helped some respondents see they were knowledgeable. For example, an educator described how contributing during a small breakout session during an IFECMH training helped her realize that she had insights to offer, even though she had initially felt “intimidated...because you've got directors....you've got the higher ups.”

As educators built their confidence, they also embraced their self-awareness - in their role as educator, in being able to change practice as needed to support children, and in embracing the knowledge they have. As one respondent articulated,

“So, all of us in our center, we kind of went through the same process where we realized we have a lot of knowledge and we have a lot of experience and we just felt empowered to make changes. And just felt like, I don't know what's the word, but we felt we were... just kind of lifted up into that position.”

Respondents not only talked about recognizing the knowledge they already had, but also provided numerous examples of new knowledge and insight they gathered as a result of the TA, including better understanding of child development. This increase in knowledge also supported educators' self-efficacy. One respondent described this change as transformative within themselves and their peers,

“Just everyone, all of us teachers, had this big transformation, so that was just amazing to see. And we just became a really good strong team and just our whole center transformed. So, it was just, in the end, we all came out as really confident and really capable and knowledgeable

teachers. And it [shifted], going from like, 'I don't know, I have to be told what to do. To, I know what's right for my classroom and I know what's right for my children.'"

In building their confidence and feelings of self-efficacy, the consultants increased educators' self-awareness and ability to act on that awareness. The consultants did this by both spotlighting all the knowledge that educators brought, and by helping them increase their knowledge. This finding aligns with other research studies that have shown self-efficacy of educators to be positively related to a variety of outcomes, including educator behavior and practices related to classroom quality, teacher effectiveness, and factors associated with well-being, job satisfaction, and commitment.⁷

Improving communication, building collaboration, and breaking down siloes

Beyond individual level changes of increased self-efficacy, the TA also increased professionalism by improving communication and teamwork amongst educators through the development of collaborative spaces. In particular, respondents reported meeting regularly as a team as a result of the TA to discuss strategies to better support children. These meetings were described as intentional spaces to support the team's reflective practice. As one administrator said,

"Before the teachers didn't really have those really intentional meetings where they sit down weekly...Being intentional of, 'Let's set up these activities,' or, 'We noticed [CHILD NAME] has been having a hard time, but do you notice that when we work with [CHILD NAME] or we put these activities, he seems to,'...Some of the tools [of the TA] is seeing the value of team meetings and also self-reflection."

As noted, the team meetings provided opportunities for group reflective practice and planning, where center staff "sit together and reflect....[on] what is going on, what everybody thinks [about what] will work better, where you can improve." The team meetings also provided opportunities for educators to "get to know each

⁷ Zee, M. & Koomen, H.M.Y. (2016). Teacher Self-Efficacy and Its Effects on Classroom Processes, Student Academic Adjustment, and Teacher Well-Being: A Synthesis of 40 Years of Research. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 981-1015.

other and just communicate.” In another instance, the TA consultant even helped to “build a bridge and connect” to another classroom with a program not receiving TA but that shared an outdoor space that the educators wanted to revamp. As described by a respondent,

“The two classrooms were like, ‘Well, we don't know how to involve [the educators from the other program] and then kind of make those changes outside without upsetting them or how do we even do that?’ So, [the consultant] kind of helped us to invite them over and it was a whole other project, right? This whole big, long project of ours was how to kind of connect and invite them into what we were doing, even though they weren't part of the TA project and how we could do our work. So that was nice.”

The consultants helped to break down silos both within and across classrooms. The seminars available to participants also contributed to increased dialogue amongst educators as detailed below.

Connecting to a broader network of practitioners in ECD

By having access to the Dr. Martha Moore socio-emotional series, as well as the IFECMH series, educators had opportunities to network with other professionals in the field.

At the Martha Moore series, respondents enjoyed meeting other educators, appreciated commiserating with others in the field, and increased their confidence after seeing that some of the issues they struggled with occurred in other centers as well. As one respondent noted of attending these seminars,

“And I think that was an eye opener for everybody. Like, okay, now we're not alone in this. Everybody's going through stuff. And that was really good ... to go out to the community.”

While not all respondents had participated in the IFECMH trainings, a few who did reported that they provided opportunities to see “different roles people had because they had different types of input related to whatever we were talking about.”

TA provided safe spaces for learning

A critical component to the TA appears to be the intentional development of a safe space for learning, built on trust between the educators and TA consultants, “no judgment” spaces, and a focus on supporting a growth mindset. In our focus group, the consultants described how they intentionally sought to create this safe space for learning. As one of the consultants reported, the goal was to

“...build relationships where teachers and directors, everybody who's involved, has a sense of safety, security, they [TA participants] develop a sense of freedom to wonder and be curious...to find a sense where multiple perspectives don't mean I have to abandon my own way of thinking but I can add to it, or I can make adjustments along the way.”

Respondents described how important it was that the consultant was not there to judge them, but rather was focused on supporting them in order to better support children. As one respondent mentioned, the TA consultant

“would come into the center...and just sit with us and just point out things..., ‘Yeah, what can we do here?’ There was never...judgment so it's somebody that's there not to judge, but to help and mold with what you already have and make it something even just stronger and better for your whole team.”

This safe space appears to have allowed the educators to be opened to asking questions, experimenting, and learning, just as children should be within an ECE program. Again, this reflects the parallel process that consultants promote. These safe spaces to ask questions was intertwined with the focus on learning in order to be more effective educators. As one respondent reported, the consultant “always reminded us, nothing’s wrong. We’re always learning and progressing along the way.”

