



Indigenizing Early Care and Education

Centering Community in Research, Systems, and Practice

Tandeca King, Ed.D.

Assistant Professor

Community Health and Preventive Medicine

Morehouse School of Medicine

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The Center: National African American Child & Family Research Center

Mission: To provide national leadership and excellence in community-engaged research to better serve African American children and families.

Three Priorities Areas:

Early Care & Education (Head Start/Early Head Start & Child Care Assistance)

Poverty Alleviation/Economic Mobility

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Funding Agency: Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department Of Health and Human Services

Project Period: 2021-2026

Total Award Amount: \$9,000,000

Objectives

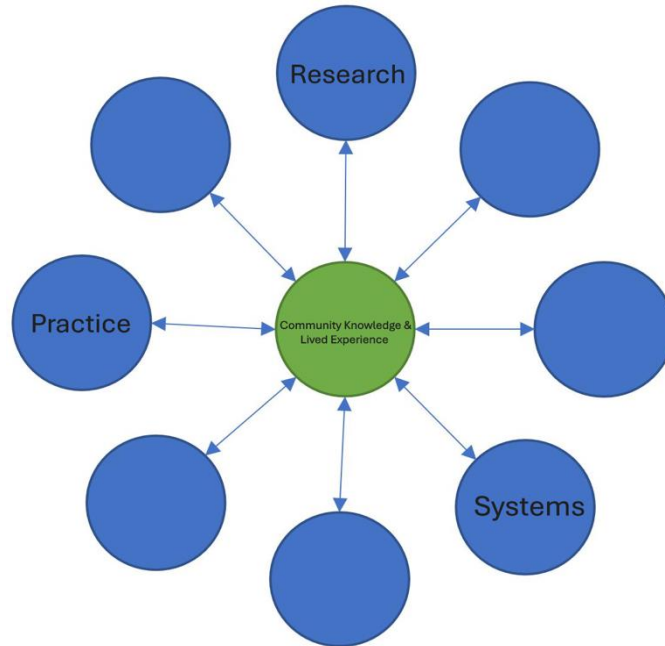
- Share lessons from community-engaged research
- Describe research approach and agenda development
- Highlight strategies for optimizing impact and ensuring sustainability





Our Approach

Indigenizing early care and education centers community knowledge and multi-generational lived experiences to design more effective, equitable systems and research.



