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early developments

Cost, Quality and Outcomes of Preschool Inclusion

For two decades FPG has been conducting research on inclusion. One of our newest research projects on inclusion at FPG, funded by the US Department of Education, is examining widely used ways to implement preschool inclusion: community-based itinerant services, Head Start centers and public school classrooms.

Project Director Virginia Buysse, a scientist at FPG, explained, “Across these three organization models, we’ll be looking at the relationships among program costs, program quality and outcomes for preschool-age children with disabilities and their families.”

Buysse and her team will collect information from nine North Carolina programs, involving 90 children and families. Sam Odom, principal investigator at Indiana University, will gather the same information on preschool programs in Indiana.

The outcomes will be documented through developmental measures and assessments of friendship formation and peer relations. The programs’ quality will be measured through an environmental rating scale, an ecobehavioral observation tool, and an assessment of the quality of inclusion.



Virginia Buysse, Project Director

Buysse said the costs per child will be assessed through methods developed by the Center for Special Education Finance in Palo Alto, CA, and statistical tests will examine the relationship between program quality and outcomes as well as differential costs between higher- and lower-quality programs.

“We expect to offer information that can be used to guide families, teachers and local program administrators in selecting appropriate placements and designing quality improvements of inclusion preschool programs,” she said. Findings will be available in 2004. | ed |

Children with special needs in child care, including those enrolled in the FPG Child Care Program, receive specialized services such as physical therapy, special education, occupational therapy, and speech-language pathology. FPG has a history of conducting research on specialized services and has a current project demonstrating recommended practices in this area.

Connecting Research Findings



Robin McWilliam,
Project Director

For 10 years, Robin McWilliam has been examining and demonstrating the efficacy of different methods of providing specialized services. This work has included a national survey of disability specialists and therapists; studies with individual children and groups of children; and focus groups with parents, service providers, and administrators.

McWilliam summarized the most important findings from these studies in this way: “Specialized services need to be provided in classrooms, in collaboration with the classroom staff, so the staff can carry out the interventions throughout the day. All the worthwhile intervention occurs between specialists’ visits. Integrated therapy and integrated special education are more effective than pulling children out for these services.”

The key dimensions of inclusion, based on research, demonstrated at the FPG Child Care Program are—how to use routines-based assessment—how to integrate therapy and special education, and—how to use embedded interventions. McWilliam says, “All three of these dimensions are designed to maximize the amount and effectiveness of intervention for children with disabilities.”



The FPG Child Care Program employs integrated therapy with the assistance of another FPG project, Individualizing Inclusion in Child Care. This federally funded model demonstration project has helped the staff organize the demonstration aspect of their inclusionary practices. Integrated therapy is achieved through collaboration, especially between teachers and specialists. Specialists provide therapies in the classroom, weaving interventions into classroom activities and consulting with teachers. “Because the specialists are in the classroom and see what the child is able to do, they develop feasible strategies with the teachers so that intervention occurs even when the specialists are not present,” says Stacy Scott, coordinator of the Individualizing Inclusion in Child Care Project. “If you go into one of the classrooms to observe, you’ll see that in just about every classroom routine, at least one, and often several, of a child’s intervention goals is being addressed by a teacher.” | ed |

To learn more

Rethinking Pull-Out Services in Early Intervention: A Professional Resource. McWilliam, R.A. (Ed.). (1996). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Integration of therapy and consultative special education: A continuum in early intervention. McWilliam, R.A. (1995). *Infants and Young Children* 7(4), 29-38.

Integrating therapies into the classroom. Scott, S.M., McWilliam, R.A., & Mayhew, L. (1999). *Young Exceptional Children*, 2(3), 15-24.

For more information about the Individualizing Inclusion project, please contact Project Coordinator Stacy Scott at 919-966-5943 or email Stacy_Scott@unc.edu.
Project web site: www.fpg.unc.edu/~inclusion.

For more information about the FPG Child Care Program, contact Dr. P.J. McWilliam at (919) 966-5098 or email mcwillpj@mail.fpg.unc.edu.