“She always reminded us, nothing's wrong. We're always learning and progressing along the way.”

– Educator

These safe spaces were developed in part because of the trusting relationships built by the consultants with educators. Indeed, one of the consultants was emphatic that relationships were key, as she reported “I always say, it's all about relationships.” In order to build trusting relationships, consultants started “cautious and slow” to gain trust with the educators. The time provided to go slow and build relationships was named as important for the work. Similarly, an administrator noted that there was some hesitancy at the beginning of the TA between the educators and consultant but, once they built trust, the educators really enjoyed the TA and started implementing the consultant’s recommendations.

Seminars reinforced and complemented the TA received

Respondents overwhelmingly described how much they enjoyed and appreciated the Martha Moore socio-emotional series, particularly her use of storytelling to share information, the way she kept participants engaged, and her thoughtfulness and calming presence. While some respondents said that attending on Fridays was hard, others enthusiastically mentioned that they looked forward to these sessions. As one respondent reported,

“I liked [that] the topics are really relevant to us and it's been really beneficial to us. I know it's on Friday night, we've had a long week but I will not miss Martha Moore. I will not. If I can be there, I'm there because it is tapping in on subjects like how we can best help the kids... and her delivery of it is really ... I'm really attentive to it... then she gives her stories and she shares about her husband Mr. Moore ... and we get a good laugh. I think she keeps us interested.”

Beyond general praise for the Martha Moore series, respondents reported that the series and the TA made the professional development a “whole piece” and if educators had only access to one, “we would feel like we were not fully balanced.” An administrator also noted that her attendance in the Martha Moore series helped

improve the quality of the program through her own learning and implementation of knowledge gained across the centers she oversees.

While not all respondents had attended the IFECMH trainings, respondents who had attended these trainings described them as a place where they could learn about other resources in the community. Respondents also reported learning about stress, autism, the importance of security for a child, and the power of children to be resilient with a network of support. A few respondents even reported that they were able to apply things they learned in IFECMH in their private lives with their own children or grandchildren.

IFECMH was seen as promoting “personal growth” versus building the capacity of a team of educators as the TA sought to do. For one respondent, she considered attendance at IFECMH as personal growth because it was difficult to share the knowledge gained with colleagues who did not attend the IFECMH sessions. As this respondent stated,

“It's more of individual learning where you go on your Saturdays and you learn. But it's on an individual level because the Martha Moore series and the consulting groups, you're not doing it as a team... if not a lot of people from the team are going, it's kind of you just come back with those resources and you come back with that new knowledge and you apply it to your work. But then it's hard to share that with other people and it's hard to say, “This is what I learned, and this is what I'm going to do differently or this.”

So, while IFECMH complemented and reinforced the TA, its effect on participants was limited to those who attended these sessions.

Educators changed their practice as a result of the TA

Respondents provided numerous examples of changes they made in their practice as a result of the TA received. They described working with the consultant to develop transitions for children and families, changing routines and practices with children, focusing activities based on children's interest, rearranging classrooms and using new materials, and engaging with families and the community in ways they had not done so before. Below we provide examples of each.

Supporting smooth transitions for children and families

Respondents reported that the consultants helped them be more intentional about how they support children to transition between classrooms as they grow older (e.g., moving from infant to toddler room). One example provided was of a center in which educators worked side by side with the consultant to develop a transition plan, including the development of a book with images and instructions. As part of this transition plan, which was a new policy for the center, children would have opportunities to visit the new classroom so the transition would not be an abrupt change for the child. In another example, a respondent discussed changing how they welcomed new families to the center. The center began to provide parents with an opportunity to visit the classroom before the child begins attending and how this helped develop relationships between educators and families.

Changing routines and practices with children

Educators reported learning about creating safe spaces for children and the importance of forming strong attachment relationships to children. They learned about strategies to promote language acquisition and how to best support children behaviorally. Below is a list of some of the changes in practices that educators shared. It is not meant to be an exhaustive list but illustrates a range of practices.

Educators reported learning:

- 1) strategies to redirect children when needed;
- 2) the importance of allowing children to be free and not correcting everything they do;
- 3) not to interrupt a child when they are working;
- 4) to observe babies to better learn their needs;
- 5) to use narration with infants to support language acquisition; and
- 6) to stop and welcome a child when they come into the classroom.

One respondent shared an illustrative example of how educators working with infants had changed their routines to place a larger focus on engagement and language development and how these changes impacted children.

“You know you have about six at a time, you had all your infants... [Before the TA, educators] were just kind of... [focused on] feeding. And it was just another routine, right? Now if you walk [in]to that

classroom, they have smaller tables. And they are down to the children's level. So that the mobile infants, the ones that can already walk...they sit down in their size chair...And now you can see that they are practicing using the utensils. And the teachers are talking to them about what they are eating. So, it's a warmer atmosphere, the climate, like the connection's kind of changed. And the emotional climate changed, in the classroom. I can see that [educators] are a little more in tune with [the children]. They're making more eye contact....This is more of an opportunity to talk. To do a little more language modeling.”

Important in this process was understanding “the purpose of what we were doing, why, what our goals were by doing certain things and how to expand on those activities.” The consultants sought not only to suggest different ways for engaging, but also to explain how these new practices support positive child development.

Focusing activities based on children’s interest

Respondents also reported learning about the importance of giving children choices in activities and developing longer term project plans based on children’s interests. One respondent described how the consultant encouraged them to be more attuned to their surroundings and the importance developing activities that connect to children’s experiences.

