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early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

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Inaugural issue

Celebrating 30 Years

From the Director's Office: The Goals, Then and Now

Research Spotlight

NCEDL News: Looking to the Future

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From the director's office

The goals, then and now

Research at

Frank Porter Graham

IN THE 1960S the United States was faced with a number of pressing social and economic challenges. The civil rights movement was in full swing, heralding an era of gradual but fundamental changes in the treatment of all of America's citizens. An alarming rate of intergenerational poverty existed, disproportionately affecting children from African American families. Women were entering the work force at earlier ages and at rates never seen before in the history of our country. And persons with disabilities, many of whom had been relegated to lifelong confinement in large residential institutions, were beginning to return to their families and their communities. These forces and research gave rise to:

- the belief that by providing high quality child care during the earliest years, school failure could be prevented and the cycle of poverty could be broken;
- concern that the return of mothers to the work force during the early childhood years could damage children's social development and social relations; and
- the belief that early intervention for children with disabilities could help them be successful in their families, schools, and communities.

It was in this context that the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center was born in 1966. In the ensuing 30 years, center investigators have produced a library of articles, chapters, books, monographs, tests, and curriculum materials. Collectively these efforts have demonstrated the importance of the early childhood years, shown that quality of care is the essential ingredient in ensuring successful outcomes for children and families, demonstrated the meaning of quality, documented the importance of family support, shown the important roles played by state and national policies, and provided many practical aides to practitioners, administrators, and faculty in early childhood.

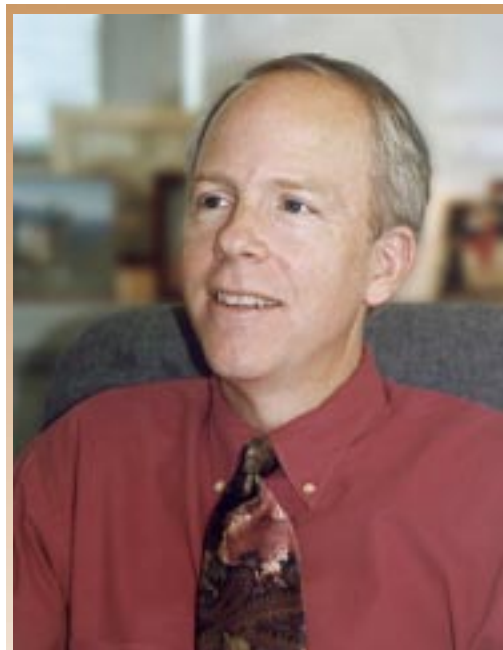
Have we now solved all of the major issues related to young children? Unfortunately the answer is no. We still see high rates of poverty, with nearly 25% of children under the age of six living below the poverty level. The majority of mothers of children under the

age of six now work, including mothers of infants and toddlers, and there is a pressing need for high quality options for child care. Unfortunately, study after study has documented that typical child care in the U.S. today is poor to mediocre, especially group care for infants and toddlers. Recent welfare reform legislation means that many poor mothers of young children will need to enter the work force without the resources for adequate child care. Managed care and changes in Social Security and other support systems will likely result in a reduction in preventive and therapeutic health care services. With the shift from federal to state responsibility for control of resources and decisions, states will have to establish standards and

policies that balance the needs of children with the financial constraints of programs and families. And despite a national goal that all children will enter school ready to learn, many children arrive at kindergarten unprepared for the social and academic expectations of school.

In this issue of *Early Developments*, we focus on FPG's latest initiative, the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL). Funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U.S. Department of Education, NCEDL's mission is to provide national leadership for research in early childhood. Our research covers a diverse array of complex issues facing children, families, and schools today: enhancing the quality of child care, easing the transition from preschool to kindergarten, preventing problems in children at high-risk for health, behavioral or educational problems, identifying important policies for state and federal governments, and translating research into practice.

In each area, rather than conducting a single, isolated study, which may not tell us the whole truth, we are engaged in multiple, coordinated activities. Take, for example, the need to improve quality in child care. We knew in 1972 that if you provided high quality care for



children at risk you could make a difference in their lives. Amazingly, here we are 25 years later still trying to make the same point. Many factors contribute to poor quality: lack of training, staff turnover, lack of administrative leadership, inadequate financial resources, weak state standards, uncoordinated systems of care, and the list continues. To improve quality we need to understand how all of these factors interact to prevent quality from happening. Thus the center will involve a critical mass of people who have a long history of seeing the big picture and who can work together to figure out what to do.

To function as a child development center, an organization must conduct both basic and applied research. It must draw on multiple disciplines to examine the various facets of a problem. It must examine policies and training practices. Its work must be longitudinal in nature,

with the goal of understanding change over time and the forces that promote or impede change. Most importantly, a child development center must ground its work in the everyday worlds of children, families, and the adults who provide, administer, or set policies for programs that serve children and families.

