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Porter  
Graham  
Child  
Development  
Institute  
The University of North Carolina  
at Chapel Hill

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All Backgrounds and Abilities

## Our Mission

The mission of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute is to enhance the lives of children and families through interdisciplinary research, technical assistance, professional development, and implementation science. FPG generates knowledge, informs policies, and supports practices to promote positive developmental and educational outcomes for children of all backgrounds and abilities, from the earliest years.

## Our Position on Inclusion

At FPG, we are committed to the policy of inclusion. By that we mean welcoming membership and supporting participation of people with differing abilities; people from different racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds; and people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. At this time, we reaffirm our commitment to this policy and these values.

—Sam Odom, director

## Our Position on Immigration

In this era of “fake news” and “alternative facts,” science can reliably inform policy. Child development research advises that a sense of security provided by family and community is fundamental, that socially insecure environments and circumstances can lead to toxic levels of stress, which, in turn, can affect brain architecture and social-emotional development, and that healthy attitudes toward others are built through a history of positive interactions rather than establishing walls of separation.

In U.S. society, our families face political and personal travel restrictions, deportations of mothers and fathers who have lived here since childhood, and implicit attitudes we often do not perceive or acknowledge that hinder the inclusion and acceptance of all children. In this tumultuous time for many children and families, I reiterate FPG’s policy of tolerance, acceptance, and inclusion. We remain open to a wide range of perspectives, and we remain committed to the work of supporting all children and families, regardless of how they have arrived at our doorstep.

—Sam Odom, director

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All Backgrounds and Abilities

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# All Backgrounds and Abilities



## Introduction

FPG's mission is to work on behalf of children of all backgrounds and abilities. Much of our work embeds a commitment to diversity by directly and indirectly addressing and supporting underserved and underrepresented populations through research, evaluation, technical assistance, professional development, implementation science, and public service. In fact, during a recent survey of FPG researchers and staff, 86% indicated that they work on projects that include racially, ethnically, linguistically, and/or socioeconomically diverse populations. FPG also carries an analogous commitment to children with special needs—identifying the features of disability that potentially impact development and full participation in society, establishing practices that are effective in promoting positive outcomes for children and families, and using this information to inform policy and practice.

FPG's commitment to diversity is not new. The idea for the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute grew out of the turbulence of the 1960s—a decade that demanded social progress. African Americans marched on Washington after integrated groups of demonstrators participated in Freedom Rides across the South. Congress legitimized the ideal of equality with the Equal Pay Act, the Civil Rights Act, voting rights legislation, and immigration reforms. President Lyndon

B. Johnson declared war on poverty, and, on behalf of children in poverty, Head Start was born. Illinois set a progressive precedent for homosexual rights at the state level by abolishing laws proscribing gay sex. Betty Friedan and colleagues founded The National Organization for Women to work for the end of gender discrimination. Disability rights advocates began challenging the status quo of care in institutions and asylums, including Burton Blatt and Fred Kaplan's release of *Christmas in Purgatory, A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation*, which exposed the horrific treatment of people with mental illness and intellectual disabilities. The 1960s also was a time of great tragedy, but the decade nonetheless provided a context that nourished lasting, organized commitments on behalf of peace, the poor, women, gays and lesbians, people of color, people with disabilities, and children.

President John F. Kennedy planted the seeds for FPG in key federal legislation he signed into law the month before he was assassinated. Kennedy's sister Rosemary had intellectual disabilities, which in large part—along with his sister Eunice's encouragement—compelled him early in 1963 to challenge Congress to significantly address mental illness and mental health by establishing interdisciplinary research centers that could profit from “the talents of our best minds.” Not only did the subsequent Mental Retardation Facilities and Community Mental Health Centers Construction Act authorize funding for developmental research centers in university-affiliated facilities, the law also specifically included provisions that supported universities in the construction of research centers. With Kennedy's assassination the following month, the Act marked the end of his planning for America's “New Frontier”—but the legislation's crucial, germinating effects would long outlive its biggest advocate.

After Lyndon Johnson succeeded Kennedy, new programs and policies originating from the White House fueled Johnson's move to a “Great Society,” through which he fostered efforts to reduce inequalities in wealth, health, and education. Johnson signed Medicare and Medicaid into law, and when his “War on Poverty” zeroed in on the plight of children, the 1965 launch of Head Start began more than 50 years of federal funding for early education for children from low-income families.

In this climate, researchers also had begun to consider how early education could affect the trajectories of young children in poverty. In fact, it was the seminal question for husband and wife Hal and Nancy Robinson, psychologists at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

“It was wonderful to be living in a liberal community in the middle of the South, because it was a time of the civil rights movement,” Nancy Robinson remarked years later. “There

was a hopefulness about what could happen economically to our society and with inclusion of everybody, and that was very exciting and made a big difference in what we did there. The other movement at the same time was, of course, in ‘mental retardation.’” And, thanks to Kennedy's pivotal legislation and the federal political context, “There was money.”

Nancy and Hal Robinson and close colleagues at UNC proposed building a center on “retardation” that would include both behavioral and biological research, and the Robinsons became FPG's co-founders—and Hal its first director. The husband-and-wife team planned to establish a model child care center that offered comprehensive services to a small number of infants and toddlers, a place where scientists also could study their learning and development. The Robinsons and their small group of scientists wanted to determine to what extent high-quality child care could impact intellectual deficits in young children from at-risk families. They also wanted to explore the effects of group care for infants, as well as how children from different backgrounds could share the same settings.

“In the 1960s, there was talk about the ‘cycle of poverty’ and how generation after generation had problems in school and life,” said Joseph Sparling, who came to FPG in 1967. He subsequently co-created the curriculum for the most famous study in early childhood care and education, FPG's Abecedarian Project.

“There was a sense of concern, because of the Civil Rights Movement, that there needed to be more equity in society and that universities needed to respond,” Sparling said. “Educators and psychologists saw a social role for themselves. Until then, they primarily viewed their role as creating knowledge. There was a sweeping vision that we were not only going to do research in the field of ‘mental retardation’ but also to produce a program that had practical value to society.”

FPG offered nothing short of a radical child care setting for the South of the 1960s. “It involved Black and White children together,” Nancy Robinson explained. “This was revolutionary in those days and times.”

The fledgling center began what would become a half-century of research, technical assistance, professional development, and other forms of public service. FPG's influence would spread across many professional and disciplinary spheres, and by the time the original center would celebrate its golden anniversary last year as a booming institute, people in 180 countries would use its resources. Today, FPG's Strategic Plan highlights racial, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity as a key area of emphasis, and the Institute's longstanding Race, Culture, and Ethnicity Committee brings together investigators and staff to inform FPG projects and initiatives. Co-chaired this year by Betsy Ayankoya


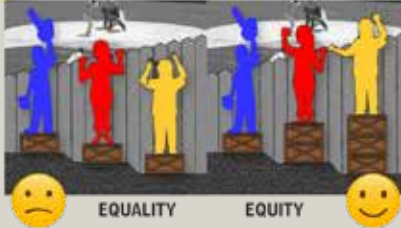


and Allison De Marco, the committee elevates awareness, promotes dialogue, and facilitates a positive work climate, while fostering the development of culturally attuned and culturally relevant work. Members of the committee have joined other FPG strategic groups to strengthen collaborations, and the committee has held recent workshops on the impact of implicit bias on decision-making, recognizing the need for cultural competence, anti-harassment bystander training, and more. During the past year, the committee also created a professional development program that provides funding for FPG staff to attend trainings with a priority on cultural humility, racial equity, and diversity awareness.