Why Indigenizing Early Childhood Education Matters

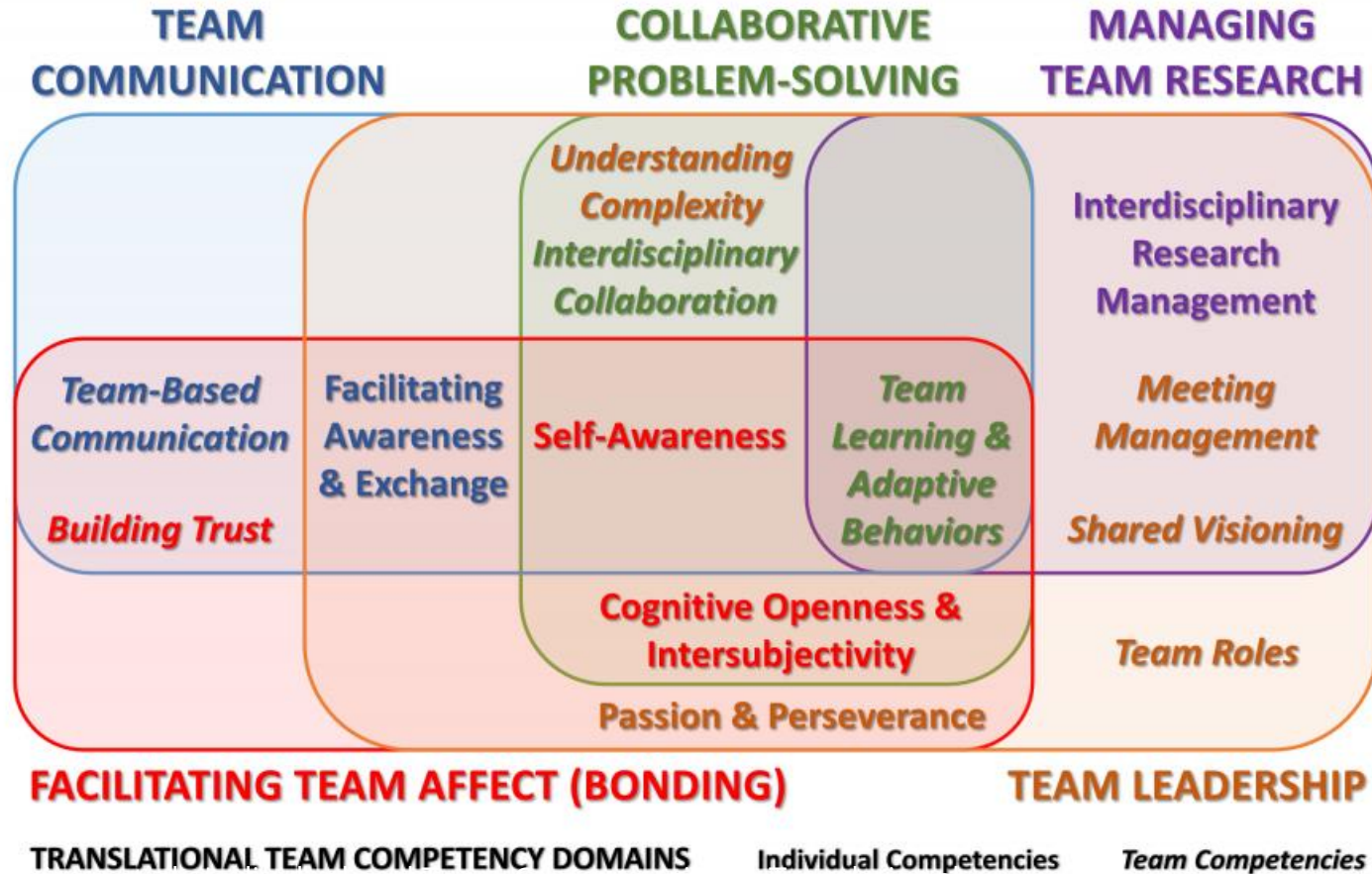
- Moving beyond standardized, top-down approaches
- Disconnect between formal systems and local communities
- Need to center culture, identity, and lived experience
- Shifting power from systems to communities
- Persistent inequities in access, quality, and outcomes

Key Domains of Inquiry

- Early Care & Education Access and Quality
- Economic Mobility & Family Stability
- Health & Well-being
- Community Context & Cultural Identity

Assess:

- Community-defined **needs, assets, and experiences**
- Barriers and facilitators to **service access and use**
- Strategies that promote **social and economic well-being**
- Culturally grounded approaches to **service delivery**



