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Research to Practice

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Finding Our Way

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Quality Care

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

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to practice**

Field notes

This issue of *Early Developments* tells the stories of how some of today's projects at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center (FPG) evolved from earlier institutes and projects into down-to-earth help for professionals and families, into models for systems change, and into assessment tools to help administrators, policymakers, and ultimately, of course, children and their families. In a few cases, the chain has been direct with the same researcher(s) or group of researchers completing one study and then taking the next logical step. Such is the case with a series of projects involving inservice and preservice training of teachers, and described in an article beginning on page 8.

In most cases the connection has been institutional, with large projects and institutes creating a caldron of ideas that have spawned projects well into the future. For example, 13 investigators were involved with the Carolina Institute for Research on Early Education for the Handicapped (CIREEH) project in the 1980s. A story about some of CIREEH's "grandchildren" today begins on page 4.

A FPG project more than two decades ago about curriculum led circuitously to some of the most widely used assessment tools in America. That story begins on page 11.

So while research may be more complicated, the public outreach mission of FPG hasn't changed: Helping children and their families is still our bottom line.

In our special section about the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL), also based at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, we highlight one of the first national conferences dedicated to professional development and compensation for the early childhood workforce. We also look at a new product aimed at delivering the results of research faster and in an easily accessible format. These stories are on pages 14-15.

Errata: In the last *Early Developments*, a book edited by Martha Cox and Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, *Causes and Consequences*, was mentioned in an article on parenthood. The full title is *Conflict and Cohesion in Families: Causes and Consequence* published by Lawrence Erlbaum.

By the way, *Early Developments* is online at our website in PDF format and may be freely downloaded and reprinted. If you want additional printed copies, they are \$1 each plus shipping costs. Please address your requests for additional copies to Nancy Pruden at 919-966-4221 or email the FPG publications office at <publications@mail.fpg.unc.edu>.

—Lloyd Little
editor

Visit the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center website at <www.fpg.unc.edu>



FINDING OUR WAY—how early family research led to practical help for professionals and families, page 4



MAPPING THE FUTURE—changing the ways early childhood professionals are trained, page 8



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MAKING GAINS—national conference examines compensation and training of the early childhood workforce, page 11

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From the director's office

The road from research to practice

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Sometimes research has immediate results that are of practical use. This is, of course, the universal hope of researchers, practitioners, parents, and policy makers. More often, however, research begins with more fundamental questions about how things work. Once we understand how something works, then we can figure out how to make it work better.

In this issue of *Early Developments*, we trace how several projects at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center began, their evolution and transformation into new projects, and the products or benefits that were derived from these projects over the years. For example, a project to create an early childhood curriculum led to the development of the *Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS)* which gave program administrators a valuable tool to help make changes in programs. It also gave policymakers more precise data to help assess the effectiveness of programs.

Another example: Early FPG research showed that individualized service plans for inclusion needed to be more family centered. That meant changes in how service providers and center operators approached such plans and that, in turn, led to creating practical models for affecting change in the education and preparation of service providers.

From our work over three decades, we have learned two fundamental lessons. First, important problems regarding young children and the programs that serve children and families cannot be fixed quickly. The issues are too complicated and the barriers to change too great. Only through sustained focus on an issue can meaningful change occur. Second, it is sometimes impossible to predict, at the beginning of a project, what the final useful product from that project might be.

The key is

- identifying an important problem,
- studying as many aspects of that problem as possible,
- brainstorming with the beneficiaries (teachers, parents, etc.) of the research about a number of possible solutions, and then
- trying out solutions that have a good chance of succeeding.

—Don Bailey

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