



ROUNDTABLE *reflections*

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What We Wanted to Know

What do we know about quality teaching? What does research tell us about what it looks like and how to get there? How are states approaching improved quality through policy? What challenges do teachers--and states--face?

Through the theme of “[Excellence for Every Child: Improving the Quality of Teaching Birth through Grade Three](#),” the 2014 Roundtable aimed to address these questions through interactions among content experts and 132 participants (representing 48 states and territories) in attendance.

This document is intended to provide broad highlights from the meeting session, as well as resources identified by those who participated in the 2014 Roundtable. This is not detailed meeting notes. For more information, direct links to Padlet pages are available in the “PADLET” box (p 2). Reading materials, resources, and presentations are available on the [CEELO Roundtable page](#).

What We Learned

The comments participants posted on our Padlet pages provided a wealth of information on how to cultivate and support quality teaching. The following pages present high-level summaries of two breakout sessions and overall thoughts from each day of the Roundtable. In reviewing the posts from attendees, we also learned there are a lot of fantastic resources available, which are listed in the final section of this resource.

What is the Roundtable?

The Roundtable is designed to build capacity of state agency leaders and early childhood specialists to provide informed leadership about research-based practices that directly impact the development and learning of children, from birth through grade three. The annual meeting provides early childhood state agency leaders and specialists with cutting edge research and innovative proven practices to enhance state policies and programs.

CEELO and the National Association of [Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education](#) (NAECS-SDE) hosted the 2014 Roundtable in collaboration with the [Early Childhood Education Assessment \(ECEA\) SCASS](#) and [Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Technical Assistance](#) (ELC TA).

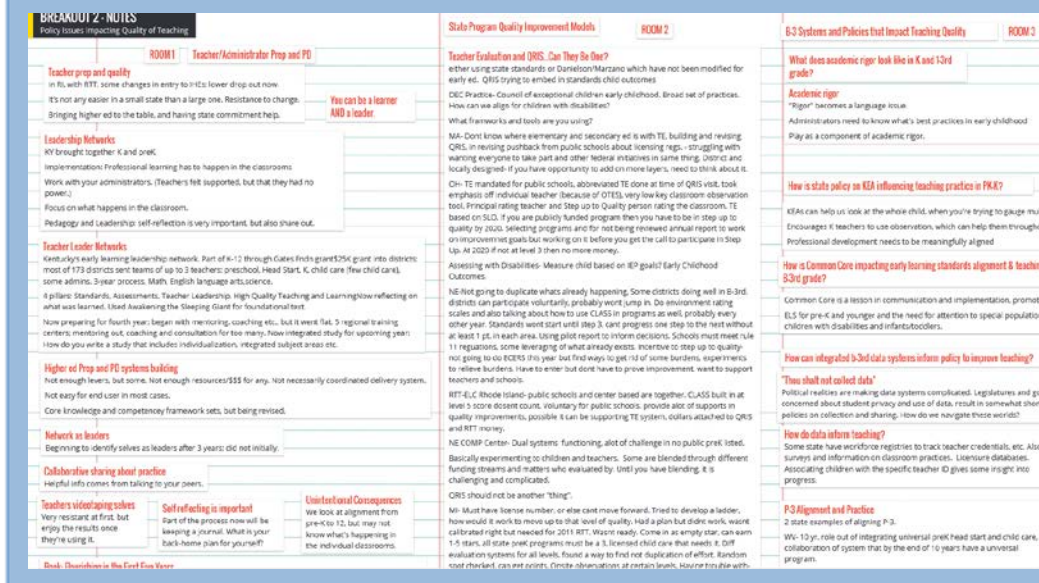
PADLET

In an effort to promote interaction and shared learning during the meeting, CEELO set up Padlet pages for participants to post thoughts, resources, and even photos from the event. [Padlet](#) is a free application that promotes collaboration and sharing. Users create walls that they use to share content with others. Walls can be public, private (log-in required), password-protected, or hidden. Users can simply click on the wall and type comments or upload files. Posts can be combined in a pdf document to view, or exported in Excel and other formats.

Roundtable Padlet pages include:

- [Welcome Page](#)—Participants posted brief introductions with photos before the event
- [Beyond the Rhetoric of Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning](#) (Breakout)
- [Thursday Thoughts](#)—Participants posted reflections on the first day of the Roundtable
- [Policy Issues Impacting Quality of Teaching](#) (Breakout)
- [Regional Discussion—Sharing and Planning for Ongoing Learning](#) (Breakout)
- [Friday Thoughts](#)—Reflections on the second day of the Roundtable

Example – What a padlet page looks like:



Overview of Thursday

Content experts and leaders shared their insights on how to improve the quality of teaching through presentations, panels, and breakout sessions.

