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

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*Social Processes and Outcomes*

Relationships critical to healthy development

Challenging behavior in preschool classrooms:

Linking research to practice

Effects of quality care and mother's depression

Continuity of care

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Friendship formation

NCEDL News

# Friendship Formation

Her study examined friendship formation in

THERE IS GENERAL AGREEMENT among researchers that children's social and emotional competence during the early childhood years predicts later outcomes. For example, children who enter kindergarten without the requisite social and emotional skills (confident, friendly, able to get along with peers) are often plagued by behavioral, academic and social problems that can persist into adulthood, if untreated.

The ability to develop and keep friendships is an important indicator of a child's ability to carry out interpersonal goals.

"Furthermore, having a friend appears to offer both partners the potential for enhanced cognitive and language development as well as specific social and emotional benefits – an increased capacity for understanding another's perspective, the ability to regulate one's emotions, and a general feeling of well-being and happiness," said Virginia Buysse, a researcher at FPG.

The empirical evidence to date suggests that even very young children are capable of forming mutual friendships with peers. However, preschool children with disabilities often have more difficulties in developing friendship. The nature of friendships in young children with disabilities is the focus of a recent completed study by Buysse. In thinking about how children relate to their peers, it is important to distinguish between friendship, which refers to a special relationship between two children, and peer acceptance, an index of a child's social status within a group of playmates or peers, Buysse said.

inclusive pre-K classrooms enrolling children with and without disabilities, an area that has received only limited attention in previous research. Of the 333 children in the study, 120 had special needs and 213 were typically developing preschoolers. They were from 18 early childhood programs in North Carolina.

The study assessed the effects of two types of inclusive pre-K classrooms: inclusive specialized classrooms (in which, for most of the programs, the majority enrolled were children with disabilities) and inclusive child care classrooms (in which the majority enrolled were typically developing children).

## The study addressed these principal questions

- (1) How many playmates and friends were reported by teachers for children with and without disabilities in the two types of inclusive classrooms?
- (2) What child and program characteristics predicted the reported number of playmates and friends?

## Preliminary findings indicated

- Children with disabilities in child care settings were 1.73 times more likely to have at least one friend than were children with disabilities in specialized settings.
- Children with disabilities were more likely to have typically developing friends if they were enrolled in child care rather than specialized settings.
- The type of setting had no effect on the probability of having friends with or without a disability for typically developing children.



Buyse said, “These findings can be used to inform decisions about how early childhood programs can achieve the goals of inclusion, particularly in the area of establishing and maintaining friendships among young children with and without disabilities. Specifically, the study results suggest that teachers and administrators should assess each component of the learning environment to determine whether there is a critical mass of typically developing children available to assist children with disabilities in carrying out their interpersonal goals.”

**[ed]**

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Other researchers working with Virginia Buyse are Barbara Goldman and Martie Skinner.

# Researcher–Constituent Collaboration

One goal of the National Center for Early Development & Learning (NCEDL) is exploring ways to increase constituent collaboration with researchers. By constituents, we mean the beneficiaries of our research.

“We want to go beyond focus groups and advisory boards,” said Pam Winton, who directs the dissemination strand at NCEDL. “We want constituents to collaborate actively with researchers to identify the kinds of research information needed by parent, teacher, and other consumers and help determine the best ways to disseminate information. We feel this will ensure that our products are practical, relevant and reflect an appreciation for linguistic and cultural differences.”

Among the three NCEDL projects that actively involve constituents, the Best Practices Study at the University of California at Los Angeles is an example of a meaningful researcher-constituent partnership in all phases of the research process.

Carollee Howes of UCLA, the principal investigator, said, “The Best Practices Study is seeking to expand the notion of quality child care and explore factors that contribute to the growth and development of under-represented children. To do this, we created a research design that involved constituents at different levels and times in the process.”