“[THE CONSULTANT] used to say observe, see that everything be based on the interest of the child... Something that they can see that they can touch, that they can experience, or they can gain something. For an example... she made me aware because our center is situated in a beautiful area, but I used to see that every day that I didn't really pay attention and then she came and she said, ‘You guys need to be aware of your surroundings and bring things into the center the children are familiar with that they see every day.’ For an example, I remember we took a walk to see the grapes because there's lots of grapes around us.”

Rearranging classrooms and using new materials

Research shows that the classroom environment can impact children’s social behavior and a well-designed ECE classroom can motivate engagement and

learning amongst children.⁸ The consultants worked not only on changing teacher practice, but also provided opportunities for educators to revisit the arrangement of rooms and incorporate new materials and books. Examples ranged from changing how children's work was displayed, to making the room a calm environment for children, to the creation of activity stations within a classroom. For example, one respondent noted that the consultant had helped them dedicate a section of the classroom to serve as an art studio with easel, paint, and art tools for small groups.

One respondent even described a complete rehaul of the classroom environment, where they removed a lot of the classroom furniture as a way to reimagine what the learning environment could look like.

"And what we did is we were going to just move some furniture...but we end[ed] up taking everything out. And I remember we [left] half of the stuff out on the play yard. And the way we rearrange[d] right away it was happiness for everybody. So, she just gave us a little idea in one of the meetings, "Oh, let's look at your environment and this and that." And right away, the teachers they start, 'Oh, let's do this, let's do that.' So, it's like she fire[s] a little thing and then boom, it happens we change it completely."

Beyond changing the classroom environment, respondents also talked about the consultant suggesting the use of new materials and books. This included recommending the use of clay for art, incorporating natural materials such as woods, having books that are more inclusive of all families, and using "real stuff, not toys." A respondent elaborated on what it meant to use real things and how they had done so,

"Then we started buying real things, real plates. She [said], 'Don't be afraid. Explain to the children. They are very smart. They will know what to do.' It is true. We got tea sets, real plates, real spoons. We even used to go, for an example, to Goodwill and get things for the children."

⁸ Obaki, S.O. (2017). Impact of classroom environment on children's social behavior. *International Journal of Education and Practice*, 5(1), 1-7. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1209957.pdf>

Like I said, real plates or baskets, real stuff, not toys. Something that they see in houses every single day.”

Engaging with families and the community

Educators also reported that they learned how to engage differently with families and the community as a result of the TA. This included knowing how to respond to families when they ask for advice on how to deal with their child, sharing videos with families that show what they did with the child, inviting families to the centers, and taking care to tell families something positive about their child during pick up. One respondent provided an example of wanting to develop a garden and being inspired by the consultant who recommended to “look for your sources in the community.” As a result, the educator reached out to families and community members to acquire materials for the garden and playground.

Outcome 2. System Alignment in ECD

F5MC's commitment to improving quality in ECE goes beyond educator- and center- level outcomes and focuses on the synergies of programs. This focus recognizes that change needs to occur at both an individual and systemic level. This section, then, focuses on two key indicators to assess if systemic change is occurring – if there is shared understanding of best practices in ECE and if there are increased networks and engagement in ECD in the County.

Our findings show that respondents agreed that a shared understanding of best practices is increasing among ECE professionals. While this shared understanding is in part due to increased networks, respondents also noted that additional connections are needed across the ECD field. Respondents also discussed how low wages and high turnover in ECE limit the sustainability of best practices. Below we elaborate on each of these findings.

A shared understanding of best practices is increasing among ECE professionals in Monterey County

Respondents agreed that the TA and seminars have contributed to an increasing shared understanding of best practices in the County. Administrators, supervisors, and educators reported that they learned best practices from the TA that remained with them after participation. The TA and seminars helped the participating

individuals and led programs to implement new program policies, such as, noted above, the development of new policies for transitions between classrooms or new strategies to welcome families into centers. Additionally, administrators reported they made changes as a result of engagement with other administrators as part of the TA and seminars.

Continuing individual level practice after the TA has ended

Respondents reported that they continued to use the best practices and information learned from the TA after it ended. The quality of the TA was cited as a reason for this – one respondent referenced a Spanish saying, “lo que bien se aprende nunca se olvida” – what is well learned is never forgotten. One administrator articulated how the individual growth of educators, in turn, impacts children in the following way:

“It does make an impact [on children] because these teachers have these new tools they can use to work with children or understanding curriculum, understanding about lesson plans being intentional, individualizing. So, I think it does. I mean, because at the long run who's going to benefit is the children.”

Educators are continuing to apply the practices acquired from the TA in new work settings. One respondent reported hearing that educators who had received TA and were now teaching in a new center, continued to implement the best practices they learned and were trying to share these practices with new colleagues.

“And then I know teachers that went to other centers, I was just so happy to hear that they were continuing the work, whatever they learned. And they were continuing with that style of work that we learned in their new centers and they had the chance to...share that with [co-teachers]...And I think it worked out because I had two teachers who went on to a center and so they were tag teamed and... they were able to really share like, ‘Yeah, we want to share this with you.... and this is what we learned works with children, right. Or works in the classroom.’ So, I know I would hear that from their new supervisor or how just refreshing it was, their style of work and how they took what they learned with them.”