- Keynote speaker Donna Wilson kicked off the Roundtable with her presentation [Improving Teaching by Applying the Science of Learning](#).
- Mary Louise Hemmeter’s presentation [Science, Math, Literacy, and Social-Emotional Development in Early Childhood – Can We Do It All?](#) prompted deep discussion and reflection.

- Juanita Copley invigorated participants' enthusiasm for mathematics through her presentation [*Early Mathematics. Content, Curriculum, and Pedagogy: Creating Coherence and Excellence.*](#)
- Gail Jordan demonstrated how to support early literacy through policy and in classrooms in her presentation on [*Language and Literacy.*](#)
- Libby Doggett, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Early Learning ([Office of Early Learning, U.S. Department of Education](#)) discussed early childhood at the federal level and engaged in conversation with participants.
- Minnesota state leaders Brenda Casselius (Commissioner, [Minnesota Department of Education](#)) and Melvin Carter III (Director, [Minnesota Office of Early Learning](#)) shared their experience on what it takes to lead multiple policy reforms to improve teaching.
- Breakout sessions encouraged and facilitated idea and resource sharing among participants.

The Padlet comments from Thursday's presentations and breakouts, related to teachers' mathematic foundations, teaching, and curriculum, cover a number of key themes.

Teachers' Mathematic Foundations

- Participants agreed that a strong understanding of math is essential for teachers. They noted that a recent focus on encouraging students to find answers quickly for tests does not promote the best understanding of math.

Environments that are Conducive to Learning for Understanding

- In math, and other subjects, students must have the opportunity to explore, fail, and try again, to best develop a deep understanding of the subject.
- The same applies to teachers, noted respondents. They should have the opportunity to delve deeply into subjects, and try different options if one teaching method/lesson plan is unsuccessful.
- Speakers also noted that is important to attribute student success to functions students can control and change: effort and persistence, for example.

Collaborate and Integrate

- Collaboration is essential within teaching; some respondents noted that including parents is especially critical for the youngest children.
- Integrated curriculum was also strongly promoted, both for engaging students and parents, and for deepening understanding of all subject matter. A focus on higher-level thinking, exploration, and reflection are essential.

Beyond the Rhetoric of Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning

During this [breakout](#), three domains were discussed in detail in separate rooms: literacy, mathematics, and social-emotional. While literacy is more prominent in the public view compared to mathematics and social-emotional development, there were many common themes that arose across the three domains: the use of technology; breaking down myths and bad practices rooted in good intent; providing professional development that affects practice; and opportunities for those entering the profession to share newer research on practices with other staff (in a community of learning).

Literacy

- Intentionality—the key to improving outcomes through teacher training and professional development is intentionality.
- Policy—there are a lot of voices discussing and promoting improved literacy outcomes nationally (e.g., [National Governors Association](#), [Annie E Casey](#)) as well as within states; however, there are different issues in teaching language from birth-pre-K and K-12. Policy needs to stress the importance of literacy development in pre-K years and recognize that it can be developmentally appropriate while also standards- and evidence-based
- Assessment data—concern that teachers are using assessment data for compliance, rather than to inform instruction; concern over appropriate use of data
- Technology—we can harness technology for improved instruction and learning in classrooms (personalize learning); for creating links between the classroom and home (e.g., tablets children can take home and use with family); and for awareness (outside the classroom). Professional development needs to be practical and focus on how to apply tech in the classroom. Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) need to be involved as well, so teachers are learning skills they can bring with them into classrooms when they begin teaching

Thinking about the *how*

It's not about the technology itself, it's about how it's used. Not all technology is good (e.g., some of the material coming out that "aligns" with Common Core State Standards (CCSS)), but some is great. Teachers and administrators need support to build their capacity to make the distinction for specific purposes and contexts.

Mathematics

- Children naturally love math: they are able to think, solve problems, and engage, but—even better—they get excited about it and enjoy it. When we give them experiences with meaningful problems that relate to their real life, they can go so much further in math.
- Common Core State Standards—how are we getting young children to be ready for the math they'll be doing when they enter Kindergarten? It requires going beyond counting—need for measurement skills and geometry experience.

- Building awareness—we need to get around misunderstandings about what children can (or can't) do in mathematics. Awareness needs to be built in the public as well, with parents, and with administrators and teachers.
- Teachers' beliefs—they can change, but they aren't going to change until they "see it through what happens for kids." Younger teachers may be more comfortable with technology and can provide guidance and support to teachers who have been in the classroom longer.
- Supports—this includes leadership, professional development, peer learning communities. No matter which way, it has to be an "environment where they can try." (With no penalty for failure)
- Technology— it offers promise, with caution. It can support two-generation learning with families and children outside the classroom, as well as within (e.g., teachers using video for reflective supervision). There is gaming potential with technology, but only if it's appropriate.