She said that throughout the project her team has worked to understand the varieties of teaching and learning practices that encompassed high quality child care. “This was an ecological approach to understanding the growth and development of minority children and their families within the context of child care. Our goal was to remain conscious of value and belief systems across class, race, ethnicity and culture,” Howes said. During the first phases of this project, the research team identified



an advisory board of community members active in the child care community. The advisory board, the research staff and additional community members identified sites that served primarily low income children of color, and represented exemplary practices. This group also helped develop the research questions and provided ongoing advice. Once the sites had been nominated, researchers interviewed and observed the quality of the environment, adult child interactions and instructional practices. Both the experiences of individual children and a more global view of the classroom environment were documented. Sharon Ritchie, project director said, “Staff were interviewed to enhance our understanding of the philosophies of the individual programs. In addition, focus groups were held so we could compile multiple perspectives, and for program teachers and directors to communicate about each other’s practices.”

As the project progressed, researchers worked to gauge long-term outcomes at the original 10 sites by following 72 individual children after they completed preschool.

Ten new sites were added in a segment entitled the “Partnership Project.” The criteria for selection were demographics, location and willingness to engage in a year of inquiry about their

## Researchers report that their research has been enhanced by constituent involvement.

– Pam Winton

practices and philosophy. Ritchie said, “Our first objective was to determine, in the context of developing positive relationships between researchers and practitioners, whether unique practices of the original best practices sites could be learned and used by new sites. The second objective was to reduce barriers that traditionally prevent researchers and teachers from benefiting from one another’s expertise.”

Thus, the heart of the research project was the intentional construction of trusting relationships between the researchers and the participants-subjects who were the teachers and directors of the participating child care centers.

### Benefits evident

While much of the data concerning best practices are still being collected and analyzed, the impact of the collaborative relationships is already evident. “Regular, respectful and sustained contact helped us to both collect data and, in partnership with participants, engage in dialogue about program practices and possible changes that could enhance the experience of young children in their care,” Howes said. “Relationships were intentionally redefined to broaden the researcher role to one of partner and supporter and the participant role to include contributor.” Researchers supported this relationship with activities such as financially supporting teachers’ and directors’ expertise and time, holding a reception honoring the work of the child care programs, creating opportunities for the program staffs to meet each other and network and creating a brochure highlighting the sites. Another example: The participants-partners constituent group participated in a Best Practices Synthesis Conference at UCLA. Staff from the sites were either facilitators or discussants for small groups throughout the two days. Each person was paid for her/his work and scholarships were given to

two staff from each child care center. Reflecting significant buy-in and partnership, centers sent additional staff at the center’s expense. An additional support was a Spanish-English translator for simultaneous translation of the proceedings.

Howes said, “We developed specific activities and structures to sustain and define the exchange of information between researchers and constituents. The child care program staff helped interpret the data, plan for next steps, and commented upon and, in some cases, learned to use measurement instruments. A regular feedback loop was created between the ‘research partners’ [NCEDL staff] and the entire staff of the child care programs about study findings and data.”

One outcome was the discovery of the need to focus on directors more; and as a result, the project created a focus group for that set of constituents. >



# C o l l a b o r a t i o n



## Time was a challenge

Researchers said that one challenge to implementing constituent involvement was the time constraints that affected all participants. Considerable time and energy was devoted to creating and sustaining the relationships between constituents and researchers.

Winton said that other NCEDL projects also acknowledged time constraints. "Sustaining involvement and interest over time has been a challenge, but it appears that as long as the work is relevant and meaningful, constituents remain involved and committed."

Winton said, "Overall, we're quite pleased. Researchers report that their research has been enhanced by constituent involvement. Whether that involvement is direct and immediate, as when participant and partners help interpret data or more indirect, as when constituent perspectives are simply shared at advisory board meetings, the contributions by constituents are valued and effective."