This finding is critical because the change in educator practice is long-standing and not temporal. And while the structure of the TA was not a train the trainer model (in which educators learn and then train others in a fidelity-based model), seminars and cross-center exchanges intentionally supported educators in sharing and presenting their work to others in the field. Findings reflect that some educators are sharing their knowledge with peers who did not participate in the TA. Future research could help understand the extent to which this kind of peer-to-peer learning and exchange is happening.

Sustaining best practice within Centers

To achieve system-level changes the impact has to occur not only with individual educators, but also with administrators – who oversee centers and can sustain best practices. Administrators reported receiving TA support and attending the Martha Moore series and described how this impacted the work they did. One administrator described meetings with the TA consultant and supervisors and how the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to reassess their program,

“So, we had lots of opportunity to think critically about our current structures and systems...I would have conversations about things that were said, better ways to implement the program, things that are going really well.”

Another administrator described how she hoped to use the TA to create an inclusive model that could be replicated at other centers.

“I was really hoping that the teachers would feel supported not only by myself because I was also getting extra support by attending the Martha Moore series and by... being able to attend the mental health sessions. I was hoping that they felt supported and I was hoping that I could help create an inclusive model that works for us that I could replicate at other sites.”

While respondents generally did not report obstacles impacting their ability to use best practices learned from the TA in their classroom, one respondent did report that agency policy and procedures limited implementation of best practices. As the respondent noted,

“At the center level, we might've been making changes and we had...new ways of working. And it's hard to get higher up people, management involved enough to where they understand. And I feel that was an obstacle we couldn't make changes on that level...”

This respondent provided an example of not being able to change the curriculum or diaper policy. As the respondent reported, policies and procedures for their agency have “to apply to everybody and it has to be consistent across...all the different programs.”

Networking among ECE professionals

Dialogue and networking encourage greater alignment in practices and approaches among ECE professionals. This dialogue can provide opportunities to learn, share, and make connections. One administrator described how networking in F5MC seminars and in IFECMH provided opportunities to learn best practices from colleagues. As she reported,

“When I attended Martha Moore's sessions, I had access to other people that were doing the same work as me. I found that part extremely valuable and it was what I wanted, to be able to just say, ‘Hey, what are you doing at your site?’ and compare if they're doing something that maybe would benefit my program that I could borrow it and see if it works for me.”

Similarly, another respondent noted that the reflection time at the countywide director meetings impact the field in Monterey County by ensuring that directors are “on the same page.” Administrators reported that participation in Quality Matters and the Monterey Child Care Planning Council meetings contributed to the shared understanding of best practices. As one administrator reported,

“I feel like Quality Matters has really helped us all get on the same page. Also, the Monterey Child Care Planning Council are really active in seeking best practices and copying ourselves after other childcare planning councils that are doing innovative things.”

This administrator went on to say how important these meetings were to connect professionals within the field,

“I think all these opportunities for us to meet and be connected gives us that opportunity to validate the work that we're doing to feel connected and to know that there's other people experiencing or having more experience doing the things that we're doing that we can really support each other.”

While the ECE system is more aligned, the larger ECD field still faces challenges

While respondents described more alignment within ECE, they also spoke about persistent challenges connecting across the larger ECD field to support children birth to five. One challenge was in creating connections across different systems in ECD. Another challenge concerned sustainability of best practices amidst low wages and high turnover, a workforce challenge being felt across the country.

Ongoing need for increased connections to support children

Despite recognizing increased connections through the seminars, TA, and countywide initiatives, some respondents noted a need for additional connections to better support young children and families. The challenge was in part due to the disparate early childhood systems.

“For early childhood, it's a little different because we're all different systems. We might be housed under a school, we might be at a church, we might be privately owned, so there's no system.”

For example, one respondent described early care and learning and Transitional Kindergarten (TK) as a “complete different world” and said that there had not been opportunities to work across early care and TK but “that would be a good idea.” Respondents discussed the challenges of making connections between private centers and school districts’ early learning programs. One respondent noted the challenges of providing services for families:

“I think with early childhood providers, I feel like we could provide better services to our families if we had a system that was more connected, and I mean from every level.”

This respondent went on to recommend that the County develop a booklet to help ECE providers know how to make a referral for a child that would be specific to private or public centers. Another administrator described these systems as “interrelated, but at the same time, it's so separate.” She went on to describe how “all of this separateness but intermingle is so confusing when you're trying to truly implement a quality program.”

While these respondents were mainly describing the need to make connections for developmental screenings and referrals, one administrator described the need to connect with resources in the community to support families holistically. This administrator noted that developing relationships with agencies to support families has occurred “little by little” over time through word of mouth, but that time and lack of capacity at the referral sites limits the ability to support families.

For one administrator, the connections needed are not just between private and public centers, or accessing referrals to children, but also included education of the workforce.

“Then the whole piece about education. If you're someone who wants to work in the early childhood field, who can you call to be a mentor? What education do you need? All these pieces, none of its written down. All of us have it living inside of us or in our programs and we just pass it on anecdotally... the informal pieces of it too are important, but they're not anywhere in writing, so I don't really know what that would look like exactly, but just having stuff in writing.”

Indeed, several respondents provided suggestions for F5MC to further make connections for pre-professionals considering ECE.

“If they [F5MC] were looking for some form of like a new project, obviously continue the work they're doing to be able to sustain the staff we have and enrich them. But maybe even supporting a group of cohorts, kind of leading them through the path. And I know some of the

colleges do that too sometimes, but it would be cool if maybe they have some type of mentor or maybe a mentor that they have that works with early childhood students, EC students.”