FPG’s current work helps programs and schools to positively and productively accommodate our 21st-century melting pot and supports better classrooms for all children. In turn, better environments help create better educational experiences, socio-emotional health, and academic outcomes. Our projects annually have generated several dozen journal articles, reports, presentations, and other publications, much of it directly and indirectly on behalf of children and families from diverse backgrounds. In addition, a cadre of current and former FPG experts provided the editorial engine for the Society for Research on Child Development’s *Social Policy Report*, with key issues focusing on the developmental science behind former President Obama’s “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative and on federal funding for children from low-income families. FPG also regularly evaluates programs that enroll high proportions of young children from minority and diverse language backgrounds, and our professional development center (The PDC@FPG) offers research-based training to administrators and practitioners, especially those who teach and assess young children with

diverse abilities. Meanwhile, FPG’s Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center provides integral infrastructure and support for embedding research-based practices in services across the country for young children with disabilities. In addition, FPG’s annual National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute draws people from across the country and around the world to UNC to learn about the latest research findings, models, and resources to guide inclusive policy, professional development, and practice—and to develop collaborative relationships and cross-agency systems to support early childhood inclusion. The international community, with its great diversity of peoples and perspectives, has increasingly recognized FPG as a place to train scholars, as evidenced both by visiting international scholars to FPG and regular invitations to our investigators to present their work to international audiences.

When 86% of the people in an organization work on behalf of children from diverse backgrounds—and many others within it also work to better the lives of children with disabilities—a single issue on diversity cannot capture it all. This issue of *Early Developments* leaves out more good work than we can include, but every issue of *Early Developments* is in large part about FPG’s research and service on behalf of children and families of all backgrounds. ■

## Racial (In)Equity

WHY is it important?	WHAT is racial equity?	HOW can we achieve racial equity?
 <p>More than half of children born in the U.S. are of color —U.S. Census Bureau 2015</p> <p>America will not be able to continue to compete on a global scale without decreasing racial disparities and improving outcomes for young children of color, a major part of our future workforce.</p>	 <p><b>EQUALITY</b>      <b>EQUITY</b></p> <p>Equality = sameness      Equity = fairness</p>	<p>If we see one fish floating face up we might wonder what was wrong with the fish, but if we see most fish floating face up, maybe we should begin to wonder what is wrong with the water.</p> 
<p>The statistical portrait of the US population broken out by race reveals persistent disparities between people of color and white people in almost every indicator.</p>  <p>Our society has created barriers to opportunities based on race.</p>	<p>In the picture on the left, everyone gets the same size box, yet they still don't have a view of the game. Equality promotes fairness by giving everyone the same thing, one box. BUT, it can only work if everyone starts from the same place.</p> <p>In the picture on the right, each person gets enough boxes to give them a view of the game. We must first ensure EQUITY, everyone with a view of the same. It's about making sure people get access to the same opportunities.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <p>Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares.</p> </div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learn more from the FPG RACE committee! <a href="http://fpg.unc.edu/emphasis-area/race-ethnicity-linguistic-cultural-and-socioeconomic-diversity">http://fpg.unc.edu/emphasis-area/race-ethnicity-linguistic-cultural-and-socioeconomic-diversity</a></li> <li>Attend a racial equity workshop</li> <li>Pay attention to what is going on in your community – attend board meetings and talk with elected officials.</li> <li>Read!</li> <li>Have questions? Email us: <a href="mailto:FPG_RACE@unc.edu">FPG_RACE@unc.edu</a></li> </ul>

Courtesy of FPG’s Race, Culture, and Ethnicity Committee.



# Latino Children Make Greatest Gains in NC Pre-K

A summary of a dozen years of research—and new results from FPG’s evaluation team—reveal the impact of the statewide program on dual-language learners.

“One of our key conclusions was that those children who enter the pre-k program with lower levels of English proficiency make gains at an even greater rate than the other students.”

A summary of 12 years of research on North Carolina’s pre-kindergarten program for at-risk 4-year-olds shows that “dual-language learners” make the greatest academic progress in the program. According to the FPG report, while students in NC Pre-K advance across all spheres of learning, the program is especially beneficial for the state’s dual-language learners.

“On the whole, children in NC Pre-K exceed normal expectations for the rate of developmental growth, both while in the program and afterward in kindergarten,” said Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, director of FPG’s National Pre-K and Early Learning Evaluation Center and lead author of the report. “But one of our key conclusions was that those children who enter the pre-k program with lower levels of English proficiency make gains at an even greater rate than the other students.”

Peisner-Feinberg said the report’s conclusions are consistent with FPG’s comprehensive review of

research on young Latino or Spanish-speaking children, which confirmed in 2013 that widely available public programs help dual-language learners make important academic gains. That review determined that children with lower English-language abilities than their peers benefit the most from programs like Head Start and public pre-k.

According to Peisner-Feinberg, maximizing gains for dual-language learners is essential because the gap usually widens as they grow older. She said focusing on classroom quality—especially on the instructional environments of dual-language learners—is essential to understanding how to maximize their opportunities for

learning.

Peisner-Feinberg headed another review of research in order to examine several measures of the quality of early childhood education specifically for dual-language learners.

“We found that general measures capture overall instructional quality and its associations with child outcomes similarly for dual-language learners and the wider early childhood population, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that all children experience learning environments in the same way,” she explained. “In fact, measures designed specifically with dual-language learners in mind do capture different dimensions of the learning environment that are especially important for these children.”

Peisner-Feinberg, who has led the FPG teams in conducting annual evaluation studies of NC Pre-K since its inception as More at Four in 2001, concluded her summary report on the program’s first dozen years with recommendations that included further improving in-







struction—even for the group making the largest advances in the program.

“As a group, Latinos now represent at least 1 in 12 children in about half of the states in the country,” she said at the time. “Given the research and demographic shifts, it’s essential to carefully measure the quality of classroom experiences for dual-language learners and to optimize their learning in our state and across the country.”

NC Pre-K is a state-funded educational program for eligible 4-year-olds, designed to enhance their school readiness skills. To date, the statewide program has served over 350,000 children, with an average annual cost per child of about \$5,000.

Children are eligible for NC Pre-K primarily based on age and family income (up to 75% of state median income), although children with higher family incomes qualify with at least one of the following risk factors: limited English proficiency, identified disability, chronic health condition, or educational need; or a parent actively serving in the military. NC Pre-K provides funding for serving eligible children in classroom-based educational programs in a variety of setting types, including public schools, Head Start, and private child care centers (for-profit and nonprofit).

NC Pre-K operates on a school schedule for 6½ hours per day for 180 days of the year. Local sites are

expected to meet a variety of program standards around curriculum, screening and assessment, training and education levels for teachers and administrators, class size, adult:child ratios, North Carolina child care licensing levels, and provision of other program services.

Peisner-Feinberg’s current evaluation team includes Treshawn Anderson, Irina L. Otto Mokrova, Maria C. Sanchez, Judith L. Owen, Karen Van Manen, Stefanie M. Schwartz, and Gina W. Walker.

The team’s most recent evaluation of NC Pre-K determined overall that children who attended the program performed significantly better on measures of math skills and on a measure of executive function. On the latter, Peisner-Feinberg said a subsample of dual-language learners experienced an even greater effect than the overall sample, another important benefit of NC Pre-K due to the predictive power of executive function with regard to later academic performance.

“This research adds to the growing evidence about the power of high quality pre-k experiences to support the development of young children,” said Peisner-Feinberg, “especially dual-language learners.” ■

### **“Effects of Participation in the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program at the End of Kindergarten: 2015-2016 Statewide Evaluation Executive Summary”**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8859](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8859)

### **“North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten Program Evaluation: Summary of Research (2002–2013)”**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/7086](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/7086)

### **FPG’s review of research on dual-language learners in Head Start and public pre-k programs**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/6547](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/6547)

### **FPG’s review of research on early care and education quality measures with dual-language learners**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/7112](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/7112)

### **FPG’s National Pre-K and Early Learning Evaluation Center**

[prekeval.fpg.unc.edu/](http://prekeval.fpg.unc.edu/)



# FPG Partners with Spanish-Immersion Elementary School to Solve Class Participation Questions

**FPG researchers sought answers about home language, the language of instruction, peer networks, and classroom participation—and how these pieces of the puzzle fit together.**

When the principal of a Spanish-immersion elementary school approached FPG with a mystery, a groundbreaking new project was born. Researchers Doré R. LaForett and Ximena Franco have been examining how the school's language immersion program affects different students' academic engagement and social networks.

"The principal had noticed something that immediately got our attention," LaForett explained. "She said it seemed to her that students whose home language was Spanish weren't participating in classes—even when teachers primarily taught in Spanish."