She said, "Constituents had opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways, shaping research questions, research implementation and dissemination of research findings. In the Best Practices Study, for example, a center director suggested the sharing of the study results with the child care sites at the conclusion of the study. The center director said that researchers "could not simply expect to take from the sites but ... needed to provide them with feedback about what [we were seeing] in a way that was useful to them in a day-to-day fashion."

Winton said, "Our experiences have set a positive precedent for the involvement of constituents in a variety of roles. Policy will be more relevant and effective when the information shaping it emerges from the real experiences of families and practitioners. Practitioners need information that is accessible, meaningful and conveyed in ways that respect their experiences.

"Families and non-professionals need to help shape research so that it is asking the 'right' questions, and sharing the answers to those questions in ways that consumers can have easy access to, understand and effectively translate into practice," she said. [NCEDL]

## If you want to know more

**Collaboration in building partnerships between families and schools: The national center for early development & learning's kindergarten transition intervention.** Pianta, R.C., Kraft-Sayre, M., Rimm-Kaufmann, S., Gercke, N., & Higgins, T. (2001). *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16(1), 117-132.

More about NCEDL's overall Constituent Advisory Board is online at [www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PAGE/constit.htm](http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PAGE/constit.htm)

# Teacher education programs



## Background

- A growing body of research indicates that the education of early childhood professionals is positively related to the quality of programs.
- Policymakers are increasingly aware of the wide discrepancy between what research says about the important role of early educators and existing policies and practices that don't support an adequately paid, professional workforce.
- The 1998 Head Start Act requires that 50% of Head Start teachers have at least an Associate's degree by 2003.
- The recent report of the Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy recommends that all children in an early childhood program (ages 2-5) have a teacher with at least a Bachelor's degree.
- A critical factor to the success of these state and federal pre-K efforts is an infrastructure for preparing high-quality teachers to enter the early childhood workforce.

**A** NATIONAL SURVEY OF INSTITUTIONS of higher education (IHEs) with early childhood programs indicates that these programs are in need of support, according to Diane Early and Pam Winton, lead researchers on the NCEDL study.

"Overall, programs will not have adequate faculty to meet the projected workforce needs during this era of stronger teacher preparation requirements," said Early. "In fact, using these data we estimate that a 76% increase in early childhood faculty would be needed if all current early childhood teachers were required to obtain a Bachelor's degree."

Data also indicate that the faculty members in early childhood programs are working harder than their colleagues elsewhere in the same IHEs. They are serving more students with fewer full-time faculty members, compared to IHEs as a whole.

The survey found that there are many early childhood teacher preparation programs in the United States (over 1,200 nationwide or almost one-third of all IHEs). Less than half offer a Bachelor's degree, with most offering Associate's or less than Associate's degrees.

"This mirrors current early childhood personnel standards that typically do not require staff to have either a Bachelor's or an Associate's degree," Winton said. >

Data show that the highest-rated challenge of early childhood [teacher education] programs is “difficulty attracting and retaining ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty.”

## Faculty-related findings

Data show that the highest-rated challenge of early childhood programs is “difficulty attracting and retaining ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty.” The challenges that face all of higher education of creating diverse faculties are present in early childhood teacher preparation programs. The fact that early childhood department chairs and directors report attracting and retaining ethnically and linguistically diverse faculty as their biggest challenge affirms their awareness of the problem.

Data comparing early childhood programs with the larger institutions in which they reside indicate that early childhood teacher preparation programs tend to have a small number of faculty who serve a larger number of students. The average student to full-time faculty ratio of 61:1 is 60% higher than the 39:1 ratio of the higher education institutions in which these programs reside.

Furthermore, early childhood programs tend to have a greater percentage of part-time faculty members than do the institutions in which they reside. This is particularly true of early childhood programs at two-year IHEs; they have less than half the number of full-time faculty and almost twice the number of part-time as compared with early childhood teacher preparation programs at four-year IHEs.