Sustaining best practices amidst low wages and high turnover

Overwhelmingly, the constraints described by respondents were workforce related issues, including the high turnover in the field. One administrator noted how difficult it had been to find educators – “it's been really hard to operate our centers because we don't have people. We don't have people applying or people who are qualified.”

High turnover was often blamed on low wages. As one respondent reported,

“Teachers and directors are underpaid. In our community, I think the pay can affect [teachers'] mental health and their quality of life, which then in turn affects teacher retention, which then affects the quality of programs.”

Respondents described the low wages as affecting mental health of educators and limiting their motivation. One administrator articulated how the low wages impacted their program in multiple ways limiting the ability to sustain improvements in program quality,

“One of my goals has been to raise quality for the program, and be able to offer that quality care for the families that need it the most. But I also see that there is [only] so much that I can train, or get support from my staff. When they're really not motivated, because our field is still paying very low.... I can tell you that some of the fast food chains are paying a little more than we are, for our teacher assistants....The staff is not really motivated, because their salaries are so low. So, I think as a field, that would be something we need to advocate, and work on, so the salaries are a little more competitive.”

This finding aligns with other studies that show that low wages in ECE leads to high turnover, and high turnover limits the ability to sustain quality programs.⁹ When asked how this problem could be resolved, this respondent suggested that reimbursement rates provided by the State for the children served should be increased.¹⁰

Summary

A core role for F5MC is to build capacity of ECE educators to support a high quality ECE workforce. In building capacity, F5MC also seeks to support systemic change by supporting shared understanding of best practices throughout the County and networking opportunities. This study explored the extent to which F5MC's TA projects with ECE centers, as well as early childhood seminars, built the capacity of participating educators.

Prior evaluations of the TA showed that the TA was well received, educators made changes to their practice, and that the TA positively impacted relationships amongst educators and with their school, families, and children. This study further corroborates these findings. Results from this study find that the TA and seminars supported the professionalism of educators. The TA built educator confidence and self-efficacy by engaging them as partners in the work, which served to highlight educators' existing knowledge and expertise. Professionalism was further built by improving communication across teams and encouraging group reflection. Seminars reinforced and complemented the TA and also helped connect educators to a broader network of practitioners. Educators said that as a result of their participation they had been more intentional about supporting smooth transitions for children and families, changed some of their practice with children, rearranged

⁹ For a lengthier discussion see Stipek, et al. (2018). *Getting down to facts II: Early childhood education in California* retrieved from https://www.gettingdowntofacts.com/sites/default/files/2018-09/GDTFII_Report_Stipek.pdf

¹⁰ The State of California provides reimbursement rates for children enrolled in state funded preschool programs. In January 2022, the State launched a Rate and Reform Quality Stakeholder Workgroup that is in part exploring these issues around increasing reimbursement rates. See here for more <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/child-care-and-development/rate-reform-and-quality>

their classrooms and introduced new materials to make their centers more child centered, and increased engagement with families.

Participants agreed that the TA has contributed to a shared understanding of best practices among ECE educators and professionals throughout the County. This shared understanding of best practices has occurred in part because of peer-to-peer sharing among educators. The participation of administrators in TA has led to shifts in policies, such as the development of transition plans. Networking across the field, through participation in Quality Matters, and small reflective group practice was also noted as a mechanism that supported shared understanding of best practices. However, respondents reported a need for increased connections to support families in connecting to developmental assessments and in providing general supports and services. Concerns about educator retention was also described amidst low wages and high turnover.

Areas for Future Research

Future research could explore the extent to which the TA impacts educator retention in the field. The TA may have provided some protective factors that could promote retention in the field. For example, findings showed that the TA and seminars supported the self-care and mental well-being of educators, increased self-efficacy, and collaboration with colleagues. These are all factors associated with educator retention.¹¹

Another future area for research is around peer learning. Some respondents also reported sharing their knowledge with peers who had not participated in the training. F5MC may want to further explore the extent to which this sharing and learning occurred across educators who participated in the TA and those who did not (e.g., new staff).

¹¹ Lipscomb, S.T., Chandler, K.D., Abshire, C. et al. (2022). Early Childhood Teachers' Self-efficacy and Professional Support Predict Work Engagement. *Early Childhood Educ J* 50, 675–685. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01182-5>

Appendices

Appendix A. Methods

Instrument Development

F5MC was interested in learning about outcomes related to participation in TA and seminars. The instruments were developed to capture information related to participants experience with TA and seminars, and their reflections on the alignment of best practices and approaches in the ECE field in the County. Drafts of the protocols were developed with feedback obtained from F5MC staff. They were also developed to be parallel and capture similar information across respondents. Protocol development included several rounds of iteration and refinement to ensure the protocol would properly address the research questions, outcomes, and relevant indicators. F5MC staff translated the educator protocol into Spanish. See Appendix B for a copy of the instruments.

Sample

For this study, we were interested in understanding the impact of the seminars on TA participants. Therefore, we purposefully over-sampled educators who had both participated in TA and the Dr. Martha Moore socio-emotional series and IFECMH sessions. We conducted these focus groups in English and Spanish, and educators were able to choose what language focus group they preferred to participate in. They also each received a \$25 gift card for their participation. We also wanted to speak to all the administrators of centers receiving TA in this last cohort, so we invited all the administrators to participate in one-on-one interviews. The years participating centers had receive TA varied from two to nine years. We also invited TA consultants to participate in a focus group.