According to LaForett, if in fact this were the case, it could contradict theory and expectations about Spanish-speaking learners in immersion classrooms. Many researchers believe that dual-language education can help to reduce the achievement gap for English learners, and LaForett and Franco were eager to launch a partnership with the elementary school on the "Social Networks and Academic Engagement in a Bilingual Education" project.

"We followed 340 pre-k to fifth-grade students," explained Franco, who also previously served as project director for a multi-site study on the relationship between language exposure and language development of bilingual children. Equally split by gender, 67% of the participants in the new study were White, and 65% did not receive free school lunch. Students' home language backgrounds differed: 58% mostly English, 30% mostly Spanish, and 12% equal English and Spanish. "The school employs a variety of models across classrooms, from a 50-50 English-Spanish mix to 90-10 mostly Spanish instruction, depending on the grade level, track, and subject."

In addition to conducting their own classroom observations, LaForett and

Franco gathered data from teachers and children. “We’re looking at which students hang out with whom and which students actually are participating in class,” said LaForett, who has been involved in several research projects and initiatives focused on young dual-language learners and their families. “We’re even asking the students to tell us who they consider to be good students.”

In the end, the researchers hoped to answer questions about home language, the language of instruction, peer networks, and classroom participation—and how these pieces of the puzzle fit together.

“No one else is doing this,” LaForett said. No previous research had studied academic engagement in dual-language settings, nor English-language learners’ peer relationships in such settings.

With regard to student engagement, when LaForett and Franco controlled for student socioeconomic status and gender, they found that ratings of teachers in English and in Spanish instruction classrooms using the 50/50 model did not reflect differences by home language.

However, home language had a significant effect on engagement based on ratings of teachers in the 90/10 model. In these settings, teachers rated students from equal Spanish and English home language families as significantly more engaged than students from mostly Spanish backgrounds.

Overall, peers and teachers rated students with higher socioeconomic status and students who were not from mostly Spanish-speaking households as engaged.

When LaForett and Franco looked at student social networks, they found that across student and teacher reports, more segregation by home language occurred in the earlier grades (pre-k to first) and later grades (fourth



Ximena Franco

and fifth), but that there was openness in second and third grades. Across the full sample, again controlling for socioeconomic status and gender, they found no significant differences by home language with regard to whether students were liked by their peers.

Teacher ratings also showed no differences by home language across the school as a whole, but in kindergarten and second grade they rated students from equal backgrounds in Spanish

and English as having more social connections than mostly English or mostly Spanish students.

According to LaForett and Franco, these results suggest there may be grade-level variations in students’ cross-cultural peer relationships. Nonetheless, overall, dual-language educational settings may create the conditions to promote cross-cultural friendships, and students who are more “bilingual” may serve as important social bridges in connecting students with different cultural backgrounds. ■

see also

**free online training developed by Ximena Franco and FPG colleague Nicole Gardner-Neblett, “Dual Language Learners: Strategies for Successful Opportunities in ECE”**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8383](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8383)



**A new FPG study builds on previous research on Educare schools and reveals benefits to a diverse group of children.**

# A Single Year of High-Quality Early

**N**ew research from FPG reveals that one year of high-quality early education and care at age 2 brings multiple benefits for children in poverty. Not only do language skills improve, but children also have more positive interactions with their parents and display fewer problem behaviors.

“The achievement gap for children from low-income families has been an enduring problem, but relatively few programs have been successful in narrowing that gap,” said Noreen M. Yazejian, FPG senior research scientist and the study’s principal investigator. “These findings suggest that a comprehensive, research-based early childhood education program can make a difference for children even after just one year.”

Yazejian led a randomized study of 239 infants and toddlers in Educare schools in Chicago, Milwaukee, Omaha, and Tulsa, comparing children who were assigned to attend Educare to those who were not. About half of the children in the study were African American and about a third were Hispanic.

Educare is an enhanced Early Head Start and Head Start program for children from low-income families. It includes children from 6 weeks old until entry into kindergarten. Twenty-one Educare schools currently serve 3,400 children across the country, providing full-day, full-year center-based education and care.

“We found that children in Educare schools had significantly greater auditory and expressive language skills,” said Yazejian. “The size of Educare’s effect on language was greater than effects reported for other early interventions.”

Previous research has shown that language skills are most malleable for children before age 4, which in large part explains high-quality early education’s potential power. Early language skills are a precursor to emergent literacy skills and are strongly related to later language, reading, and school achievement.



# Education Has Broad Effects

“FPG’s Abecedarian Project demonstrated that early language development almost entirely accounts for differences in child outcomes after preschool,” said FPG senior research scientist Donna Bryant, the Educare study’s co-principal investigator. “All children entered the new Educare study before age 19 months, with both the Educare and control groups scoring near national average on a language measure at study entry. Whereas Educare children maintained their developmental level over the course of a year, children in the control group decreased relative to national norms.”

Yazejian said Educare’s positive effect on problem behaviors is also a key finding, because prior studies have shown that the same behavior regulation skills promoted by Educare are linked with school success.

“Many researchers view social-emotional and academic skills as interconnected,” she said. “Children with problem behaviors may frustrate teachers, and teachers may provide such children with less positive feedback and instruction.”

The study also found a positive effect on sensitive and responsive parent-child interactions. Yazejian and Bryant attribute this to the family support and opportunities for parent engagement that Educare schools provide.

Previous studies have shown that early parent-child relationships are important because they predict social and academic outcomes in the elementary school years, through middle grades, and even in high school.

“Educare is able to offer a high-quality early education experience by promoting high-quality classroom instruction, partnering with families to promote children’s development, offering ongoing professional learning for staff, and collecting and using data to improve the program,” said Jessie Rasmussen, president of the Buffett Early Childhood Fund, a leading partner of Educare.

“We know that healthy development in the first years of a child’s life is essential, and this study shows that a high-



quality, comprehensive early learning program like Educare has the potential to improve the outcomes of low-income infants and toddlers,” said Diana Rauner, president of the Ounce of Prevention Fund, also a leading partner of Educare.

Yazejian and Bryant’s research team included FPG’s Margaret Burchinal, as well as Sydney Hans from the University of Chicago School of Social Service Administration, Diane Horm from the University of Oklahoma-Tulsa, Lisa St. Clair from Omaha Program Evaluation Services, and Nancy File from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Their

study will follow children until they enter kindergarten.

Findings from the new Educare study add to a growing body of research revealing better outcomes for children from low-income families who receive high-quality early education, including prior research on Educare.

In 2015, Yazejian’s study of children across all 21 Educare schools revealed that both an earlier age of entry and a longer duration of care boosted language skills. That study also found that Educare’s effects on children whose first language is not English are especially powerful.

“Most dual-language learners in this study were in classrooms where English was the primary instructional language but in which one staff member could use their home language as needed to support learning,” Yazejian said when the 2015 results were released. “It’s not surprising our findings show they quickly acquired skills in English.” ■

## “Child and Parenting Outcomes After 1 Year of Educare”

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8803](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8803)

## “High-Quality Early Education: Age of Entry and Time in Care Differences in Student Outcomes for English-Only and Dual Language Learners”

[fpg.unc.edu/node/7632](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/7632)



# “The One Doing the Talking Is the One Learning”

**With an innovative online course, FPG’s FirstSchool project is helping teachers hear every child in class.**

Over 11,000 pre-kindergarten to third-grade students have directly benefitted from a new online course that FPG’s FirstSchool team has developed for teachers and administrators. The course, which researchers piloted in North Carolina’s Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools and later offered statewide in Minnesota, provides strategies to capitalize on the educational value of increasing opportunities for students to speak in class.

FirstSchool principal investigator Sharon Ritchie said experience in the field, as well as data the project has collected, have shown that teachers rarely allow children to talk in class.

“Children listen to teachers and, when they have a chance to talk at all, it’s often in very short utterances,” Ritchie explained. “For instance, at the front of the room, a well-intentioned teacher directs students’ attention to the figure of a plant on the board, pointing to the plant parts and only asking students to name them out loud. We’ve seen this sort of scenario a hundred times. It’s especially com-

mon in schools that principally serve students of color and those who come from less-advantaged homes.”

istrators who direct them to stay on schedule with the curriculum, while others fear never regaining students’ attention if they start letting them talk. There’s a mindset that suggests that silence and compliance are the mark of a good teacher.”

