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early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

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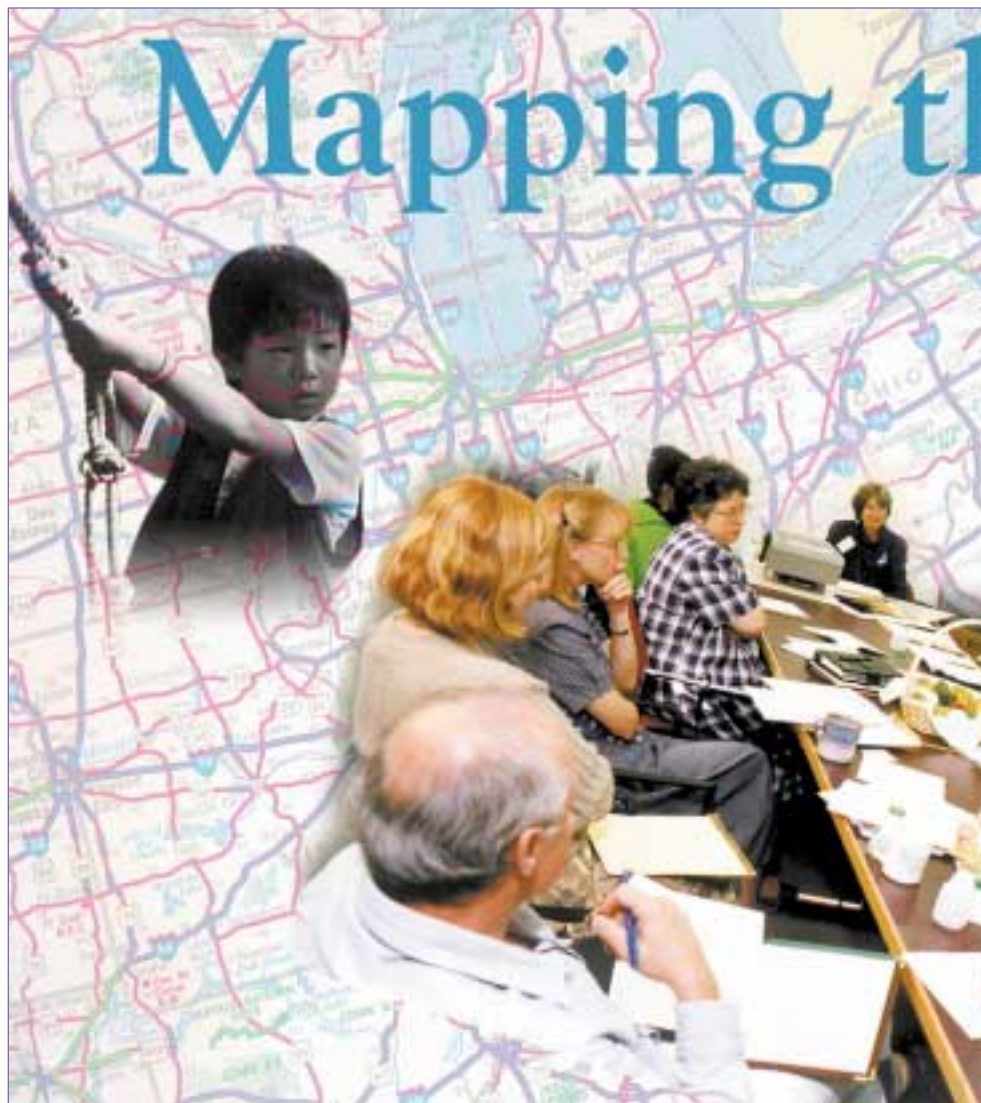
This fall, North Dakota will hold a faculty institute with interdisciplinary teams drawn from community and tribal colleges, families, and practitioners—these teams will focus on increasing family-centered and interdisciplinary practices in the preservice programs.

A group in Idaho has organized a statewide Consortium for Preparation of Early Childhood Professionals, and Baylor University in Texas now offers an interdisciplinary early intervention minor.

