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early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

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Inclusion in Child Care Centers

From the Director's Office: Inclusion at the Frank Porter
Graham Child Development Center

Policy Makes a Difference

In Partnership with the Community

Inclusion

NCEDL News: The Right Tools for the Right Job

NCEDL News: Advising the Researchers

The right tools for the job

While research on issues of quality of early child care and experiences has focused primarily on typically developing children, investigators with the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) are working on a way to assess quality practices for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

NCEDL investigator Lynette Aytch Darkes and her team are designing a tool to evaluate the quality of services provided to infants and toddlers with special needs and their families. Their work is part of the "Quality Practices for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Their Families" project, which is one of three separate studies that comprise the Early Child Care Quality strand of NCEDL.

Currently, no instrument is broadly used and accepted across a variety of geographic areas and programs to comprehensively evaluate early intervention services. A number of states, however, have developed evaluation strategies and others are in the process of designing such procedures.

Organizing framework
The organizing framework of the tool is subscales that encompass seven dimensions of early intervention services:

- Assessment
- Comprehensive Planning/IFSP Development
- Service Provision
- Transition Practices
- Personnel Competency
- Supervision/mentoring
- Program evaluation

"Our goal is to develop an instrument that is sufficiently comprehensive and flexible that it can fit the unique needs

and program characteristics of different states. Challenges related to this are to identify practices which constitute high quality early intervention services, and then develop a practical system for evaluating those practices," said Darkes. "The primary challenge is how to develop something useful in a system so complex."



At the moment, the format of the scale is modeled on the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)* because the goal is to develop an instrument that can be used by local and state program administrators and service providers to see what they are doing and how they might improve the quality of services. In addition to program improvement and planning purposes, the instrument is also being developed for use as a research tool.

You can't comprehensively assess quality of services without assessing families' perceptions

In considering what components to include in an instrument, Darkes and other team members examined what professionals and parents say about quality, studied other instruments, and drew on existing literature such as recommended practices by the Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Early Childhood.

Quality of relationships

The research team believes a critical element in the assessment of high quality services is the quality of the parent/professional relationship and the relationship between the child and service provider. "It is often not too difficult to evaluate the procedural aspects of a program or service, but evaluating the quality of relationships is a more challenging task," said Darkes.

To help organize their approach to such challenges, the research team organized a survey and held focus group meetings with program administrators, service providers

and families in North Carolina in the fall of 1996 and spring of 1997. Here's an example of one of the survey questions, and the answers received, ranked in order of frequency:

What are the most important features of high quality early intervention services?

Parents identified:

- Timeliness, availability, and accessibility of services
- Personal qualities of services provider (such as warmth, genuineness)
- Good parent/professional communication
- Extensive knowledge and experience of service provider about child's disability

Practitioners identified:

- Availability of parent support services
- Effective service coordination
- Appreciation for the cultural context and sensitivity to the values, beliefs, and priorities of families
- Availability and accessibility of services.

Information from the survey and focus groups suggested that the quality of relationships was an important indicator in early intervention services.

While the instrument is being developed to be used by service providers, administrators, and other program personnel, the research team expects to develop a parallel tool for parents. "It is likely that a parent's perception of service quality is distinctly different from that of the service provider. You can't comprehensively assess quality of services without assessing families' perceptions," said Darkes.

Researchers hope to have a draft of the instrument ready for review and critique by services providers, administrators, parents, and a team of technical experts and advisors by the fall of 1997. After extensive review and revision based on the feedback, the tool will be field tested in a representative sample of early intervention programs across the nation.

Variations in quality

"Ultimately, we would like to use the instrument in research to first determine variations in quality of programs provided by early intervention programs, and then to study the relationship between variations in quality of services and outcomes for young children and families. While it may seem that all the indicators in the instrument are important to positive outcomes, some may in fact be more or less important than others. We

need to identify those critical indicators and how they relate to the long-term success for children with disabilities and their families," said Darkes.

In addition to the instrument itself, additional products from the study may include fact sheets, quality guidelines, resource materials, and implications for policy and practice.