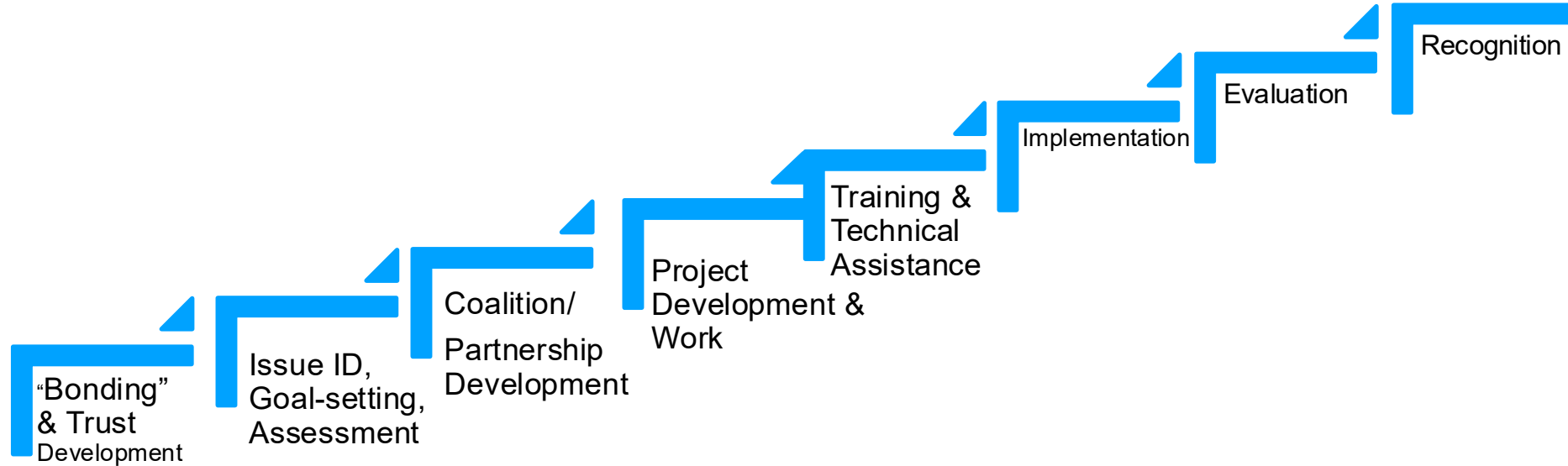
LoGrecciano et al., Individual and Team Competencies in Translational Teams; Journal of Clinical Translational Science, 2020.



Research Approach



Model for Community Engagement



Braithwaite, R. L., Akintobi, T. H., Blumenthal, D. S., & Langley, W. M. (2020). *The Morehouse Model: How One School of Medicine Revolutionized Community Engagement and Health Equity*. JHU Press..





What is CBPR?

Community-based participatory research (CBPR) is a collaborative research approach that is designed to ensure and establish structures for participation by communities affected by the issue being studied, representatives of organizations, and researchers in all aspects of the research process to improve health and well-being through taking action, including social change.

Blumenthal, D., Hopkins, E., & Yancey, E. 2013. Community-Based Participatory Research: An Introduction. Pp. 1-17. In Blumenthal, D., DiClemente, R., Braithwaite, R., & Smith, S. Community-Based Participatory Health Research: issues, Methods, and Translation to Practice.





Why CBPR?

- New views
- Resources
- Increased capacity for both researcher and community partners
- Visibility and voice for community
- Results more easily translatable into practice

Breland-Noble, A., Streets, F. J., & Jordan, A. (2024). Community-based participatory research with Black people and Black scientists: the power and the promise. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 11(1), 75-80.



Reframing Power in Research

Challenges

Shifts Required

Community Mistrust

Shared power

Research control

Transparency

**Exclusion from
decision-making**

**Community-
informed structures**





Research Agenda Development

- Guided by **community priorities, cultural context, and lived experiences**
- **Community Assessment**
 - Understanding needs and strengths **through a cultural lens**
 - Recognizing **existing community assets and practices**

Community Assessment

Secondary Data Collection

- National Surveys
- ACF Administrative Program Data
- State Administrative Program Data

Primary Data Collection

- Community Survey
- Community Listening Sessions
- Community Conversations

Community Survey

Caregivers in AL, GA, MS, LA, DC, MD, NS, SC, VA

Questions:

- In the past year, have you or your family experienced any of the following challenges...
- How can the current programs (i.e., TANF/welfare, Head Start, Childcare assistance) improve to help you and your family?



Are you a Black/African American parent/caregiver?

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The National African American Child and Family Research Center at Morehouse School of Medicine invites you to participate in a survey. The survey seeks to understand the economic, educational, and health needs and resources of African American families with children. Participants must be African American parents/caregivers aged 18 years or older, residing in one of the selected states (Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Washington, DC), and participating or likely eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Head Start/Early Head Start, or childcare assistance programs. This information will be used to inform programs and policies that impact African American families' well-being.