According to Oertwig, however, silent classrooms are cause for concern.

“Too often children of color and those who come from less advantaged homes are relegated to memorizing isolated facts and doing what they are told,” she explained. “They don’t learn how to tell their stories or articulate their experiences. They don’t learn

“Our focus is on letting the children talk,” Crawford said. “Oral language opportunities contribute to equitable education experiences, particularly for children of color.”

The first participants from Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools included a central office administrator, two principals, and several teachers across each pre-k to third-grade level. Leaders, staff, and students at the participating schools were each comprised of diverse populations.

After the pilot course’s completion, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) contacted FirstSchool, and,

“Teachers’ responses suggested they valued student expression and vocabulary development more—and that they also saw data as more important after their participation in the course.”

mon in schools that principally serve students of color and those who come from less-advantaged homes.”

Ritchie said that no matter what district, state, or grade across the pre-k to third-grade age span, the data reveal that meaningful conversations between teachers and students are limited to an average of 28 total minutes per day—and that intentional vocabulary development is almost non-existent. “This is despite research showing that oral language and vocabulary development are strong predictors of third grade outcomes,” she added.

Sam Oertwig, a scientist on the project, said at times it has seemed as if “a culture of silence” pervades classrooms.

“There are many reasons for this creeping silence,” Oertwig said. “Some teachers feel pressure from admin-

istrators who direct them to stay on schedule with the curriculum, while others fear never regaining students’ attention if they start letting them talk. There’s a mindset that suggests that silence and compliance are the mark of a good teacher.”

how to use language as a tool to craft an argument or explain their thinking. New vocabulary doesn’t feel relevant to them, and working together with a friend to solve a challenging problem isn’t part of their experience.”

With a grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and funding awarded by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the FirstSchool team developed an online course in order to foster more in-class opportunities for oral language.

Gisele Crawford, a social research specialist on the project, said the FirstSchool team developed course content, activities, and quizzes that draw on research and lessons they had learned from thousands of hours the team has spent in pre-k to third-grade classrooms.

based on feedback from the pilot and in collaboration with MDE, FirstSchool revised the course and added supports. MDE hired school personnel to serve as regional liaisons, supporting course participants in person and online.

Adam Holland, a researcher who evaluated the course’s impact, said that through the course teachers worked on pre-planning higher-order thinking questions, having sustained conversations with children, asking children to explain their reasoning, and building classroom community through morning and afternoon meetings, among other strategies.

“Research supports prioritizing communication in these ways,” said Holland. “These kinds of practices can change the classroom atmosphere dramatically.”

**Principal Dewey Schara touts FirstSchool's online course in a video for his school district.**



Holland's evaluation showed that the longer teachers participated in the course, the more likely they were to teach children new vocabulary.

"We found that teachers' dispositions can be changed with few resources and little time," he added. "Teachers' responses suggested they valued student expression and vocabulary development more—and that they also saw data as more important after their participation in the course."

For example, teachers reported the course offered "great strategies" and, as a result, that they were "allowing students to communicate more and probe their thoughts as well as engage in storytelling."

Another teacher said she especially valued one of the course's core principles. "I hope that the phrase 'the one doing the talking is the one learning' will stick with me throughout my teaching career."

"I didn't know what I didn't know," said Dewey Schara, principal of Neveln School in Minnesota's Austin Public Schools. Schara took the online course as part of a series on leadership training and noted the importance of access to current research.

Neveln teacher Maria Mickelson said that such research supports allowing her students to speak in class.

"My students' oral language and vocabulary are key predictors of future successes," she said. "So I'm giving my students more opportunities to express themselves."

Dawn Pope, a speech language pathologist in the Austin school district, said that insights from the course guide her instruction. "It really focused me in making sure that while students were in my room, they were able to practice the oral language targets that I was trying to teach them."

Educators also said the course made them more aware of how their colleagues were teaching.

"When I see other teachers work or hear what they are doing in their classrooms, I am now noticing the ways they incorporate communication to deepen learning," said one teacher. "And I am inspired to try these or similar ideas in my own classroom."

According to Holland, not only does FirstSchool's online course deliver critical information to pre-k to third-grade educators, but it does so cost effectively.

"We've directly impacted over 10,000 children, extending our reach far beyond what we would have been able to do with in-person professional development," Holland explained. "These children will complete third grade with improved skills around vo-

cabulary and with having had more opportunities to collaborate with their peers around learning. They'll be better readers and better learners, allowing them to take advantage of more opportunities in school and later in life."

Sharon Ritchie, now a 12-year veteran of FirstSchool, said that bringing such change to schools is difficult.

"Even when teachers are ready to learn new ways of teaching, resources in education are strained," she said. "Education agencies often do not have the funds or the time to put the right opportunities in front of the right educators."

However, she added, teachers will go to great lengths for their students.

"FirstSchool always finds educators who are willing to advocate on behalf of their students," said Ritchie. "They become articulate about the research behind their practices, find ways of meeting school and district expectations and providing rich experiences for their students—and they develop their own skill and knowledge base in order to be more effective in their roles." ■

**FirstSchool**  
[firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/](http://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/)





# Storytelling Skills Support Early Literacy for African American Children

**Preschool oral narrative skills are a significant predictor of emergent literacy for African American kindergartners.**

**E**arly narrative skills are tied to kindergarten literacy among young African American children, according to recent research from FPG. The study was the first to demonstrate the connection between African American preschoolers' storytelling abilities and the development of their early reading skills.

"Previous research found an association between oral narratives and literacy at later stages of development," said FPG researcher Nicole Gardner-Neblett, who led the study. "But our findings suggest how important storytelling is for African American children at the earliest stages."

Gardner-Neblett explained that oral narrative skills emerge as early as age 2 and continue to develop as children engage in interactions with parents and others who provide guidance and feedback. Although experts have

suggested the importance of oral language skills on literacy during the preschool years, much of the research until now has focused on associations between early language and later reading outcomes in elementary school, leaving many unanswered questions.

Gardner-Neblett and Iheoma Iruka, director of research and evaluation at the Buffett Early Childhood Institute, looked at these unsolved early developmental questions by focusing on preschoolers' skills with oral narratives and on

## Spotlight on Nicole Gardner-Neblett

FPG advanced research scientist Nicole Gardner-Neblett has been selected for a prestigious 18-month ZERO TO THREE Fellowship. The Fellowship Program brings together multidisciplinary, cross-sector leaders who work across the country and around the world to positively impact the lives of infants and young children through research, practice, advocacy, and policy.

“Nicole has an impressive background in infant and toddler language development, and she will bring a unique perspective to the team,” said Matthew Melmed, executive director of ZERO TO THREE. “She will help us transform and advance programs, systems, and policies that help give all children a strong start in life.”

Gardner-Neblett is also a research assistant professor in UNC’s Department of Psychology and Neuroscience. She co-authored *More Than Baby Talk*, a popular guide for early childhood professionals on research-based practices to promote language and communication skills among infants and toddlers.

With FPG director Sam Odom, Gardner-Neblett is spearheading a new collaboration with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) to establish the North Carolina Consortium on Black Children and Families. In addition to sharing resources with faculty at participating HBCUs, FPG scientists anticipate benefiting from the perspectives, knowledge, and skills that faculty from HBCUs will bring to joint research and professional development projects preparing or training early childhood educators and others who work with young Black children and their families.

“This consortium renews and establishes valuable connections with HBCUs in North Carolina,” said Gardner-Neblett. “FPG will learn from important scholars and contribute to securing a better future for Black children in our state.”



the same children's emergent literacy at kindergarten. Their study's sample included 6,150 students nationwide.

The researchers found that oral narratives of children from low-income families generally received lower scores than other children's oral narratives. Similarly, children from low-income families did not score as well as their peers on reading achievement.

"This may reflect socioeconomic disparities evidenced in other studies," Gardner-Neblett explained.

