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## early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

Social
Processes
and
Outcomes
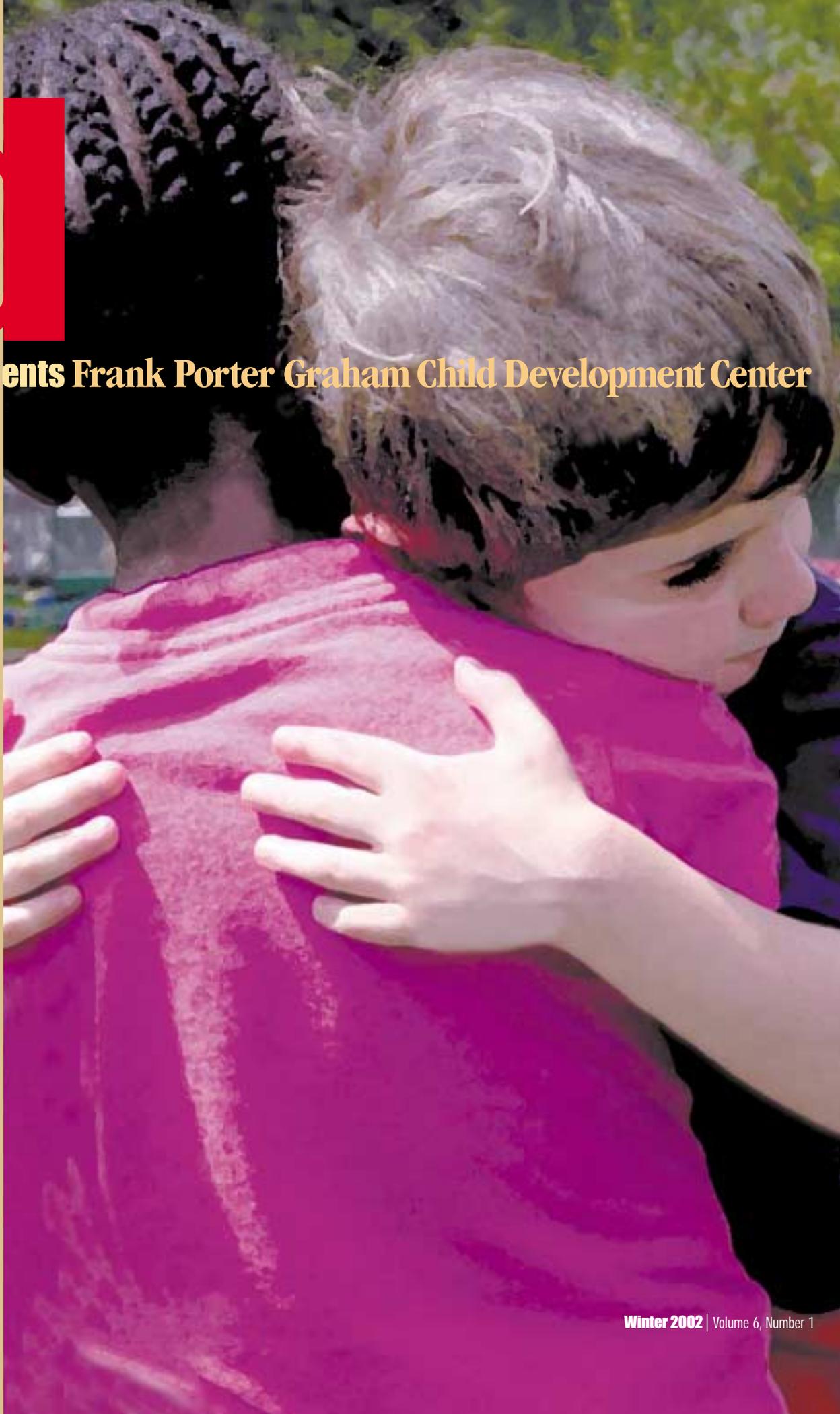
Relationships
critical to healthy development

by Don Bailey Director, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

"HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS are the building blocks of healthy development." This quote, from *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*, a recent publication of the National Research Council of the Institute of Medicine, captures the essence of this issue of *Early Developments*. It also gets at the heart of current debates about the nature and consequences of organized programs for the care and education of young children.

Developmental psychologists and early childhood educators have long recognized that children are inherently social beings. From the moment of birth, infants and parents alike begin a process often referred to as attachment – the development of a close and enduring relationship based on mutual affection and caring. A secure attachment, one in which the child is confident of the loving and enduring nature of this relationship, is highly predictive of healthy social-emotional development. A healthy emotional relationship between parents and children also is important for healthy language and cognitive development. As children get older, they develop relationships with people other than their parents. These relationships include extended family members, neighbors, peers, child care professionals and teachers. These relationships are important because they provide other contexts in which children feel cared for and accepted. And it is in the context of these relationships that much learning occurs.

So what's all the fuss about? Why are social relationships the focus of much discussion in today's world of early childhood? Highly publicized and dramatic incidences of school violence propagated by students who don't fall into the traditional risk categories caused the nation to start asking questions about the roots of violence and looking to the early childhood period for answers. A recent study that linked aggressive behavior in young children with their participation in child care created headlines and led to lively debate among researchers about the findings and their implications for child care.