The principal investigator on the study is Don Bailey, who is also director of NCEDL and FPG. In addition to Darkes, Debby Cryer is an investigator. Mark Wolery is a research partner and Laurie Selz is a graduate research assistant. 

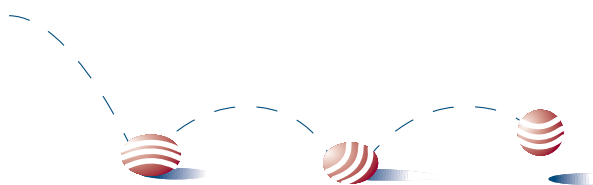
The Mission of NCEDL

The National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) is administratively housed at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center at UNC-CH. NCEDL has divided its five-year mission into six strands:

- early child care quality
- kindergarten transitions
- ecological interventions
- policy
- statistical modeling of extant and project data
- translation of research to practice

NCEDL researchers include senior faculty members at UNC-CH, the University of Virginia, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock and the University of California at Los Angeles. The director is Don Bailey, who is also director of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center.

NCEDL is funded by the US Department of Education's Office of Education Research and Improvement through the National Institute for Early Childhood Development and Education.



Advising the researchers

Investigators with the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) who are creating a tool to assess quality practices for infants and toddlers with disabilities are investing time in collaborating with and listening to parents, practitioners, administrators, technical experts, experts in the field, providers and others.

This investment is a fundamental practice of NCEDL and involves constituents in the planning, implementation, evaluation and dissemination of all six of its research strands.

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For example, members of the “Quality Practices for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Their Families” project have held meetings with their advisory board, their team of technical experts, focus groups and others during the study’s first 10 months. Researchers also met with coordinators of infant disability programs in Washington, DC.


The study’s advisory board has 12 members, including parents, practitioners, administrators, and other researchers. The board has meet three times and Investigator Lynette Darkes is pleased with the group’s ideas and feedback. “At first, it seemed to be a bit of a challenge because our study is rather technical—focusing on the development of an evaluation instrument. But it’s important that we find a way for all advisory board members to have active and meaningful roles. It’s certainly beneficial to the study and it’s important to hear different perspectives. Parents, for example, give a wonderful perspective because they’ll say, ‘I’ve gone through this personally and I can tell you if that was an important indication of quality in my experience.’”

Darkes and her team have also met with a group of technical experts. Asked how this group responded to

the idea of a new assessment tool, Darkes laughed and said, “They confirmed the complexity of the endeavor.”

The technical experts were of two basic opinions: One was that you can’t really determine the quality outside the context of the family and the child. What really matters is the experience of the children and families in the system. The other opinion was that sometimes parents are not the most accurate source of determining quality. “For example,” said Darkes, “if parents get along well with the service provider sometimes they’ll say that it’s a good quality program. However, an independent observer may rate it as a moderate or low-quality program.” Investigators ended up taking the best of both camps of advice and using both perspectives.

The advisory board has seen an initial draft of several subscales of the instrument. “The feedback was positive overall as well as providing substantive critique which will guide our continued work,” Darkes said.

Researchers are planning to meet with additional focus groups and in the future perhaps expand its advisory board, to work with investigators over the five-year life of the study. 

Constituent advisory boards are used by all strands at the National Center for Early Development & Learning for a variety of purposes. For example, one board recently reviewed board meetings themselves and made a number of suggestions. Their ideas included:

- Consider having some meetings in the community, rather than all at the research center.
- Consider inviting constituent “pairs;” that is, two people who know each other and can support each other’s participation through sharing rides, information, etc.
- Keep meetings short, focused (stick to agenda), and well-facilitated.
- Make sure all voices are heard.
- Be sensitive to “keeping the playing field level” to build a sense of trust and collaboration.
- Avoid jargon—use proactive strategies to minimize it.
- After meetings, provide follow-up on how suggestions and recommendations have been incorporated or made a difference.

Recent publications

by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

📖 **Families As Systems.**

M.J. Cox, & B. Paley. (1997). *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48: 248–267.

📖 **Increased Virulence of Coxsackievirus B3 Due to Vitamin E or Selenium Deficiency.**

M.A. Beck. (1997). *Journal of Nutrition*, 127: 966S–970S.