All of these very practical changes in how we prepare early childhood personnel have their roots in an institute that began at the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center more than a decade ago.

THAT INSTITUTE GAVE RISE TO A COLLABORATIVE SERIES of projects that began changing the way early childhood professionals are trained. In doing so, researchers created new rating scales for assessing family-centered practices in early intervention, refined the case method as a way to help prepare professionals, developed models for states and institutions of higher learning (including community colleges) to beef up their preservice and inservice training of early childhood professionals, and created a model that helped North Carolina early intervention programs apply a family-centered approach.

The institute was the Carolina Institute for Research on Infant Personnel Preparation (CIRIPP), which ran from 1987 to 1992. The principal investigator was Don Bailey, director of the Frank Porter Graham Center. “With the implementation of the early intervention legislation (Part H of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]), we needed to take a closer look at the personnel training of early intervention professionals. We needed



to know many things: Did these people have sufficient training for implementing the family-centered, interdisciplinary approach in the new law? What was ‘sufficient training’? Were our institutions responding to new needs and demands?”

First, CIRIPP conducted a national survey of college and university programs in 11 key disciplines to see how students were being prepared to work with infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. Other surveys focused on barriers, models of training, com-

petencies, best practices and so forth. Some of the findings and conclusions from these surveys were:

- ▶ In most disciplines, with the exception of social work and nursing, students received virtually no information about working with families.
- ▶ Professionals consistently reported a discrepancy between typical and desired practices in working with families.
- ▶ It was clear that changes in the pre-

Over the next five years, CIRIPP faculty developed new curricula, assessed alternative instruction strategies, worked out ways to promote family-centered attitudes among professionals, created inservice training methods, and tested new family-centered systems for service coordination.

Bailey said, “Our findings projected little change in preservice programs because of competing areas of specialization, lack of faculty with expertise, and the sometimes contradictory and competing requirements of

Other research spin-offs

Among other things, CIRIPP researchers:

- ▶ developed and evaluated the case method of instruction as a supplement to traditional training of early childhood professionals;
- ▶ published a manual for workshop facilitators, *Implementing Family-Centered Services in Early Intervention: A Team-based Model for Change*; and
- ▶ developed and published the *Brass Tacks* series of instruments to help early intervention programs, teams, and individual professionals determine the extent to which their practices reflect a family-centered approach.

In the final CIRIPP report, Bailey and his team noted these implications:

- ▶ in the area of preservice, the average entry-level professional from the key disciplines is likely to enter the field with little infancy, family or interdisciplinary experience or knowledge; and
- ▶ at the inservice level, large numbers of direct service providers need training to the Part H (now Part C) of IDEA initiatives. This training must address the systems and family barriers preventing them from being as family-centered as they would like to be.

The next step

One of the 18 CIRIPP faculty members working with Bailey was Pam Winton, who took part of the CIRIPP findings to the next level. Winton said, “Our research revealed the enormous personnel challenges. What we needed were strategies and models to help personnel development systems make changes. And the biggest challenge was that there was no one ‘personnel development system.’”

What existed was a conglomeration of different state and local agencies, departments within universities and community colleges, and so on, that all had responsibility for personnel preparation but that didn’t necessarily work together and might even be giving conflicting messages about best practices, she explained.

“For example, in one university there could be three different disciplinary departments preparing students headed for early intervention jobs; each discipline had its own



Research projects can lead to revisions in how early childhood professionals are trained

service preparation of professionals would be slow to non-existent. A mechanism was needed to promote systems change.

- ▶ Families and professionals needed to be involved in decisions about changing practices.

state agencies, professional organizations, and universities. As for inservice training, we found that large numbers of direct service providers needed training about new federal regulations. In other words, we found a major lack of collaboration and cooperation at a time when it was needed more than ever.”

traditions, strategies, and philosophies about how to work with children. Working with families was not typically part of their training. The people who suffered were the families and children who relied on a smoothly operating interdisciplinary team to provide them with the services they needed," Winton said.