Somewhat surprisingly, she said, the study did not find a link between oral narrative skills and emergent literacy for the overall sample. However, when Gardner-Neblett and Iruka broke down the findings demographically, one group was different.

"We found that preschool oral narrative skills were a significant predictor of emergent literacy for poor and non-poor African American kindergartners," Gardner-Neblett said. "Only for the African American children."

"Oral story telling has been an important part of the histories of many peoples—and an especially rich aspect of the Black culture across the African diaspora," said Iruka, whose own life included preschool care in Nigeria between trans-Atlantic moves.

According to Gardner-Neblett, previous research suggests that African American children are skilled in telling complex narratives of many different types, which may provide clues to the new study's findings.

"Having a repertoire of different styles suggests that African American children are flexible in their narratives, varying the narratives according to context," she said. "This flexibility may benefit African American children as they transition from using oral language to the decoding and comprehension of written text."

She added that preschool oral narrative skills may be as important to children of other ethnicities, too.



"Something different is going on for African American children before they receive any formal instruction in kindergarten," said Gardner-Neblett. "But for other groups, the association between narrative and literacy may be as crucial—but not evident until later stages of development, as other studies have shown."

Gardner-Neblett

and Iruka said the new findings suggest the importance of recognizing and capitalizing on storytelling skills to help young African American children with their early reading development.

"Building on children's oral narrative skills is a strategy for schools looking to connect with children," said Iruka. "Especially as schools support children of color who come from a culture that has cherished these skills."

She added there still was much to learn about early literacy. "Better understanding the relationships between early narrative skills and literacy will help inform strategies to improve reading skills among all children," she said.

Gardner-Neblett's latest research looks at how African American boys' and girls' storytelling skills at preschool differ in affecting the development of their reading skills across elementary school. ■

### **Abstract and article**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/7809](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/7809)

# Rural Families Provide Researchers with Key Insights on Children

The Family Life Project and a new comprehensive IES study build on FPG's longstanding commitment to researching the care and education of children in rural settings.

Since 2003, rural North Carolina and Pennsylvania residents have been providing valuable evidence to FPG researchers about how parenting, child care, and many other factors affect young children and their families.

Scientists at FPG have followed 1,292 children from birth for the Family Life Project, oversampling for children from African American families in North Carolina and from low-income families in both states. These families have never been more important to understanding how children grow and learn in rural communities.

According to FPG fellow Lynne Vernon-Feagans, principal investigator of the Family Life Project, understanding the relationship between children's literacy and later achievement is especially important in rural communities. As these children grow older they typically have fewer good educational and employment opportunities than children in other areas.

"Thirty percent of urban adults have a college degree, but less than 18 percent of rural adults have a college degree," said Vernon-Feagans. "These differences in education have more dire implications in rural America now than they did 40 years ago, when over half of all high school graduates lived in the middle class."

Vernon-Feagans, the William C. Friday Distinguished Professor in UNC's School of Education, explained that people with only high school degrees have lost ground economically since 1970.

As the Family Life Project now studies children as they progress from fifth through seventh grade, clues may emerge about why those students might have less access to later opportunities.

"Which parenting practices—and which instructional practices—are most important to building literacy for rural children?" Vernon-Feagans asked. "Does good instruction at elementary and middle school help our most vulnerable children achieve their potential even in the face of many home challenges? These are important questions."

Roughly 20 percent of children in the United States live in rural communities, but surprisingly little research had looked at children from these areas. Over the years, in collaboration with Mark Greenberg at Penn State University and researchers at several other universities and institutes, Vernon-Feagans and her colleagues have published numerous studies that have shed light on what it means to be a child in rural America. With data from living rooms to schools, the project has shown the impacts of parenting, poverty, early child care experiences, classroom quality, and other variables on a wide variety of child outcomes.

Key findings have shown how important it is for parents and teachers to engage in complex and detailed interactions with their young children, how poverty brings challenges that affect parenting, how fathers make crucial contributions to child development, and more.



For instance, project director Patricia Garrett-Peters—along with Vernon-Feagans, Michael Willoughby, and Irina Mokrova—determined one of the important links between family income and kindergartners’ achievement. They found that poverty is related to household disorganization, and that, in turn, household disorganization is a stressor on academic performance. In addition, FPG research scientist Mary Bratsch-Hines used data from the Family Life Project in a different study that explored the role of child care instability on the social outcomes of 4-year-olds.

FPG advanced research scientist Allison C. De Marco and Vernon-Feagans headed another recent study that explored the effects of child care subsidies on children from low-income families. Such child care subsidy programs are designed to lessen the number of families for whom child care limits or excludes opportunities to work, and, therefore, they support economic self-sufficiency. De Marco and Vernon-Feagans found that families who used subsidies were more likely to receive better quality care, regardless of the type of care they chose for their children.

Vernon-Feagans said one thing in particular stands as a testament to the families she studies.

“It’s quite amazing that young children even from poor families in rural communities are on target when they start school,” she said. “This may be because of a variety of protective factors—such as less exposure to violent crime than

in urban areas. More contact with extended families and churches may also bring these children a better sense of community.”

Vernon-Feagans added, however, that the education and income gap between adults in rural communities remains wide and troubling.

“We need more research, but our families in North Carolina and Pennsylvania are helping us understand why and how this happens,” she said. “With their help, the Family Life Project continues to unlock clues that can show how to close that gap.”

As the Family Life Project continues, Vernon-Feagans also will be helping to build on FPG’s work in rural North Carolina through a new project that will study the early learning experiences of the state’s children from pre-kindergarten through third grade in order to identify policies and practices that promote school success.

The new study, headed by FPG senior research scientist Margaret Burchinal, will be a key component of the Early Learning Network, which the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) funds. The network looks at systems-level policies and practices, teacher-child interactions and classroom practices, and child and family characteristics to identify effective policies and practices for early education.

“This is an exciting opportunity to look at the quality of early learning from new perspectives,” said Burchinal. “We



will follow children from pre-k into elementary school and gather enough data, from enough different sources, to tell us what we can do to promote academic success for vulnerable children.”

“As we increase access to early education, we need high-quality research to show us the most effective ways to prepare children for success in elementary school and beyond,” said Acting Secretary of Education John King last year in an announcement from IES. “The Early Learning Network will develop important information and tools that will help policymakers and practitioners improve preschool and elementary school teaching and learning across the country.”

Burchinal, a veteran of FPG’s Abecedarian Project and many other seminal studies of early education, will rely on an experienced team with established ties in North Carolina. Joining her is co-principal investigator Ellen Peisner-Feinberg, who for several years has headed FPG’s annual evaluations of the state’s pre-kindergarten program.

“We know from our previous research that NC Pre-K benefits children academically,” said Peisner-Feinberg, who also directs FPG’s National Pre-K and Early Learning Evaluation Center. “This study will help us understand how to extend those positive outcomes through the early elementary grades.”

Vernon-Feagans will oversee the study’s exploration of teacher-child interactions, and Lora Cohen-Vogel, the Robena and Walter E. Hussman, Jr. Distinguished Professor of Policy and Education Reform at the UNC School of Education, will lead the study’s integral look at policy, an often understudied area in early childhood education.

“We need to understand state and local policies as they relate to the early educational experiences of rural children in North Carolina,” said Cohen-Vogel. “Policymakers are concerned about program effectiveness and how their early childhood investments can lead to positive, long-term effects for kids. We will help them get answers.”

Rounding out Burchinal’s team is a formidable collection of FPG experts, including Ximena Franco, who will study English-Spanish dual-language learners; Claire Baker, who will look at parental involvement and the role of African American fathers in promoting academic success; Mary Bratsch-Hines, who will serve as project director; and Irina Mokrova, who will contribute statistical analyses.

In addition to Burchinal’s team, the new IES Early Learning Network comprises researchers from a social policy nonprofit and four universities, which Burchinal called “a first-rate group.”

Thomas W. Brock, Commissioner of the National Center for Education Research at IES, said the Early Learning Network would lead to crucial advances.