Myth-Busting!

Presenter Juanita Copley gave this example: A teacher may say that according to Piaget, children don't understand inverse relationships until age seven. However we can start introducing the concepts before then. For example, four- and five-year-olds can "get" that a person with larger feet will take fewer steps to get across a room than someone with smaller feet.

Social Emotional

- Foundation—Mary Louise Hemmeter noted that "social/emotional should not be seen as something separate [from] academics, but the foundation of everything else."
- Teacher expertise—in order to integrate social-emotional well, teachers have to understand child development and have special skill sets in age areas.
- Push-back—states are beginning to look at social-emotional standards in the K-3 space however there is pushback from teachers and parents who are concerned about privacy around social-emotional information being collected and shared about individual students. Details on efforts in eight states are available on this sessions' [Padlet page](#).
- Myths—there is concern that some practices in early childhood classrooms are not good for social-emotional development (even though intention is good), such as a rewards system. Participants saw this as a professional development moment, in which we can discuss with teachers WHY it's not a good practice, though they may have been taught it's a good one.
- Identified needs—guidance from researchers on fidelity (how are we measuring what we're using and whether it works), funding, and tools to help teachers self-assess competencies in social-emotional (and reflect on practice).

Policy Issues Affecting Quality of Education

This breakout session was divided into three sections and participants self-selected which strand they attended.

Teacher/Administrator Preparation and Professional Development

- Participants noted that both teacher-leader networks and partnerships with Institutes of Higher Education were important to professional development. This can include mentoring and coaching but also may involve just understanding the challenges faced by others and how they have worked through them.

State Program Quality Improvement Models

- Teacher evaluation and QRIS should not necessarily be separate systems; potential to be a unified system focused on improving quality classroom quality. Reduced burden on classrooms.

B-3 Systems and Policies that Affect Teaching Quality

- Communication matters whenever something new is launched—conversations about academic rigor, B-3 data systems, and Kindergarten Entry Assessment (KEA) all need clear language.
- Move slowly. Start working on sharing within your department, then across your department.
- Outline clearly how these data are to be used: to answer questions? where? to coach teachers? Teachers and parents may be concerned about giving data, especially if they don't know why or how it will be used. What's the benefit to THEM?
- Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and other official methods for making data-sharing relationship clear.
- Bring stakeholders in as early as possible to be part of these conversations.

Voices from the Field: Challenges and Successes of Policy Implementation

A panel of early childhood teachers and administrators in Minnesota offered reflections on their experiences in the field.

We asked, “**What does a great teacher look like?**” They said: a great teacher needs to understand a child’s need; be engaging; participate in continuous teacher learning; practice intentionality and work towards a goal; build connections.

Panelists stressed avoiding cognitive overload of teachers (e.g. giving more requirements on top of old ones) and suggested administrators work with teachers on what they can let go of in order to let the new in.

[Twitter](#) responses noted a need for change in the field, including professionalizing early childhood and closing the pay gap between early and elementary education to retain top teachers. Teachers need to feel respected and valued, which includes supportive PD and opportunities for teachers to meet and learn from each other.

Padlet reactions

- *Voices from the field give data meaning.*
- *Engage practitioners in conversation as you make policy decisions.*

Friday Thoughts

The second day of the Roundtable centered on a series of panels, including:

- Teachers and leaders (birth to third grade) in Minnesota provided insight into how policy affects teacher and students in classrooms and what policymakers could do to cultivate and support great teachers (see Voice from the Field above).
- Representatives from four RTT-ELC States discussed what they've learned about state leadership to improve teaching quality.
- Steve Barnett (CEELO Principal Investigator) shared [research findings](#) with policy implications to improve teaching.
- Early childhood leaders envisioned what an early childhood profession would look like and how to get there.

There were three major takeaways from participants' reflections on Friday's presentations.

Importance of Professional Development (PD)

- This includes ensuring programs are not only getting the support they need to succeed (through the PD), but are also high quality.
- "Peer Learning Communities ([PLCs](#)) and in-classroom coaching are critical for growth of professionals and students."

Focus on Individual Needs

- By focusing more on the individual needs (of the teacher, of the child, etc.) and working together with other professionals, we can develop successful programs that are high quality.

The Ah-has and Uh-Oh's in Systems-Building

- Success involves a relentless focus on evaluation, scale to get to the outcomes, making progress on individual initiatives, but we have to focus on how families and children experience the system, and what makes access to quality easiest for parents and families
- We must also be aware of the risk of focusing on the process and forgetting the outcomes and raising artificial barriers as we unpack the system.