Below we describe the data collection activities completed for this study.

- **One focus group** with the TA consultants; with two TA consultants participating in the focus group.
- **Five focus groups** with educators participating in TA. Two were held in English and three in Spanish. A total of 18 educators participated in the focus groups.

- **One focus group** with the immediate supervisors of the educators participating in TA. A total of four supervisors participated in the focus group.
- **Four interviews** with administrators of agencies that operate ECE centers that receive TA.

Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was informed by grounded theory.¹² The focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed. We used an iterative process for analysis of the data. We began by coding each focus group/interview by question in the protocol, as each question represented different areas of interest we wanted to capture. We summarized recurring patterns and themes across respondents. We then shared emerging findings with F5MC staff and the Evaluation Advisory Committee (EAC). This iterative engagement with the data informed the synthesis of emerging findings presented here by supporting interpretation of the findings, highlighting areas for clarity, providing opportunities to have findings interrogated externally from SPR, and ensuring that the findings are relevant and reasonable.

While replicability of qualitative analysis is not feasible or appropriate, we recognize the importance of ensuring our findings are transparent and trustworthy.¹³ As such, we share quotes throughout the report to both illuminate key findings and to present evidence of our findings. As with all our quotes, we only include those that allow us to protect confidentiality of respondents. We also provide additional quotes in Appendix C to further illustrate our findings. Please note to further protect confidentiality of participants, we do not highlight which quotes have been translated into English by SPR.

Limitations of study

While educators provided numerous and detailed examples of changes to their practice, a limitation of this study is that we have not been able to observe them in

¹² Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

¹³ Pratt, M.G., Kaplan, S., & Whittington, R. (2020). The tumult over transparency: Decoupling transparency from replication in establishing trustworthy qualitative research. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, (65)1, 1-19.

the classroom, nor compare their practice before participating in the TA and after to analyze any changes. We also were not able to observe the interactions between the TA consultants and participants. Still, we are confident in our findings as respondents were not only able to talk about their experiences, but gave detailed descriptions that helped to illuminate the complex ways in which they experienced, received, and adapted their practice because of the TA. The richness of the data provide strong evidence of the impact of this work.

Appendix B. Instruments

Center Administrator Interview Protocol

Introduction

1. Tell us your name, organization, and how long have you worked at your organization?

Capacity Building

2. In your own words can you briefly explain what the TA consultation is that you and your center staff receive?
3. Why did your organization apply to receive technical assistance consultation from First 5?
4. How were you hoping that TA would benefit your program?
5. How have the TA consultation benefited educators?
6. Are you aware of teacher participation at the Martha Moore seminars? If yes, how, if at all, do you perceive these seminars have supported program quality?
7. Have you participated in:
 - a. Any of the meetings with Dr. Martha Moore?
 - b. Any individual session(s) with Dr. Martha Moore?
 - c. (If yes for either or both) In what ways, if any, have you—in your position as an administrator--benefited from them?
8. Has some of your staff also participate in other F5MC activities such as IFECMH?
 - a. Do you think your staff's participation in the IFECMH series has impacted your center(s)? [If yes] How so?
9. Have your staff experienced any challenges with the consultations or seminars that they have attended? (If yes) Can you provide a couple examples?
10. Are there any practices that have been a focus of the TA consultation and/or seminars that you and your staff haven't been able to implement? Why do think that is?

ECD System Alignment

11. Do you think the TA program has benefits beyond the centers directly receiving TA? [If yes] How so?
12. Do you feel the early childhood field in Monterey County is coming to a shared understanding of best practices? If yes, what has contributed to this

shared understanding? If no, how can a shared understanding of best practices be developed?

13. Over the last several years, has there been a change in your organization's connections with agencies that offer supportive resources for families? If so, how?
14. What other obstacles have you faced when supporting children and their families? What, if anything, helped you overcome those obstacles? What additional support would help?

Center Staff (Educators and Supervisors) Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

1. Tell us your Name, organization, and how long you've been at a site that has a TA consultant

Capacity Building

2. Could I get a couple of volunteers to share briefly, in your own words, what TA consultation is?
3. Can anyone share a story about a time that you were able to apply a strategy or approach that you had been discussing or working on with your consultant? What difference did it make in your work?
4. In what other ways has your work been affected by your participation in TA consultation? What about the seminars with Dr. Martha Moore or the IFECMH training series—how has your work been affected by your participation in those?
5. Do you think it's helpful to participate in both the IFECMH training series and TA consultation? How does participating in one affect how you are involved in the other?
6. How has the experience of partnering with a consultant or consultants changed over the years? Do you feel like you get more or less out of the experience now than you did when you first worked with a consultant?

ECD System Alignment

7. How do you think the TA program has impacted your center as a whole?
8. How do you think centers can integrate the progress made through the TA program so that it is sustainable even after TA consultation ends?
9. Imagine that the TA program, seminars and IFECMH didn't exist. What would be different about your center? About early childhood education in Monterey County?

Unintended Outcomes/Continuing Needs

10. What obstacles or challenges have you faced when you try to apply or implement what you have learned from your consultant or training?
11. What would help you overcome those obstacles?
12. What other obstacles have you and other professionals in the early childhood field faced when you are supporting children and their families? What has helped you overcome those obstacles? What would you need to better overcome those obstacles?