TOPICS INCLUDE:
Early Childhood Education and Childcare
Health and Access to Quality Care
Economic Benefits and Assistance
Community-Level Resources

COMPENSATION PROVIDED FOR YOUR TIME
This project is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award (grant # 5P19CE002311-01-00). This project does not reflect the views of HHS/ACF.



PARTICIPATE IN A SURVEY:
[HTTPS://TINYURL.COM/NAACFRCsurvey2](https://tinyurl.com/NAACFRCsurvey2)



Community Listening Sessions

Topics:

- Community-Level Resources
- Geographic Location/Residential Factors
- Economic Mobility
- Health and Family Wellness
- Education and School Readiness
- Engagement and Community Perceptions



Community Conversations

Discussion Questions

- What surprises you about the information? Anything?
- What is the good news? What is the bad news?
- What information is missing or needed?
- How should this information be shared?
- What issues should be prioritized?



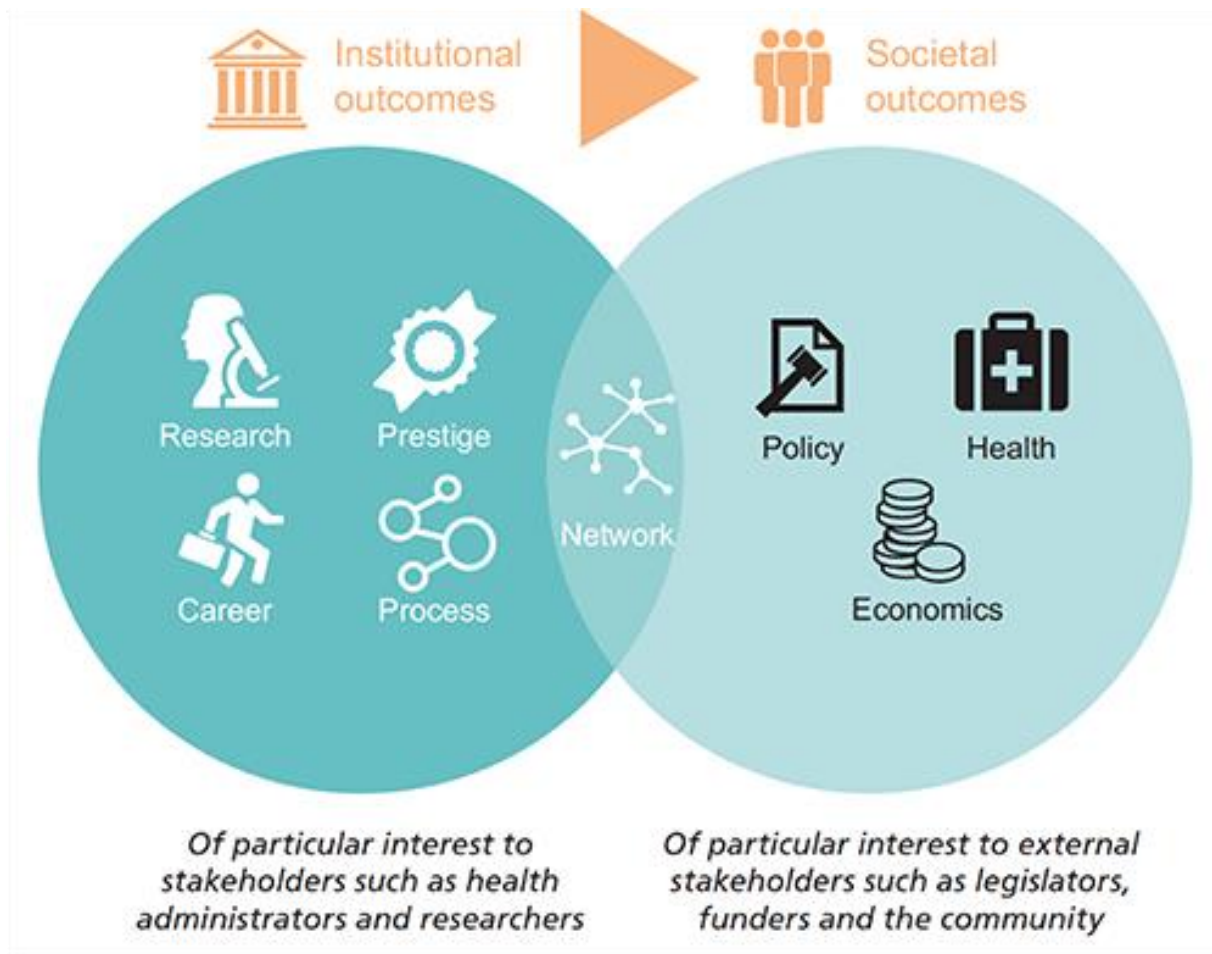
Community Research Priorities

- Awareness
- Enrollment
- Eligibility
- Maintaining Assistance (i.e., Retention)
- Quality
- Access
- More Benefits (e.g., Money)
- Better Employment Opportunities
- Service (e.g., communication w/programs & staff, friendliness)
- Other drivers of well-being (health, housing, food, safety, etc.)