“The idea is for the network teams to develop a deeper understanding of problems and solutions surrounding the issue,” Brock said, “and then share what they have learned with policymakers and practitioners to improve teaching and learning for all students.” ■

### **Family Life Project**

[fpg.unc.edu/projects/family-life-project](http://fpg.unc.edu/projects/family-life-project)

### **Early Education in Rural North Carolina**

[fpg.unc.edu/projects/early-education-rural-north-carolina](http://fpg.unc.edu/projects/early-education-rural-north-carolina)

# Helping Children of All Abilities: FPG Celebrates 30 Years of Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education

On the occasion of the 30TH anniversary of landmark legislation for the field, Christina Kasprzak and Joan Danaher explain how FPG's Trohanis TA Projects have shaped technical assistance and impacted programs that serve young children with disabilities and their families.



FPG's Trohanis Technical Assistance Projects, named for technical assistance pioneer Pat Trohanis, have provided integral support for Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education—programs that annually enrich the lives of hundreds of thousands of children with disabilities in every U.S. state and territory.

The passage of Public Law 99-457 in 1986 established Part C and mandated Part B: Section 619 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These programs have helped to improve child and family outcomes while defending the rights of young children with disabilities and the families of those children. On the occasion of the legislation's 30TH anniversary, FPG's Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA Center) director Christina Kasprzak and associate director Joan Danaher talked about FPG's role in supporting the implementation of PL 99-457.

## **The Passage of Public Law 99-457**

**Joan Danaher:** Before he came to FPG, former director Jim Gallagher was an important influence in federal policy for early intervention and early childhood special education, including the first federally funded demonstration projects and technical assistance projects to support them. At FPG, Jim mentored graduate students in policy development and analysis, and FPG also became a locus for national technical assistance projects under the leadership of Pat Trohanis. Barbara Smith, one of Jim's students who is now at the University of Colorado Denver, was instrumental in developing policy options to expand the early childhood provisions of the law. Working with the Council for Exceptional

Children, those ideas were funneled through congressional committee staffers to the legislators who passed the law.

When PL 99-457 was passed, FPG was already positioned to support it after fifteen years of experience providing technical assistance to local and state programs.

**Christina Kasprzak:** The Trohanis TA Projects have a long history of supporting early intervention and preschool special education—45 years and counting—and Pat Trohanis was an early innovator here at FPG. For many years, he designed and delivered TA that focused on building effective systems and implementing effective practices. He was a brilliant leader. He understood people, and he understood systems. He also had a passion for young children with disabilities and their families. His work supported programs nationally and internationally, bringing recognition and support for systems for young children with disabilities.

**Joan Danaher:** At the time that PL 99-457 was passed, FPG was supporting states in planning statewide services for birth to school-aged children with disabilities through the OSEP-funded State Technical Assistance Resource Team (START), which Gloria Harbin directed. The new law created the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers and added a disincentive for states not to serve all children 3–5 years old with disabilities. Because of these changes to the early childhood programs, OSEP [the federal Office of Special Education Programs] ended the START TA project and issued a call for a new national early childhood TA center that would promote the development of comprehen-



sive, coordinated interagency systems of family-centered services for children birth through age 5. But services for infants and toddlers with disabilities were different from the preschool Special Education program. The governor of a state could assign the lead agency for their Early Intervention program, and some federal requirements meant it was a much different animal from preschool Special Ed. So, it wasn't easy within states for services for infants and toddlers to synch up with services for preschool-aged children.

Under Pat Trohanis, promoting a new seamless system of services for children birth to age 5—between two agencies for different age groups—became the responsibility of FPG's new center, the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance System (NECTAS). It was an exciting time for having the opportunity to get early intervention institutionalized, but it was very challenging—and we really had to hit the ground running.

## The Legacy of TA at FPG

**Joan Danaher:** Our technical assistance projects have responded to the evolution of the federal early childhood programs, and we have a perspective on the complete system implementation, starting from local services and demonstration projects and outreach. If you take each aspect of what we have helped clients with over the years—from the Technical Assistance Development System [created in 1971] and START, then, NECTAS and then NECTAC [the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center, which evolved into the present-day ECTA Center]—some of the same ideas and concepts are refined and enhanced through a spiraling of sophistication, complexity, and

an expanding evidence base. The evolution of the TA centers through NECTAC is described in a 2009 article, as is this notion of increasing complexity.<sup>1</sup>

For example, in the early days, we were doing TA for demonstration projects and helping them document their models in order to replicate them in other places. Today we approach it through implementation science, which gets to that same core of providing a service to the client that is replicated effectively. Services have to be institutionalized, through “systems drivers,” like infrastructure for personnel and finance and governance and all of those aspects that we addressed three decades ago at a much more basic level. Yet, because we have marched down that road in each succeeding generation of projects, we are now seeing the implementation of the law more completely.

**Christina Kasprzak:** The Trohanis TA Projects have contributed to the



field by defining what it means to deliver effective TA. Effective TA is grounded in social science. It is grounded in the questions *What outcomes are we trying to accomplish?* and *What changes can we make that will result in improvement?* Effective TA takes an outcome orientation based on program evaluation, addressing questions like *Which services are producing intended results?* *Who is benefiting?* and *Where are improvements needed?*

Effective TA is also grounded in systems change literature, adult learning principles, and shares concepts with improvement science, and, in more recent years, it has incorporated the learnings from implementation science.

From 45 years of TA we also have learned some principles of effective TA. We've learned that TA providers must offer a broad range of TA strategies and different levels of intensity in order to effectively respond to the diverse and unique needs of clients. We've learned that to be effective, we must build and maintain trusting relationships. Clients must have confidence that their TA providers understand the context of their work, have the content expertise to address their needs, and will provide timely, evidence-based information and resources. Our experience has seen that effective TA requires TA providers and clients to work collaboratively and that successful improvement efforts are built on existing strengths and initiatives. Over the years, we've provided technical assistance to all 60 states and territories—helping them build their systems of service. Our TA projects have supported that evolution from the early stages of establishing a system to serve children with disabilities, to supporting their access to services, and then to focusing on

improving the quality of services and outcomes for children and families.

**Joan Danaher:** We've helped write state policies—guidance for practitioners and how children are served—helped with personnel systems issues, and much more. Over time, the evolution from the emphasis on *access to services* to *quality of services* to improving *outcomes from services* means it's not good enough anymore only to get children in the door. Today, the question is: What *kinds* of services and how *high* is the quality and what are the *outcomes*? This is what has to be the measure of success for the law. Not just getting the kids in the door and providing enough trained professionals—we want to see improved outcomes.

### Impacts on Systems, Practices, and Child and Family Outcomes

**Joan Danaher:** Over the years, we would always provide OSEP with documents concerning the implementation of the law in states. Those were summary kinds of documents—a look at what's going on—as well as survey information from the states about how and what was happening on that level. For a number of years, we produced annual yearbooks for Part C and 619, almanacs that covered a lot of different topics about what the states were doing.

Staff here also participated in writing journal articles and other papers that

congressional staff received, and Pat Trohanis provided testimony to congress. All of this would help OSEP and the administration formulate decisions about what changes they needed to address.

**Christina Kasprzak:** One area where we've impacted the field is around the measurement of child outcomes. Prior to 2004, some state Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education programs had individualized efforts to measure outcomes. The efforts that existed were disparate. Between 2004 and 2008, the Early Childhood Outcomes [ECO] Center and NECTAC collaborated with federal partners, state administrators, researchers, family members, practitioners and other partners to define outcomes for EI and ECSE, and to assist states in developing systems for measuring these outcomes. Lynne Kahn was director of NECTAC and led our subcontract for the ECO Center, and Kathy Hebbeler was the director of ECO at SRI International. That work led to recommendations to the Office of Special Education Programs, which eventually became requirements for reporting outcomes.

We continued to provide TA through ECO, NECTAC, and now ECTA on collecting, reporting, and using child outcomes data. Today, there is nationally aggregatable data; there is usable data for program improvement efforts. The focus now is to improve data quality and use these data for program improvement. Our annual analysis shows a steady increase in the number of states meeting national criteria for data quality.

Another example of Trohanis TA impacts is summarized in a 2009 publication on long-term systems change.<sup>2</sup> The article describes our comprehensive plans with state EI and ECSE programs



to improve systems, practices and outcomes. Systems issues included fiscal issues, political turnovers, personnel issues (including staff turnover), and other barriers that states deal with all the time.

