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**early developments** Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

**Spring 1999** | Volume 3, Issue 2

*Family-Centered Research & Practices*

From the Director's Office: The Big Picture

Why Do They Do That?

Focus on Families

I Don't Want to Talk About It!

Putting Parents in the Picture

NCEDL News

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SUPPORTING FAMILY HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill  
Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

# early *Developments*

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**Family-Centered  
Research &  
Practices**

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Kersgaard

From the director's office

## The big picture

**M**OST YOUNG CHILDREN in America today are raised in some sort of family. However, there is enormous variation in the nature of the American family—who is in it, where they live, their financial resources, their values and ways of interacting with each other. Understanding the development of young children cannot be studied apart from understanding the families in which they live.

We know quite a bit about the importance of the family's role in children's social development and on their success in school. Early relationships with parents and siblings form the basis for later social development with peers and teachers. Language use in the home and the variety of experiences families provide for their children shape later language and cognitive competence of children. Attitudes about school, work, and whether effort can make a difference in one's life are transmitted very early to children and their effects are evident in children's participation in school.

This issue of *Early Developments* highlights some of the work on families being conducted at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development

Center. Some of our research is devoted to understanding families better and how they influence their children. We are interested in how families respond when they have a child with a chronic illness or disability, and how cultural background influences those responses. We are studying early childhood, early intervention and early elementary school programs to find out how "family-friendly" those programs are. Finally, a number of investigators have developed and are testing strategies for helping programs be more supportive of families in the context of parenting roles.

So, although we call ourselves a child development center, that inevitably means a focus on families as well. Hopefully this work will lead to a better understanding of families in today's society and how agencies, schools, and programs can be more responsive to the wide variation in family needs, parenting styles, and goals for their children.

—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.*