We hope that *Early Developments* will be an effective means of sharing the research and development activities at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center. We also hope that it will serve as a forum for highlighting major issues facing children and families today. Most issues will be thematic, summarizing an array of activities around a particular theme. I will use "From the Director's Office" as a way to summarize issues about the theme and to provide editorial comments on both the research and the state of the field today. Comments and reactions from the readership are encouraged.

—Don Bailey

Bailey is Director of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center and holds academic appointments in both the School of Education and the School of Medicine at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Research spotlight

Recent findings at FPG Quality of Center Child Care and Infant Cognitive and Language Development

Margaret R. Burchinal, Joanne E. Roberts, Laura A. Nabors, & Donna M. Bryant. (1996). *Child Development*, 67, 606–620.

This study rated the quality of center-based child care received by 79 African American 12-month-old infants, and tested the relationship between quality and infants' cognitive and language development. Previous studies have addressed this issue with older preschoolers, but research on very young children has been limited.

Highlights

- ★ The quality of infant care positively correlated with scores on standardized assessments of cognitive development, language development and communication skills.
- ★ Although a positive association was found between quality of child care and quality of the home environment, each independently related to infant cognitive development.
- ★ Quality of care in child care centers and at home was positively related. Analyses suggested that the process measure of child care independently related to an infant's cognitive development, and one structural measure, the infant-adult ratio, independently related to the infant's overall communication skill.

This study provides the first systematic evidence of the role of quality and its effects on children as young as 12 months of age. These findings, in conjunction with the growing child care literature, suggest that researchers and policy makers should focus on how quality of child care can be improved to enhance, not impair infant development. This concern is especially relevant because many of the infants in this study attending poor quality care were receiving subsidized care paid for by federal and state moneys, providing a very dubious investment of tax dollars.

Recent publications

by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

-  **Assessing the Comfort Zone of Child Care Teachers in Serving Young Children with Disabilities.**
V. Buysse, P. Wesley, L. Keyes, & D. Bailey. (1997). *Journal of Early Intervention*, 20, 180–203.
-  **Families as Systems.**
M.J. Cox, & B. Paley. (1997). *The Annual Review of Psychology*, 48, 243–267.
-  **The 21st Century for Young Children with Disabilities and Their Families.**
J. Gallagher. (1997). Chapter in E. Erwin, (Ed.). *Putting children first: Visions for a brighter future for young children and their families.* (pp. 261–264). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
-  **Educating Exceptional Children. (8TH ed.)**
S.A. Kirk, J. Gallagher, & N. Anastaslow. (1997). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
-  **Otitis Media in Young Children—Medical, Developmental and Educational Considerations.**
J.E. Roberts, F.W. Henderson, & I.F. Wallace. (Eds.). (1997). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
-  **Evaluating the Effectiveness of Curriculum Alternatives for Infants and Preschoolers at High Risk.**
D. Bailey. (1996). Chapter in M.J. Guralnick., (ed.). *The effectiveness of early intervention.* (pp. 227–248). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
Also in this book...
The Effectiveness of Early Intervention for Disadvantaged Children.
D. Bryant, & K. Maxwell. (23–46).
-  **Quality of Center Child Care and Infant Cognitive and Language Development.**
M.R. Burchinal, J.E. Roberts, L.A. Nabors, & D.M. Bryant. (1996). *Child Development*, 67, 606–620.
-  **Associations between Marital Distress and Work Loss in a National Sample.**
M.J. Cox, M.S. Forthofer, H.J. Markman, S. Stanley, & R.C. Kessler. (1996). *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 58, 597–605.
-  **Characteristics of Infant Child Care: Factors Contributing to Positive Caregiving.**
M.J. Cox, corporate author. NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. (1996). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 11, 269–306.
-  **Policy Development and Implementation for Children with Disabilities.**
J. Gallagher. (1996). Chapter in E. Zigler, & L. Kagan (Eds.), *Children, families, and government.* (pp. 177–187). New York: Cambridge University Press.
-  **Practical Strategies for Family-Centered Early Intervention.**
P.J. McWilliam, P.J. Winton, & E.R. Crais. (1996). San Diego: Singular Publishing Group, Inc.
-  **Therapy Services in Early Intervention: Current Status, Barriers, and Recommendations.**
R.A. McWilliam, H.J. Young, & K. Harville. (1996). *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 16(3), 348–374.
-  **Supporting Early Childhood Inclusion: Lessons Learned Through a Statewide Technical Assistance Project.**
P. Wesley, & V. Buysse. (1996). *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 16, 476–499.