At the end of our project, we analyzed 37 state plans to identify impacts on systems, as well as their practice and family-childhood outcomes. All plans showed state system-level impacts. Fifty-one percent of plans demonstrated practice changes, and in 35% we saw an actual change in improved outcomes for children and families. Those numbers increase to 67% and 44% when you take out plans that were not yet fully implemented.

More recently, the ECTA Center has developed a *System Framework* that describes the components and quality indicators for a high-quality system. It was developed using a 2-year collaborative process, because it was developed with national experts and state partners and was field-tested in states. In a recent national survey, we found that 47 state EI and ECSE programs are using the framework. So we can see widespread efforts around evaluating EI/ECSE systems and planning for improvement using the ECTA *System Framework*.

**Joan Danaher:** The ECTA Center has an important focus on practice improvements, which includes supporting the DEC [Division for Early Childhood] Commissioners' work on Recommended Practices, as well as developing materials that support state and local implementation of the DEC Recommended Practices. Through our cooperative agreement with OSEP, we've developed a suite of products for practitioners and families to learn how to apply the DEC Recommended Practices to developmental interventions in everyday routines and settings involving children and families. All of the products and resources are free, including videos starring "aRPy," an

animated spokesperson we created. And we've recognized the need to reach practitioners and professional development providers, in addition to state level personnel, with our products. We selected 16 experts across the country to serve as "ambassadors" to spearhead the use of the new recommended practices in their states. We handpicked the ambassadors for their broad expertise and skills. They form a national cohort with knowledge of evidence-based practices, professional development and training, and their state's early childhood services and practitioner networks.

Not only will ambassadors collaborate with one another to develop and share strategies and resources, but each will develop and implement goals aligned with a state improvement effort. They'll also participate in designing, documenting, and making recommendations for subsequent groups as we continue to disseminate materials nationally.

**Christina Kasprzak:** Although we work with every state, we are working very intensively with four states in implementing and scaling up the DEC Recommended Practices. In that intensive work, we developed and are using a number of tools at the state level with state teams to look at benchmarks of quality, as well as looking in turn at local teams, using local benchmarks of quality. And, at the practice level, we're using observation skills to see what changes are happening in practices and child measures to capture changes at the individual level. In these four states we are documenting changes at the systems, practice, and child outcomes levels, and putting together case studies that illustrate the impacts of our TA.

I'm fortunate to have such a fabulous leadership team. Joan Danaher, Betsy Ayankoya, Megan Vinh, Robin Rooney, and Siobhan Colgan serve as leaders for the Trohanis TA Projects. ■



## Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center

[ectacenter.org/](http://ectacenter.org/)

<sup>1</sup>Gallagher, J. J., Danaher, J. C., & Clifford, R. M. (2009). The evolution of the National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 29*(1), 7-23. doi:10.1177/0271121408330931

<sup>2</sup>Kahn, L., Hurth, J., Kasprzak, C. M., Diefendorf, M. J., Goode, S. E., & Ringwalt, S. S. (2009). The National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center model for long-term systems change. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 29*(1), 24-39. doi:10.1177/0271121409334039

## FPG Projects for Students with Diverse Abilities Receive Special Recognition for Innovation

**A**t the 2016 meeting of project directors of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) in Washington, DC, two FPG projects received special recognition for their groundbreaking work. Larry Wexler, the director of the Research to Practice Division of OSEP, singled out FPG's Autism Focused Intervention Resources & Modules (AFIRM) and the State Implementation and Scaling-Up of Evidence-Based Practices Center (SISEP), calling the projects "significant innovative accomplishments" of OSEP.

AFIRM teaches the step-by-step process of planning for, using, and monitoring each of several evidence-based practices with learners with autism from birth to age 22. Each free learning module includes engaging case examples that demonstrate the behavior or practice in use, audio and video clips, and interactive assessments that provide feedback based on responses. In addition, supplemental materials and handouts are available to download. Users learn key components of each evidence-based practice, including the various approaches that can address specific behaviors and skills of learners with autism spectrum disorder. Ann Sam, Ann Cox, and Sam Odom represented FPG on behalf of the project at the meeting.



**Ann Cox**

FPG's SISEP Center provides technical assistance to increase knowledge of evidence-based implementation supports for states, districts, and OSEP-funded technical assistance centers, as well as to establish implementation infrastructures in State Education Agencies and Local Education Agencies in support of full and effective use of evidence-based approaches to education. SISEP also helps establish implementation capacity, which research points to as the missing component in efforts to move national and state policy into effective action in districts, schools, and classrooms. FPG's Dean Fixsen and Caryn Ward attended the meeting on behalf of the project.

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### **AFIRM**

[afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules](http://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules)

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### **SISEP Center**

[sisep.fpg.unc.edu/](http://sisep.fpg.unc.edu/)

# more news

## FPG Report Helps Guide Law to Expand Health Insurance for Children with Autism

**B**efore his term ended, former North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory signed the Autism Health Insurance Coverage Act, broadening coverage for birth to 18-year-olds with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). A seminal report that FPG scientists prepared for the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder (NPDC) helped shape the legislation.

“We are very pleased that the NPDC has been able to contribute to the important policy decisions about service that should be covered by insurance for children and youth with ASD,” said director Samuel L. Odom at the time. Odom also served as principal investigator of the NPDC. “This could set a precedent in the nation for a more expanded view of evidence-based services that could be funded by insurance.”

ASD incurs an additional average lifetime cost of \$1.4-\$2.4 million per diagnosis, depending on the level of severity. However, research suggests early diagnosis and effective interventions can reduce that cost by two-thirds.

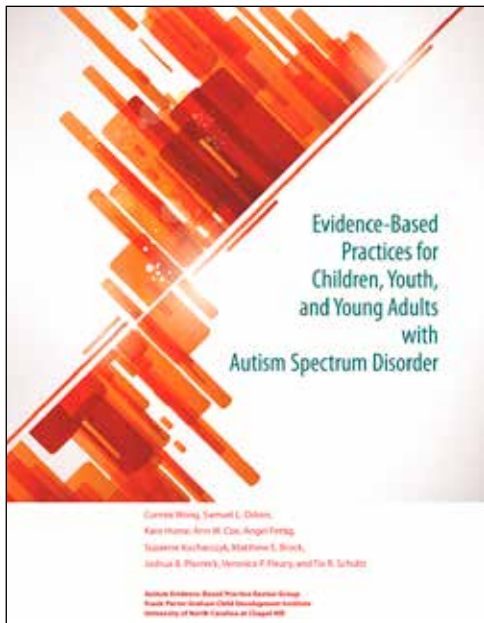
Under the new law, qualifying health benefit plans must cover screening and treatment of ASD. This includes “Adaptive Behavioral Treatment” therapies, which the legislation defines as research-based “behavioral and developmental interventions that systematically manage instructional and environmental factors or the consequences of behavior.”

“The families and caregivers of those with autism need every tool we can provide to get their loved ones treatment,” said Governor McCrory at the time in a press release. “This new law is not a silver bullet, but for many North Carolina families, it is a huge step in the right direction.”

FPG scientists spearheaded the review of research that led to the NPDC’s influential 2014 report by screening 29,000 articles about interventions for children and youth with ASD. “More children than ever are being diagnosed with autism,” said Odom, when the NPDC’s report was released. “We’re catching them earlier, with better tools, and these children need the right services.”

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**The NPDC’s *Evidence-Based Practices for Children, Youth, and Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder***  
[go.unc.edu/AutismReport](http://go.unc.edu/AutismReport)





## CONNECT Courses Support New Federal Policy on Inclusion

**A**t a special federal panel at the 2015 National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute, the U.S. Departments of Education and Health and Human Services debuted a draft policy statement for increasing the inclusion of young children with disabilities in high-quality early childhood programs. While the Institute was at the epicenter of the new policy, innovative CEU-granting courses on inclusion also were in the last stages of development at FPG—and, in 2016, all registrants for that year’s Inclusion Institute received free access to the courses.

