



early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute

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Rating Early Childhood Environments

Director's Notes

A Place for Eliot

A Whole New Yardstick

A Giant in Her Field

A Star Performer

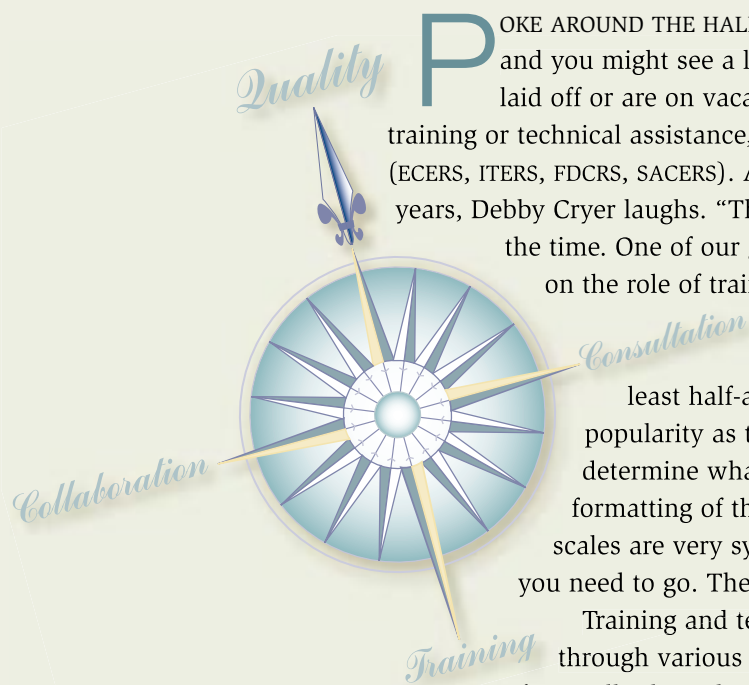
Roadmaps to Quality

FPG Publications

NCEDL Meets with State Representatives

NCEDL Publications

ROADMAPS to QUALITY



PROKE AROUND THE HALLS OF THE FPG CHILD DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE these days and you might see a lot of empty offices. This is not because staff have been laid off or are on vacation. More than likely, they are out doing some kind of training or technical assistance, often related to the use of the environment rating scales (ECERS, ITERS, FDCRS, SACERS). Asked how many people FPG has trained in the last 20 years, Debby Cryer laughs. “Thousands,” she says, “and the demand keeps growing all the time. One of our goals for the coming year is to train other people to take on the role of trainers. It’s more than we can keep up with.”

Currently, FPG’s rating scales are being used for training and technical assistance in every state and at least half-a-dozen countries. Cryer cites two reasons for the scales’ popularity as training tools. “First, research has validated their ability to determine what helps children do well in school,” she says. “Second, the formatting of the scales shows how to improve quality for each item. The scales are very systematic about showing you where you are and where you need to go. They provide a roadmap for change.”

Training and technical assistance using the scales is currently provided through various programs at FPG. Each year, FPG offers short courses (generally three days) and a weeklong institute that provide a basic introduction in the use of the scales. These are held approximately four times a year and offered to early childhood center directors, state licensing officials, researchers and others.

“At first, most of the people who came were from North Carolina,” Cryer says. “Now, they are from all over the country and abroad. We’ve got a long list of people waiting to attend.”

Training to encourage accurate use of the scales is just the beginning of moving towards quality improvement. Once people know how to administer the scales accurately, they can employ the scales to pinpoint exactly where classroom improvements are most needed and focus technical assistance specifically on those areas.

“The scales take much of the guesswork out of targeting technical assistance, and allow people to make the changes most needed to impact the positive development of children,” Cryer says.

To make the necessary improvements, a systematic approach is required to guide staff in their quality enhancement efforts. FPG’s Partnership for Inclusion (PFI) exemplifies one technical assistance model employing the rating scales. Through grants provided by the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the NC Department of Public Instruction, PFI offers early childhood teachers free consultations on how to upgrade their programs and then works with them to achieve those goals. PFI focuses most of their attention, however, on preparing early childhood professionals

as consultants themselves. Through the project's sessions, trainees learn an intensive mode of on-site collaborative consultation that has been proven time and again to increase program quality.

At the request of an early childhood teacher, PFI-trained consultants conduct an assessment of the classroom using the rating scales. At the same time, teachers and other classroom staff, often trained by these consultants, assess the classroom using their own copies of the rating scales. The consultants and consultees compare their findings, and reach a consensus on the areas needing change. Over the next 6 to 10 months, the consultant makes repeated visits to the center to help in whatever way desired, such as rearranging the classroom, providing additional training, or referring the consultee to relevant resources.

"We've come to realize that if you want sustained and meaningful change in early childhood environments, you've got to involve the consultee in calling the shots," says Pat Wesley, director of PFI. "The rating scales are used as a springboard for change, but the emphasis is on collaboration."

To date, PFI has trained more than 900 consultants in this on-site model and has worked with at least that many early childhood teachers.

A similar collaborative approach is employed in the Quality Care for Children Initiative (QCCI), sponsored by FPG, the District of Columbia's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) and the University of the District of Columbia. Washington, DC has a large population of children considered at-risk for school failure, many of whom live in non-English speaking households. Faced with

these challenges, the sponsors have launched QCCI with the goal of building the capacity within the District to improve and sustain quality care and education services.

"Our main strategy to achieve this goal is to train a group of local early care and education professionals—the QCCI Leadership Corps," says Barbara Ferguson Kamara, director of OECD. "Using the rating scales as the foundation for assessment, these professionals provide on-site consultation and technical assistance to child care providers to improve the quality of care and education environments throughout the District."

Each person in the Leadership Corps is assigned one center to contact each week with the goal of developing a close partnership and identifying areas for improvement. Using the *Infant/Toddler Environmental Rating Scale* (ITERS), these consultants conduct an assessment of a classroom and then work with the center to make improvements over time. Now in its third phase, QCCI has 19 trained consultants working with 20 early childhood centers in the District.

"The beauty of this program is that it's a true partnership rather than a hierarchy," says Lynette Aytch, Co-Principal Investigator with Thelma Harms. "The Corp members themselves have their own centers rated by other consultants, so it is a mutual learning process."

In North Carolina, The Duke Endowment funds a project that uses the scales as a major building block to improve the quality of child care. The project is establishing high quality early childhood programs in a select group of centers, which are designed to serve as models for the rest of the state. Cryer is heading a FPG project that provides technical

assistance to these model centers, so they can reach and maintain the required high level of quality. The rating scales serve as the roadmap, showing staff where improvement is needed and what steps need to be taken to get there. Once the model centers are up to speed, the staff then offer similar technical assistance to other programs in the area to meet the higher quality standards.

"People in the model centers learn the key ingredients to quality early care and education, but that is not the end of the effort," Cryer says. "They pass their knowledge on to other child care practitioners, creating a multiplier effect." | [jed](#) |

To learn more

Early intervention consultants in the classroom: Simple steps for building strong collaboration. Wesley, P. (2002). *Young Children*, 57(4), 30-34.

Improving quality in early childhood environments through on-site consultation. Palsha, S., & Wesley, P. (1998). *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 18(4), 243-253.



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recent publications

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Resources within reason: Very young children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing and their families. McNally, A., Catlett, C., & Winton, P. (2002). *Young Exceptional Children*, 6(1), 28.

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