The data indicate a gap between the stated mission of the programs and students’ experiences in terms of preparing students to work with children with disabilities. For instance, almost 80% of Bachelor’s programs indicate that preparing early interventionists is part of their mission; however, only 60% require one course or more addressing working with children with disabilities.

## Scope of study

NCEDL conducted a nationally representative survey of chairs and directors of early childhood teacher preparation programs at two and four year colleges and universities. The respondents represent programs that prepare students to work with children any ages prior to kindergarten entry. The survey excluded programs that prepare students to work only with children in kindergarten or older.

The 438 IHEs in the survey were in 47 states, plus Washington DC, Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands.

A similar gap exists with regard to preparing individuals to work with infants and toddlers. For instance, although 95% of the Associate’s programs report that the age range covered by their program includes infants and toddlers, only 60% require a course or more on the topic, and only 63% require a practicum experience.

“Survey data indicate that access to Bachelor’s degree programs after completing an Associate’s degree continues to be a problem because of articulation challenges,” said Early. Articulation refers to the policies, guidelines, and practices that allow students to transfer credits earned in one university or college to another. Half of Associate’s programs offer an Associate’s in Applied Science (AAS), which is usually a terminal degree and not typically included in articulation agreements that guarantee a smooth transition of students from two-year to four-year programs.

This situation creates roadblocks for early childhood personnel graduating from AAS programs who want to pursue four-year degrees. Because four-year programs typically have some leeway in the policies and guidelines set by their universities about accepting credits, the motivation of faculty to address problems is important. Early said, “Our data indicate that faculty in two-year programs are more aware of this challenge than are their colleagues in four-year programs, suggesting that faculty awareness in four year programs may be a roadblock to making needed changes.”

Other major challenges cited by IHEs include “students’ competing work or family-related responsibilities” and “attracting and keeping students due to poor working conditions and wages in the field of early childhood.”

## IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS

- Resources must be earmarked to support the overall quality and accessibility of early childhood teacher education programs.
- Resources must be earmarked to address the lack of diversity in our early childhood faculty ranks.
- Attention must be paid to articulation or transfer-of-credit issues.
- Resources must address the poor working conditions and wages of the early childhood workforce, especially for teachers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

Winton said, “Low salaries, lack of benefits, lack of a coordinated system of career paths, and few rewards for pursuing higher education are characteristics of careers in early childhood education so it is not surprising that attracting students is a challenge.

“No matter how innovative our early childhood programs are, they will fail if we do not provide the infrastructure to support a well-educated and adequately compensated staff,” she said.

**[NCEDL]**

**EDITOR'S NOTE** Data from this survey was used to update the National Directory of Early Childhood Teacher Preparation Institutions. The directory was published in collaboration with the Council for Professional Recognition and is online at <http://www.cdacouncil.org/>. Contact the council if your institution is not listed or if you wish to add, delete or change information. Telephone 202-265-9090 or 800-424-4310 or send email to [directory@cdacouncil.org](mailto:directory@cdacouncil.org).



### If you want to know more

Spotlight #22: **Directory of teacher-prep institutions.** NCEDL. <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/spot22.pdf>

Spotlight #33: **Preparing early childhood workforce.** NCEDL. <http://www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PDFs/spot33.pdf>

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Gallegher Burchinal Bailey Cox Catlett Roberts Clifford Winton Pianta

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- Bailey
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- Pianta
- Rimm-Kaufman
- Roberts
- Saluja
- Scott-Little
- Symons
- Winton

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**Spotlight #31:** (Feb. 2001): *New book looks at windows of opportunity in children.* Chapel Hill: UNC-Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Center, NCEDL.

**Spotlight #32:** (Mar. 2001): *New family literacy bibliography.* Chapel Hill: UNC-Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Center, NCEDL.

**Spotlight #33:** (April-May. 2000): *Preparing the early childhood workforce.* Chapel Hill: UNC-Chapel Hill, FPG Child Development Center, NCEDL.

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