To lead practitioners through several crucial aspects of the new federal policy’s research-based roadmap to inclusion, FPG senior research scientist Pam Winton and FPG advanced technical assistance specialist Chih-Ing Lim developed low-cost online CONNECT Courses for professionals who work with or support young children and their families in inclusive settings. They launched the courses through FPG’s Professional Development Center (The PDC@FPG), and five states already have approved the courses for state training.

Winton and Lim adapted the content for the online courses from FPG’s free CONNECT Modules, which have generated over 4.2 million page views from 430,000 people worldwide. According to Winton, the new courses have found a variety of applications, including use in a hybrid model of training that also incorporates the modules.

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### CONNECT Courses

[connect.fpg.unc.edu/connect-courses](http://connect.fpg.unc.edu/connect-courses)

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### The National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute

[inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu/](http://inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu/)

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### Joint federal policy statement on inclusion

[go.unc.edu/InclusionPolicy](http://go.unc.edu/InclusionPolicy)

## Social Policy Report Explores “My Brother’s Keeper” Initiative

**F**PG director Sam Odom and assistant director Stephanie Ridley spearheaded an editorial cadre of current and former FPG experts for the seminal *Social Policy Report*, which published a volume of four new editions for the Society for Research in Child Development, including an issue on “Implications of Developmental Science for My Brother’s Keeper Initiative.”

Oscar Barbarin and his colleagues opened their exploration of the White House initiative by outlining the reasons for its necessity: “On almost every indicator of wellbeing, the vulnerability of boys and young men of color is unmistakable. On negative indicators such as poor health, academic deficits, unemployment, and incarceration, they are over-represented. Conversely, on positive indicators, their presence is barely registered.”

The volume year also included issues on “Children and Terrorism,” “The Influence of Health Care Policies on Children’s Health and Development,” and “Federal Expenditures on Children: What Budget Policy Means for Children’s Policy.”

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***Social Policy Report: Development of Boys and Young Men of Color***  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8209](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8209)

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***Social Policy Report: Children and Terrorism***  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8111](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8111)

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***Social Policy Report: The Influence of Health Care Policies on Children’s Health and Development***  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8377](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8377)

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***Social Policy Report: What Budget Policy Means for Children’s Policy***  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8123](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8123)

## Launch: The National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning

FPG is a primary partner with national nonprofit ZERO TO THREE on a new center to improve outcomes for children and to support professional development systems for child care providers.

“The National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning will bring research-based solutions to real-world settings for children and the people who care for and educate them,” said senior research scientist Allison Metz, FPG’s principal investigator on the project. “The Center will create resources, provide training, and offer technical assistance to early childhood programs, specialists, and lead agencies.”

Metz said FPG’s groundbreaking work in implementation science—the science of effectively bringing research to actual services on the ground—will be a critical component of the new center’s approach.

“By using proven mechanisms and structures, we can strategically move evidence-based practices more quickly, widely, and efficiently into the field at all levels,” said Metz, who also directs FPG’s National Implementation Research Network. “This benefits more children and teachers and does so more immediately.”

Co-principal investigator Pamela J. Winton, said FPG’s longtime commitment to supporting the inclusion of young children with disabilities in early childhood settings will fuel a key part of the new center’s mission.

“FPG has a lengthy, proven track record of training, technical assistance, and research that ignites and strengthens inclusive services for children who have a wide range of abilities,” Winton said.

Winton added that different early childhood programs and services often face similar challenges and could benefit from more opportunities to collaborate. “Another of the new center’s key priorities will be to help strengthen coordination between Head Start, child care, and other early childhood services,” she said.

FPG senior research scientist Noreen Yazejian, who also will serve as co-principal investigator, said FPG’s experience adapting to the nation’s changing demographics will inform and support the new center, too.

“FPG is well-positioned to help ensure the Center fosters services and practices that are culturally and linguistically responsive,” Yazejian said.

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### Partnerships for Inclusion:

**Ensuring Access to High Quality Evaluations and Services (inaugural webinar from the Center’s series on high-quality inclusion)**

[fpg.unc.edu/node/8867](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8867)

# resources

and information



FPG's 50<sup>TH</sup> anniversary conference panel on *Children with Disabilities and their Families*  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8335](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8335)

FPG's strategic emphasis on Developmental Disabilities  
[fpg.unc.edu/emphasis-area/developmental-disabilities](http://fpg.unc.edu/emphasis-area/developmental-disabilities)

Curriculum from FPG's Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, which supports teachers who have students with autism who present challenging behaviors  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/6949](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/6949)

More on FPG's Center on Secondary Education for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder  
[cseas.fpg.unc.edu/](http://cseas.fpg.unc.edu/)

Research and resources from FPG's other projects on autism spectrum disorder  
[fpg.unc.edu/learn-more-about-autism-fpg](http://fpg.unc.edu/learn-more-about-autism-fpg)

Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center's webinar series on inclusion, along with accompanying resources  
[ectacenter.org/~calls/2016/nationalinclusion.asp](http://ectacenter.org/~calls/2016/nationalinclusion.asp)

FPG's National Early Childhood Inclusion Institute  
[inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu](http://inclusioninstitute.fpg.unc.edu)

More FPG resources on inclusion  
[go.unc.edu/InclusionResources](http://go.unc.edu/InclusionResources)

The Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center's portal to key resources about reducing disproportionate suspensions and expulsions of children from diverse backgrounds  
[go.unc.edu/SuspensionExpulsion](http://go.unc.edu/SuspensionExpulsion)

FPG research on how in kindergarten and first grade classrooms teacher-student conflict increased both for boys and African American children as the school year progressed  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/6467](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/6467)

FPG research determining that African American students in first grade experience smaller gains in reading when they attend segregated schools but that the students' backgrounds likely are not the cause  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/7225](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/7225)

"Early Life Stress and the Environmental Origins of Disease: A Population-Based Prospective Longitudinal Study of Children in Rural Poverty"  
[go.unc.edu/Stress](http://go.unc.edu/Stress)

"Stress, Self-Regulation, and Psychopathology in Middle Childhood"  
[go.unc.edu/StressSelf-Reg](http://go.unc.edu/StressSelf-Reg)

"An Epidemiological and Longitudinal Study of Rural Child Literacy Trajectories"  
[go.unc.edu/Rural](http://go.unc.edu/Rural)

FPG's "A Public Health Approach to Understanding Fathers' Psychological Health and Child Well-Being in Ethnically Diverse Families" project  
[go.unc.edu/Dads](http://go.unc.edu/Dads)

The "More Than Baby Talk" professional development program on "Improving Child Care Providers' Capacity to Promote Infant/Toddler Language and Communications"  
[go.unc.edu/MoreThanBabyTalk](http://go.unc.edu/MoreThanBabyTalk)

FPG's 50<sup>TH</sup> anniversary conference panel on *Race, Ethnicity, Linguistic, and Cultural Diversity*  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8336](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8336)

FPG's strategic emphasis on Race, Ethnicity, Linguistic, Cultural, and Socioeconomic Diversity  
[go.unc.edu/FPGdiversity](http://go.unc.edu/FPGdiversity)

The "International Initiative" issue of *Early Developments*, featuring articles on the U.S.'s 21<sup>ST</sup>-century melting pot, autism spectrum disorder, and much more  
[go.unc.edu/MeltingPot](http://go.unc.edu/MeltingPot)

FPG's "Immigrant Parents and Children in Transitions: Cultural Models and U.S. Early Childhood Education" project  
[go.unc.edu/Immigrants](http://go.unc.edu/Immigrants)

The "Health" issue of *Early Developments*, featuring articles on the physical, social, mental, and emotional health of children of all backgrounds and abilities  
[go.unc.edu/Health](http://go.unc.edu/Health)

Diversity across the first five decades at FPG, in *The Promise of the Promise: The First 50 Years of the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute*  
[go.unc.edu/ThePromise](http://go.unc.edu/ThePromise)

U.S. Department of Education's "Key Data Highlights on Equity and Opportunity Gaps in our Nation's Public Schools" (with links to accompanying FPG resources)  
[fpg.unc.edu/node/8373](http://fpg.unc.edu/node/8373)

early developments

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