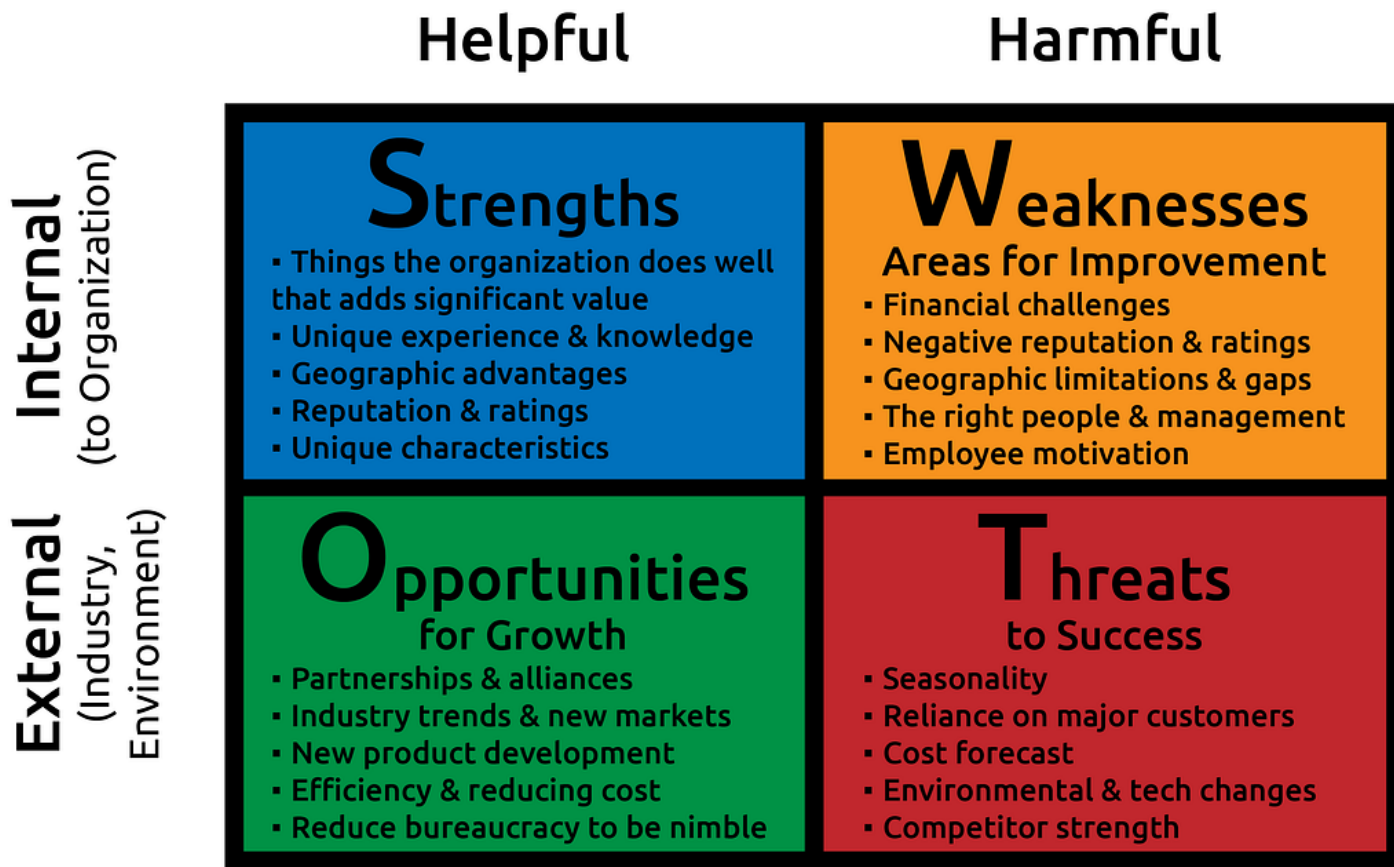


Measuring Impact

Center Metrics



100 metrics to assess and communicate the value of research.
<https://www.rand.org/pubs/periodicals/health-quarterly/issues/v6/n4/14.html>



What Does Success Look Like?

- Community-defined outcomes
- System-level changes
- Improved access, experience, and trust

Outcomes



Enrollment and retention



Improved service experience



Greater community trust



Policy or program changes



Sustainability



SOAR Model Analysis (Appreciative Inquiry)

S

Strengths: *What can we build on?*

- What are we most proud of as an organization?
- What makes us unique?
- What is our proudest achievement in the last year or two?
- How do we use our strengths to get results?
- How do our strengths fit with the realities of the marketplace?
- What do we do or provide that is world class for our customers, our industry, and other potential stakeholders?

O

Aspirations: *What do we care deeply about?*

- *When we explore our values and aspirations, "what are we deeply passionate about?"*
- *Reflecting on our Strengths and Opportunities conversations, who are we, who should we become, and where should we go in the future?*
- *What is our most compelling aspiration?*
- *What strategic initiatives (projects, programs and processes) would support our aspirations?*

A

Opportunities: *What are our stakeholders asking for?*

- How do we make sense of opportunities provided by the external forces and trends?
- What are the top three opportunities on which we should focus our efforts?
- How can we best meet the needs of our stakeholders?
- Who are possible new customers?
- How can we distinctively differentiate ourselves from existing or potential competitors?
- What are possible new markets, products, services or processes?
- How can we reframe challenges to be seen as exciting opportunities?
- What new skills do we need to move forward?

R

Results: *How do we know we are succeeding?*

- Considering our Strengths, Opportunities, and Aspirations, what meaningful measures would indicate that we are on track to achieving our goals?
- What are 3 to 5 indicators that would create a scorecard that addresses a triple bottom line of profit, people, and planet?
- What resources are needed to implement vital projects?
- What are the best rewards to support those who achieve our goals?



What Does Indigenizing Early Care and Education Mean?

- Indigenizing = centering community knowledge
- Culture is foundational, not supplemental
- Designing programs with and from the community
- Sustainable change requires shared power



Translating Insights into Action

- Community-informed research agenda
- Aligning systems with lived experience
- Supporting culturally grounded solutions



Sustaining the Work

- Long-term community partnerships
- Integration into institutional practices
- Ongoing funding and policy alignment
- Capacity building within communities



Key Takeaways

- Community is not just a stakeholder—it is the **foundation**
- Culture is not an addition—it is the **framework**
- Practice is not imposed—it is **co-created**

