

# ed

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

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*Family-Centered Research & Practices*

From the Director's Office: The Big Picture

Why Do They Do That?

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NCEDL News



# Putting in the

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**T**WO OF THE NEWEST PROJECTS at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center and the National Center for Early Development & Learning are creating models to increase family involvement and empowerment in early childhood arenas.

**THE PARENT LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROJECT** is developing a cadre of parents to fill a variety of advocacy and advisory roles with state and local agencies and organizations.

**THE COMMUNITY-BASED MODEL FOR IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTICES AND POLICIES PROJECT** will integrate parents into the planning process of local Smart Start partnerships in North Carolina.

Both projects build on a growing body of research showing the efficacy of involving parents and other family members in all aspects of planning, delivering, and evaluating early education and intervention services. “Developing strong parent-professional alliances is a critical first step in improving the quality and cultural responsiveness of services to children and families,” explains FPG Researcher Pat Wesley, co-principal investigator of the Parent Leadership project.

Here’s a closer look at these two projects, each of which is developing a model that can be replicated by local communities, agencies, and education partnerships.

## Parent Leadership

Comprehensive, high-quality, individualized early care and intervention for children with disabilities now require simultaneous

attention to child development, community building, professional development, and family involvement. Virginia Buysse, another FPG researcher and co-principal investigator of the Parent Leadership Development Project, says, “Families should be considered essential advisors in public policy, research, personnel preparation, and program development, as well partners in all aspects of their children’s care and education.”

The Parent Leadership project is recruiting 72 parents and other family members of children with disabilities interested in developing or improving partnerships with professionals. These parents will receive intensive training, including follow-up activities to develop leadership skills. This cadre will then be linked to institutions of higher learning and organizations and agencies providing early education, early intervention, and family support services.

Although many professionals recognize the value of having families serve as consultants, advisors, and members of boards and committees, there are a number of barriers.

- Logistical problems such as lack of transportation or difficulty in making child care arrangements and balancing family needs
- Administrative constraints
- Lack of money for parent reimbursement
- Parent’s lack of knowledge or experience with leadership roles
- Limited opportunities and support for parents in these positions
- Inadequate representation of the full spectrum of families who participate in early intervention

# parents picture

## at increasing in early education intervention



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“Our assumption is that most early intervention professionals already understand the importance of collaborating with families, but lack effective strategies for putting this philosophy into practice,” explains Wesley. Project participants will represent diversity of culture, language, family constellations (single parents, teenage parents, foster parents, grandparents) and socioeconomic resources.

### OTHER FEATURES OF THE MODEL

- A series of leadership retreats for parents focusing on information about early care and intervention systems to increase parent leadership skills
- Follow-up activities with parents as they implement action plans to expand their partnerships with professionals and develop individual portfolios
- Production of a *Parent Leadership Directory*, a *Facilitator’s Guide to Parent Leadership Development*, and a videotape about parent leadership roles
- Helping professional organizations, programs, and agencies across North Carolina meet their goals to increase parent representation and involvement
- A comprehensive program evaluation and dissemination of findings to a wide audience

The Parent Leadership project is funded for 3 years by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs.

### Model to aid Smart Start

The Community-Based Model for Improving Early Childhood Practices and Policies is aimed at developing specific guidelines,

tools, and strategies for involving families in reforming early childhood policies and practices. Specifically, the study will work with the NC Partnership for Children, which oversees a statewide childhood initiative known as “Smart Start.” Smart Start is a public-private initiative and is not just one program; it’s many. Local Smart Start partnerships of parents, educators, child care providers, nonprofits, churches, and business people plan how to improve (or provide, in some cases) local child care, health care, and family services to children under the age of six. (See related story on page 15.)

Pam Winton, director of the project, says that Smart Start evaluation studies have shown that a particular challenge for communities is implementing the state requirement that families be involved in the planning process. “People know it’s important, but it’s really hard and because of that sometimes they give up. An immediate need is the development of a technical assistance model, and that’s what we’re doing. The involvement of families is based on the assumption that families have unique perspectives about gaps in systems and solutions that are likely to work. Without these perspectives, it is felt that plans likely will promote the status quo,” she explained.

### PROMOTING INVOLVEMENT

Researchers have posed these questions:


- What are strategies for meaningfully involving families in decision-making?
- What are strategies for providing current, relevant early childhood research data to stakeholder groups, including families?