Resources

Respondents suggested a number of resources to support improved teaching. These include:

[CEELO Roundtable page](#)

[Building Capacity Through an Early Education Leadership Academy.](#) This CEELO report presents findings from four data-collection efforts conducted to inform the design, content, and implementation of the Early Education Leadership Academy (EELA). It includes a targeted review of the literature on leadership/leadership development to provide the underpinning evidence for the design and leadership content of an EELA, and an examination of the changing contexts of SEA/ELA administrators to provide insight into the knowledge and skills SEA/ELA administrators need to exercise leadership. The report concludes with a series of action suggestions based on the findings from this multi-dimensional view of the leadership development needs of SEA/ELA early learning administrators.

[Council for a Strong America.](#) When participants discussed challenges in getting disparate groups interested in early education, the Council for a Strong America was named as an organization that can help bring together military, police, business, religious, and athletic groups.

[Creating Coherence: Connecting Teacher Evaluation and Support Systems to the Common Core.](#) This professional learning module provides a set of "grab, customize, and go" materials. State and regional technical assistance providers can use them to facilitate work sessions that lead district teams through a collaborative, coherence-building process to align Common Core State Standards, teacher evaluation systems, and professional learning systems.

[Flourishing in the First Five Years: Connecting Implications from Mind, Brain, and Education Research to the Development of Young Children.](#) Keynote speaker Donna Wilson co-authored this book, which provides research background as well as strategies for practice. (Note: not a free resource.)

[Leadership and Teams: The Missing Piece of the Educational Reform Puzzle.](#) This book by Lyle Kirtman identifies seven key competencies for education leaders. (Note: not a free resource.)

Mathematics

[Mathematics Learning in Early Childhood: Paths toward Excellence and Equity.](#) Juanita Copley suggested this book, which "lays out the critical areas that should be the focus of young children's early mathematics education, explores the extent to which they are currently being incorporated in early childhood settings, and identifies the changes needed to improve the quality of mathematics experiences for young children."¹ (Note: not a free resource.)

Social Emotional

[Self-Assessing Social and Emotional Instruction and Competencies: A Tool for Teachers.](#) This resource helps teachers reflect and assess on 10 teaching practices supporting SEL for students.

[Social and Emotional Learning in the Daily Life of Classrooms.](#) This resource can be used by regional technical assistance providers, and state and district leaders can use this module, to deepen their

¹ Author description, taken from http://www.nap.edu/catalog.php?record_id=12519

knowledge and skills for integrating a social and emotional learning emphasis into their policy and planning work. It can also help strengthen connections between social and emotional learning, the Common Core State Standards, and teacher evaluation and professional development systems. Readers can also learn strategies for supporting school leaders in guiding teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices and social and emotional competencies.

[Teaching the Whole Child: Instructional Practices That Support Social-Emotional Learning in Three Teacher Evaluation Frameworks](#). This brief from the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders contains a crosswalk of 10 Social Emotional Learning (SEL) teaching practices and three common teaching frameworks (CLASS, Danielson, and Marzano) that shows exactly how SEL practices map to standards and indicators in these frameworks.

Literacy

[A Governor’s Guide to Early Literacy: Getting all Students Ready by Third Grade](#). This report from the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices examines research and policy and provides five policy actions that governors can take to support students reading at grade level by the end of third grade.

[Grade-Level Reading Resources](#). The Annie E. Casey offer a number of resources, such as reports, blog posts, and briefs around grade-level reading.

[The Linguistic Genius of Babies](#). This video is from Patricia Kuhl’s TEDxRainier talk on findings about how babies learn one language over another.

[Third Grade Reading Policies](#). This policy report provides an overview of third-grade reading policies across the states.

Technology

[Envisioning a Digital Architecture for Early Education](#). This policy brief by Lisa Guernsey identifies five essential system-level actions to support a digital architecture for early education: aim high, boost the workforce, tap hidden assets, connect to information and each other, and investigate. Each action area has a number of questions to trigger dialogue.

[Fred Rogers Center](#). The center’s website provides numerous resources around early learning and children’s media.

[Joan Ganz Cooney Center](#). The center’s website offers numerous resources, including publications, initiatives, a blog, and other features that focus on educating children in a digital age.

[Too Small to Fail](#). This initiative is a partnership between Next Generation and the Bill, Hillary & Chelsea Clinton Foundation. Its website provides a blog, video, and information for parents and caregivers. Resources can be searched by age.

ABOUT CEELO:

One of 22 Comprehensive Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Center on Enhancing Early Learning Outcomes (CEELO) will strengthen the capacity of State Education Agencies (SEAs) to lead sustained improvements in early learning opportunities and outcomes. CEELO will work in partnership with SEAs, state and local early childhood leaders, and other federal and national technical assistance (TA) providers to promote innovation and accountability.

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