Protocolo de grupo de enfoque del personal del centro

Introduction

1. Dígnanos sus nombres, organizaciones, y cuánto tiempo han estado en un sitio que tiene un asesor de asistencia técnica (Technical Assistance, TA).

Capacity Building

2. ¿Un par de voluntarios podría compartir brevemente, en sus propias palabras, qué es la consulta de TA? Imaginen que se lo están explicando a otro maestro de la primera infancia, que nunca antes había tenido una consulta en el sitio.
3. ¿Alguien puede hablar sobre una anécdota de un momento en el que pudo aplicar una estrategia o enfoque que había estado conversando o trabajando con su consultor? ¿Qué diferencia marcó en su trabajo?
4. ¿De qué otras formas se ha visto afectado su trabajo por su participación en la consulta de TA? ¿Y qué hay de los seminarios con la Dra. Martha Moore o la serie de capacitación en Salud Mental del Bebé, la Familia y la Primera Infancia (Infant-Family and Early Childhood Mental Health, IFECMH)? ¿Cómo se ha visto afectado su trabajo por su participación en ellos? Posibles sondeos, si es necesario:
5. ¿Cree usted que es útil participar en la serie de seminarios Martha Moore y en la consulta de TA? ¿El participar en uno afecta cómo se involucra en el otro? Si es así, ¿en qué forma afecta?
6. Cómo ha cambiado la experiencia de asociarse con un consultor o consultores a lo largo de los años? ¿Sienten que ahora ganan más o menos de la experiencia que cuando trabajaron por primera vez con un consultor?

ECD System Alignment

7. ¿Cómo creen que el programa de TA ha afectado sus centros en general?
8. ¿Cómo creen que los centros pueden integrar el progreso realizado a través del programa de TA para que sea sostenible, incluso después de que termina la consulta de TA? ¿Qué factores creen que ayudan a un centro a sostener el trabajo a largo plazo?
9. Imagínense que no existiera el programa de TA, ni los seminarios ni IFECMH. ¿Qué sería diferente en sus centros? ¿Cómo sería la educación en la primera infancia en el condado de Monterey?

Unintended Outcomes/Continuing Needs

10. ¿Qué obstáculos o dificultades han enfrentado al intentar aplicar o implementar lo que aprendieron de sus consultores o en sus capacitaciones?

11. ¿Qué les ayudaría a superar esos obstáculos?

¿Qué otros obstáculos han enfrentado ustedes y otros profesionales en el área de la primera infancia al apoyar a los niños y a sus familias? ¿Qué los ha ayudado a superar esos obstáculos? ¿Qué necesitarían para superar mejor esos obstáculos?

TA Consultants Focus Group Protocol

Introduction

1. Please share your name, how long you've been working as a TA consultant in Monterey County, and one sentence that describes what you love about your work.

Capacity Building

2. Can anyone share with us about a time that you saw something that you have been working on at a site or with a teacher really click? What difference do you think that made for the site? What made that change possible?
3. How else do you feel that you have influenced at the centers where you work?
4. Please share how you engage with the center's site supervisor or center director. What role do the site supervisors generally play in your work?
5. What factors influence how effective consultation is at the sites you have worked at?
6. If you have worked with a site over multiple years, how does having that longevity with a site affect your experience delivering TA?
7. How do you help a site integrate the work so that it is sustainable after you stop supporting it directly? What factors do you think help a site sustain the work in the long-term?
8. Have there been any changes as a result of your work with centers that you didn't expect or that surprised you?

ECD System Alignment

9. Have you seen a change in how early childhood professionals in Monterey County interact with each other over the years? In what ways? What has contributed to these changes?
10. To what extent do you feel that educators at the site(s) you work with have a shared understanding of best practices and quality services for families? What are some of the common approaches and practices?
11. What challenges do you believe the early childhood field in Monterey County has faced over the last few years? What, if anything, has helped the field overcome those challenges? What additional support would help?
12. How would you describe First 5's role in supporting families with young children in Monterey? Its role in supporting you as a TA consultant?

Appendix C. Additional Quotes

TA and seminars supported the professionalism of educators

Building confidence and self-efficacy for educators

“It's really unique because it comes in and it's a lot about having the people that are going to participate reflect, self-reflection on what is it they want to work on, what do they want to gain from that Technical Assistance program.”

“just shine on the things that you sometimes don't see through your eyes that somebody else is like, “Hey, you're already doing this but you just don't see it” because I think you're so used to it and it becomes so normal and natural, that she [Dr. Moore] just puts it in these beautiful words and it's so beautiful just for her to shine those things you're just doing that stand out and hear it from somebody that doesn't work with you every day or who works at your side, who comes and goes so it's great to see that ... somebody that really helps you see your growth as you're developing all these new skills and that you're picking up.”

“So that was really nice to hear and reassured us, even in this time of challenges, we're doing okay. So, it was really nice. So mentally, emotionally, it was really nice to have her be there to support us every step of the way.”

“I think a lot of people realize how resilient they are, how much they can offer. It helps people become, builds confidence in them, in what they're doing as teachers.”

Improving communication, building collaboration, and breaking down siloes

“Well, I can say we [are] still doing, not as often as we used to when they were here, but reflections. That's the other thing that she told us. At the end of the day or at least once a week, all of you sit together and reflect. Reflection was the word that she gave me. What is going on, what everybody thinks will work better, where you can improve, all that stuff, reflections. So, I think even if we don't have that consultant, I

think that reflection time is very important. Also, working with a small group. That, to me, is the best because you can see that difference in the classroom. We saw it right away.”