The answer was obvious: a major change in how state agencies and universities operated. She said, "Most practitioners did not necessarily want to be trained by someone in the 'ivory tower' who probably didn't have recent practical experience; and the state agencies in charge of inservice training did not automatically turn to universities for help for the same reason. State agencies wanted trainers who could easily relate to the daily challenges facing practitioners. To put it bluntly," she continued, "we were trying to bring the ivory tower and the trenches together, and neither side was comfortable with that. It was like trying to arrange a marriage between two people who didn't even want to go out on a blind date together."

The only way to address this, Winton decided, was to create an integrated early intervention personnel development system. That idea landed one of four regional faculty-training institutes funded by the U.S. Department of Education in 1992, the year that CIRIPP ended. One of the four was the Southeastern Institute for Faculty Training (SIFT) headed by Winton and FPG researcher Camille Catlett.

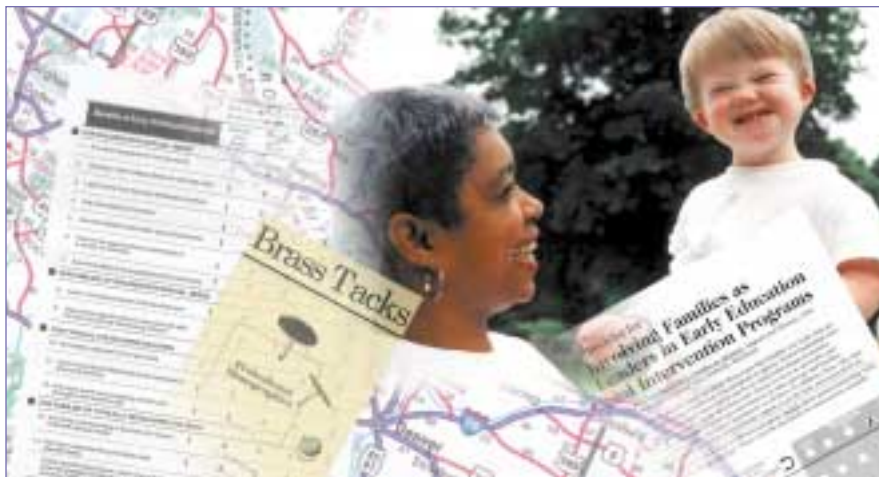
SIFT's goal was to develop and field test a model for reforming early intervention personnel development systems in 15 southeastern states. The model they developed has now been refined and replicated through three additional projects that they direct—SIFT-OUT, SCRIPT and NEW SCRIPTS. Their newest project, NEW

SCRIPTS, focuses on community colleges and diversity issues.

Putting it in perspective


To put this in perspective, since 1992 these four projects (SIFT, SIFT-OUT, SCRIPT, and New Scripts) have worked with 28 states to improve the preparation of their early child-

case method and turned it into a significant teaching technique. After CIRIPP, McWilliam directed a special Case Method of Instruction (CMI) project that expanded awareness of CMI and the availability of appropriate instructional materials for case-method teaching of early intervention personnel preparation.



McWilliam also directed the Carolina Model Inservice Training Project that created a curriculum for training early intervention teams to implement a family-centered approach in their daily work with children and families. Most recently, McWilliam is directing the CMI-Outreach Project, which is designed to help university

instructors incorporate the case method in their preservice and inservice instruction.

Bailey said, "This rolling forward of our work into more detailed and more practical use reflects one of the strengths of a large, strong research institution. These projects don't reflect so much one person following a line of research as they do the research institution and all its members building on the findings of earlier work by earlier researchers. By taking our research to the outreach stage, we show our commitment to use research opportunities to ultimately benefit children and their families." 

hood intervention workforce. Winton said, "By using a sequence of planning, training, follow-up, and evaluation, interdisciplinary teams of faculty members, family members, practitioners, and state agency representatives have created state-specific changes at a systemic level, at a program/practice level, and at an individual level."

The examples at the beginning of this article are only a few of the actual, practical outcomes from the SIFT and SCRIPT projects.

Another one of those original researchers with CIRIPP was P.J. McWilliam who took the

If you want to know more...

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