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- What processes lead to shared knowledge and values among different stakeholder groups, including families?
- What are strategies to meaningfully identify the needs of families and children in ways that lead to realistic plans for change?
- How can family involvement in making improvements in early childhood programs and policies be monitored and evaluated?

A participatory evaluation approach is based on the needs and perspectives of the NC Partnership for Children and local Smart Start participants, including families. The study is in two phases. During Phase 1, which is taking place now, information is being gathered about ways to involve families and the effectiveness of those strategies.

Data collection includes interviews with key informants, including families; observations of board meetings; document reviews, and surveys. Researchers will examine the relationship between family involvement in decision-making with positive outcomes for children and families. According to Winton, this is a missing piece of evidence in the field now. “We believe that family involvement in decision-making is important. We also know it is challenging to implement and requires time, money and resources. If we could document the ways that it makes a difference, then we would know it is worth the time and money to enlist and support family participation. This evidence would encourage community leaders to make that extra effort.” During Phase 2, the researchers will work in partnership with local communities in developing a model that supports family involvement.

This project is part of the Research to Practice Strand of the National Center for Early Development and Learning, which is administratively based at UNC-Chapel Hill. Winton is director of the strand and also a FPG researcher. Researchers at FPG have been involved in a number of Smart Start studies and projects over the years. 

## Key findings from the NICHD family study

Overall, family economics, rather than other demographic characteristics, account for both the amount and kind of nonmaternal care that infants receive, according to a study by the NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. Among the authors of that study, published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (May, 1997), was Martha Cox, a FPG researcher.

Other key findings of the study, which examined 1,281 children in 10 locations around the U.S., include:

- A startling finding with regard to the quality of nonmaternal care was

Further, that such differences were observed with unrelated caregivers but not with relatives suggests that fathers and grandparents may be responding more sensitively to the unique characteristics of the children in their care, but care providers who are not relatives may be responding more stereotypically to children.

- Children at the lowest and highest income levels received higher quality care than those in the middle. This pattern is consistent with early findings for centers serving preschool children. One reason may be that the care for children from families with very low incomes is often directly subsidized, and families with higher incomes receive a child-care tax

## If you want to know more

### FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN LEADERSHIP

Winton, P., & DiVenere, N. (1995). Family-professional partnerships in early intervention personnel preparation. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 15*(3), 296–313.

Capone, A., Hull, K., & DiVenere, N. (1997). Parent-professional partnerships in preservice and inservice education. In P. Winton, J. McCollum, & C. Catlett (Eds.), *Reforming personnel preparation in early intervention* (pp. 435–451). Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes.

### PARTNERSHIPS IN SERVICE DELIVERY

Winton, P., Roberts, J., & Zeisel, S. (1997). Family-professional partnerships in managing otitis media. In J. Roberts, I. Wallace, & F. Henderson (Eds.), *Medical, developmental, and educational considerations: Otitis media in young children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes.

Winton, P. (1996). Family-professional partnerships and integrated services. In R. McWilliam (Ed.), *Rethinking pull-out services in early intervention: A professional resource* (pp. 49–69). Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes.

that at 15 months boys received less responsive care than girls in both child-care homes and centers. This suggests that sex may be a particularly salient child characteristic, even in toddlers.

credit. Those in the middle are less likely to receive any federal benefit.

- Nonmaternal income tended to be negatively related to the hours per week that children were in child care, whereas mothers' income was positively related to the hours that children were in child care.
- In contrast to families whose infants began to receive care before they were 2 months old and who were more dependent on mothers' income than any other families studied, families whose children entered care between 3 and 5 months of age had relatively high nonmaternal income, as well as the higher mothers' income of any group. These families also tended to have fewer children, better-educated mothers, and mothers who scored higher on measures of extraversion and agreeableness.
- Demographic variables other than income were not good predictors of the amount of nonmaternal care received by children at 6 and 15 months of age.

# Recent publications

by researchers at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

## **Resources within reason: Materials that translate brain research into activities for daily use**

C. Catlett, & P. Winton. (1998). *Young Exceptional Children*, 1(4), 29.

## **Infant-toddler planning guide**

F. Derks, B. Bardin, L. Lohn, & P. Wesley. (1998). Lewisville, NC: Kaplan Corp.

## **The family-centeredness of individualized family service plans**

R. McWilliam, A. Ferguson, G. Harbin, P. Porter, D. Munn, & P. Vandiviere. (1998). *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 18, 69–82.