📖 **Interacting Nutritional and Infectious Etiologies of Keshan Disease: Insights from Coxsackievirus B-Induced Myocarditis in Mice Deficient in Selenium or Vitamin E.**

O.A. Lavander, & M.A. Beck. (1997). *Biological Trace Element Research*, 56: 5–22.

📖 **The Impact of Changing Roles on Relationships between Professionals in Inclusive Programs for Young Children.**

J. Lieber, P.J. Beckman, M.J. Hanson, S. Janko, J.M. Marquart, E. Horn, & S.L. Odom. (1997). *Early Education and Development*, 8(1), 67–82.

📖 **DATTA: Speech Therapy in Patients with a Prior History of Recurrent Acute or Chronic Otitis Media with Effusion.**

J.E. Roberts. (1997). *Abstracts of Clinical Care Guidelines*, 8(9), 2–6.

📖 **Otitis Media, Language and Learning in Young Children: Medical, Developmental, and Educational Considerations. (1997).**

J.E. Roberts, I.F. Wallace, & F.W. Henderson. (Eds.). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.,

📖 **Reforming Personnel Preparation in Early Intervention: Issues, Models, and Practical Strategies.**

P.J. Winton, J. McCollum, & C. Catlett. (1997). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.

📖 **Family-Professional Partnerships in Managing Otitis Media.**

P.J. Winton, J.E. Roberts, & S.A. Zeisel. (1997). In *Otitis Media, Language and Learning in Young Children: Medical, Developmental, and Educational Considerations*. J.E. Roberts, I.F. Wallace, & F.W. Henderson. (Eds.). Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing Co.

📖 **Encounters with General Early Education: Lessons Being Learned.**

M. Wolery. (1997). *Journal of Behavioral Education*, 7, 91–98.

📖 **Training Elementary Teachers to Embed Instruction During Classroom Activities.**

M. Wolery, L. Anthony, E.D. Snyder, M.G. Werts, & J. Katzenmeyer. (1997). *Education and Treatment of Children*, 20, 40–58.

📖 **Instructional Methods with Students Who Have Significant Disabilities.**

M. Wolery & J.W. Schuster. (1997). *Journal of Special Education*, 31, 61–79.

📖 **Comparisons of Observed Process Quality in Early Child Care and Education in Five Countries.**

W. Tietze, D. Cryer, J. Bairrao, J. Palacios, & G. Wetzel. (1996). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 11, 447–475.

Research spotlight

Recent findings at FPG

Assessing the Comfort Zone of Child Care Teachers in Serving Young Children with Disabilities.

Virginia Buysse, Patricia Wesley, Lynette Keyes, & Don Bailey.
Journal of Early Intervention, 20(3), 189–203.

ALTHOUGH WE HAVE LEARNED much about inclusion during the past 30 years, few studies have examined the perspectives of child care teachers who serve children with disabilities in their classrooms. This study examined the attitudes of 52 general early childhood teachers serving young children with disabilities in inclusive early childhood settings.

The study's authors noted that early interventionists who are consultants in general early childhood programs could use comfort zone ratings to identify collaborative classroom goals with teachers, such as using

appropriate positioning techniques or modifying the classroom environment to accommodate wheelchairs and walkers. Teachers' comments and concerns about inclusion and their decreased comfort in serving young children with severe disabilities should not be viewed as discouraging findings. Earlier studies have reported that despite teachers' initial hesitancy about serving children with severe disabilities in general education classrooms, many later described transformations that occurred as a result of direct experiences and their willingness to be involved with these children in a meaningful way.

Highlights

- * In contrast to previous research with parents, child care teachers expressed fewer overall concerns about the effects of inclusion for children with and without disabilities and their families.
- * Teachers identified concerns about the lack of specialized training among early childhood personnel and fewer opportunities for children with disabilities to receive special services and individualized instruction in inclusive settings.
- * Comfort levels were lowest when the child was reported to have severe to profound disabilities in the areas of leg functioning, muscle tone, and appropriate behavior.
- * In general, teachers who expressed more concerns about potential drawbacks of inclusion were less comfortable serving individual children with special needs.

Early Developments
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