“And I think one of the biggest things was that the First 5 the TA program project gave us that time ...to meet as a team, because before then in our agency we didn't have that at all. We just simply didn't have time set aside where we could have staff meetings....And so, we had that opportunity to actually get together and reflect and resolve problems and talk and get to know each other and just communicate. Because before then it was like if another staff, another teacher did something you didn't like, and it was difficult to bring up or whatever, we had that time to sit down and communicate and talk things out and share our perspectives and things like that. And she ... would facilitate that.”

“We used to each of us live in our own world and just do our thing. But now we're comfortable to just call each other and say, ‘You know what? Let's try this.’”

“That we sometimes will set time for ourselves to collaborate as a team, and that's one big thing that stood out and brought us to collaborate more, which we started doing, I believe weekly.... Really that collaboration, that reflection time”

“When she [consultant] was in the classroom and would be able to drop in, it was really helpful because she'd observe us and then at the end of the day, would, ‘Okay, how do you think this went down? How could you have handled that differently?’ So, it was really trying to break things down to get us to think a little bit differently and maybe different approaches to be able to handle a situation differently.”

“Pre-COVID, the teachers would check in with their Technical Assistance person, and the coaching that they got would be around certain kids. There were two classrooms at the site. They mostly stayed separate, but sometimes they'll be outside together, so the teachers knew the kids from all four of the sessions that were offered there, but

maybe they come and they would be like oh, we noticed so and so's fine motor skills or whatever was going on for that child, and then another teacher will be like, 'No, the other day when we were outside, I did XYZ, and he was able to do this project.' They would meet with the coach after hours, so everybody was not working with kids or anything like that. It was extra time, so they could actually think and process, and pull all their minds together. They would also be, 'Oh, I had a conversation with the mom,' or maybe our coach would say, 'Oh, I talked to the mom just because I happen to be by the door and she just shared this or that with me.' It was really cool to see this puzzle fit together when the teachers were meeting afterwards, and then they would all put these pieces together, and then there was a chance for them to say okay, moving forward, so a coach would be like, 'This is great. We have this information. We have this information. We're putting it out together. What could we do moving forward?' She would help them walk through the steps."

"Provides them the space to kind of share how they feel, learn from others. Learn about strategies about working together, working with the families, the children, but it's a lot about self-reflection."

TA provided safe space for learning

"It's interesting because you start off with a vision and what you believe it's going to start off in. And I think that it morphed into something really beautiful where our teachers were able to express themselves very freely and pretty much be transparent with what was going on, what they were feeling, any negative sentiments, positive sentiment...I mean, it worked out really well where our Technical Assistance coach was able to be that support, where she was not only providing that socio-emotional, but also building positive relationships so that they can have conversations about students, have conversation about instruction or just your classroom environment, what that looked like."

"Now she opened that door, which one it was a new experience for us and which one is wonderful. Because now we have a stronger bonding

and then we are open to whatever questions that... We're not thinking like any questions. 'Oh, no, that's not a smart thing to ask.' No. Now we say, 'It doesn't matter what we ask. Maybe we'll get an answer. Maybe we're not get an answer.' But at least we are out of our comfort zone which one it was hard for us."

Educators changed their practice as a result of TA

Supporting smooth transitions for children and families

"And recently they also did an amazing job, implementing transitions. When they turn 18 months, they go to the toddler room. So, the children, when they have about a month of two, to reach that age, the 18 months, now they go and visit the toddler room. It's not just the change from one day to another. So they go, they take them. They meet the teachers. They stay there for a little bit. Then they come back to their classroom, so I thought that was great."

Rearranging classrooms and using new materials

"Because she said that the presentation of the children work is very, very important, and yeah, I knew it was important, but look, she used to even tell us the way you cut the paper. She got us a cutting machine, paper cutting machine and she said, ;Look here, it has look straight and this and that. That feature, you need to take the pictures this way because the parents are important. The children are important.' All those little things that in the past, like I said, before I met her, I thought, 'Well, it's not that big of a deal.' But it is, and the way you write, you present. Like I told you, she used to say, if anybody comes into the classroom, they need to be able to find out what the children work is about. Story, goals, why you're doing it, what are they going to gain from doing that activity, title, all that stuff."

Focusing activities based on children's interest

"We've learned a lot of many things of how to just based on children's interests and how to really expand from not just doing the general stuff, and really going out there and looking for more that we could

really work with the children in terms, I know there was gardening...and she [consultant] helped us learn how to compost, and worms are now, that's something we like to do, like, 'Oh, yeah, we got to get the worms,' and ...will dig the hole and show the children, 'We're going to use these scraps for this and that. And then we'll plant something.' They connected outside learning, so would show a picture of a plant and then go outside and look at it"

"And how the children could just spend hours and even during COVID right now, it was a simple garden but the children really enjoyed just the little insects, the planting, the composting we did with the pumpkins after we were done with our Halloween pumpkins, we dug a hole and you buried them and now we have pumpkins growing, so it's like, 'Wow.' It's just little things that are there and just really expanding on them. That's how I saw it."

While the ECE system is more aligned, the larger ECD field still faces challenges

Sustaining best practices amidst low wages and high turnover

"Unfortunately, as we moved on a lot of the staff that was there to learn left, so there was really two of us who are still there now who learned from CONSULTANT NAME. And so, we try to keep as much going on but times change and then sometimes it doesn't make sense to new staff. Why are you doing this? So that's something that we've tried to keep going."