## **A longitudinal study of factors associated with Wechsler Verbal and Performance IQ Scores in students from low-income African American families**

F. Campbell, & L. Nabors. (1998). In J.S. Carlson (Series Ed.), *Advances in cognition and education practice*, W. Tomac, & J. Kingman (Eds.), *Conceptual issues in research on intelligence* (pp. 77–112). Greenwich, CT: JAI.

## **Enhancing the life course for high-risk children: Results from the Abecedarian Project.**

C. Ramey, F. Campbell, & C. Blair. (1998). In J. Crane (Ed.), *Social programs that work* (pp. 163–183). New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

## **Identity and agency in cultural worlds**

D. Holland, W. Lachicotte, D. Skinner, & C. Cain. (1998). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

## **Selves in time and place: An introduction**

D. Skinner, D. Holland, & A. Pach III. (1998). In D. Skinner, A. Pach III, & D. Holland (Eds.), *Selves in time and place: Identities, experience, and history in Nepal* (pp. 3–16). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

## **Contested selves, contested femininities: Selves and society in process**

D. Skinner, & D. Holland. (1998). In D. Skinner, A. Pach III, & D. Holland (Eds.), *Selves in time and place: Identities, experience, and history in Nepal* (pp. 87–110). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

## **Early developmental trajectories of males with fragile X syndrome**

D. Bailey, D. Hatton, & M. Skinner. (1998). *American Journal on Mental Retardation*, 1, 29–39.

## **Socially valid but difficult to implement: Creative solutions needed**

P. Winton. (1998). *Journal of Early Intervention*, 21(2), 114–117.

## **Resources within reason: Materials for supporting fine and gross motor development**

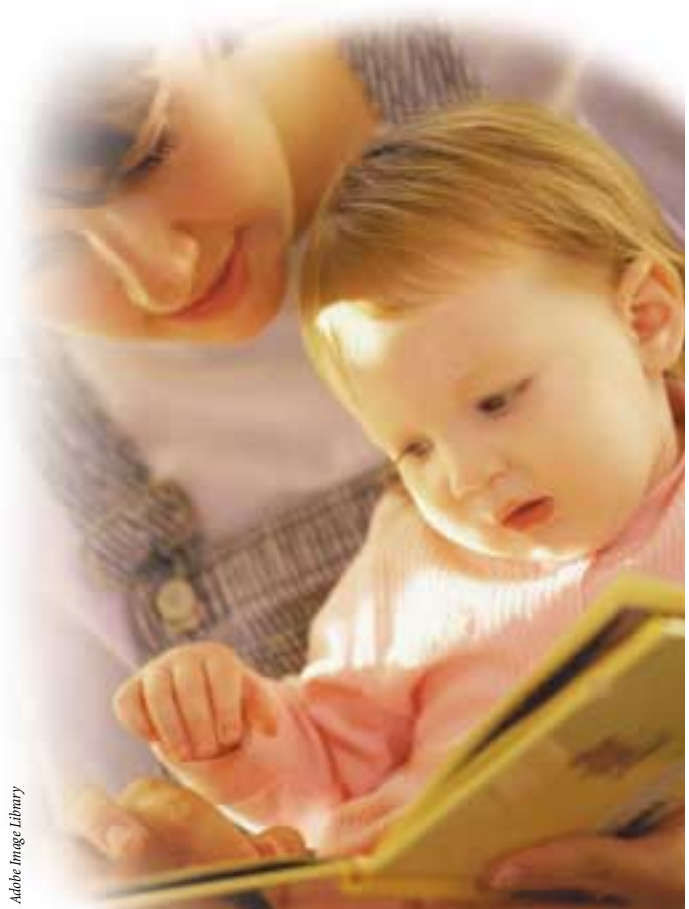
C. Catlett, P. Winton, J. Case-Smith, H. Masin, K. Perrin, B. Sher, & J. Solomon. (1998). *Young Exceptional Children*, 1(4), 28.

## **Otitis Media, the caregiving environment, and language and cognitive outcomes at 2 years**

J. Roberts, M. Burchinal, S. Zeisel, E. Neebe, S. Hooper, J. Roush, D. Bryant, M. Mundy, & F. Henderson. (1998). *Pediatrics*, 102(2), 346–354.

## **Interactions of African-American infants and their mothers: Relations with development at 1 year of age**

I. Wallace, J. Roberts, & D. Lodder. (1998). *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research* (41), 900–912.



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