Another issue that has been the subject of much discussion is whether the growing emphasis on preparing children for academic success through pre-K programs might place too much emphasis on cognitive and literacy development to the detriment of social development. >
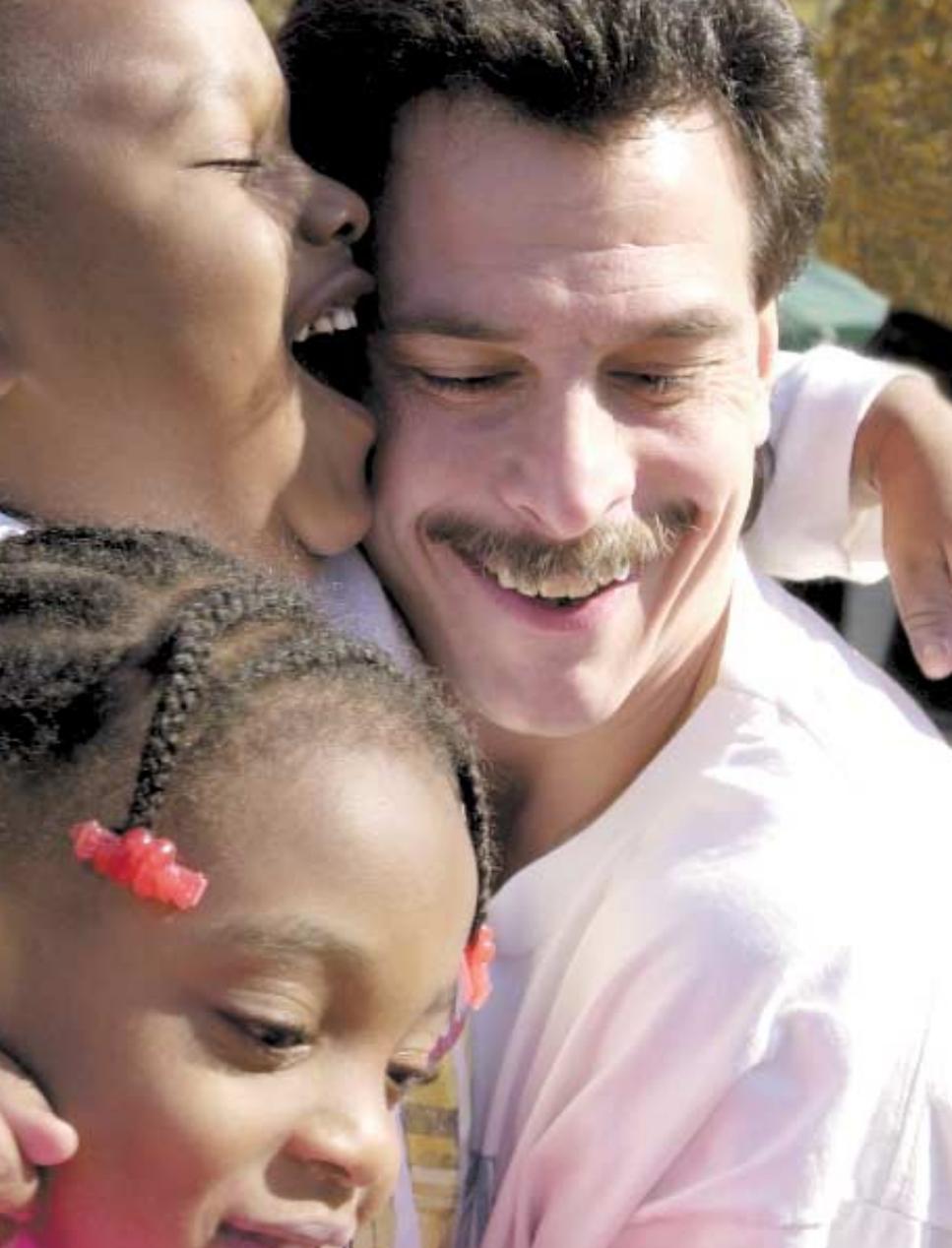
> So what's all the fuss about? Why are social relationships the focus of much discussion in today's world of early childhood?

These issues are complicated and often emotionally charged. At least six specific issues have emerged as areas in need of further research into the factors that enhance or inhibit social development in young children:

(1) What factors challenge a healthy relationship between parents and children?

(2) What interventions are effective when children exhibit early signs of aggression and antisocial behavior?

(3) How does the placement of children in child care or early education programs affect their attachment relationships with their families and their social-emotional development?

(4) What should early childhood programs do to maximize children's social development?

(5) How can we balance the need to prepare children for success in school with the need to nourish social development?

(6) What challenges do children face in developing social relationships with other children who differ from them in terms of race, ethnicity, gender or ability?

This issue of *Early Developments* highlights some current work at FPG related to these questions. As an organization, we believe that the Institute of Medicine statement regarding the importance of healthy human relationships is of central importance to the early childhood field. We should be concerned about children's social-emotional development during the early childhood years. We need to make sure that programs serving young children preserve the important bonds that children have with their families.

We also need to ensure that early childhood programs attend to children's needs for warm and nurturing relationships with adults and peers and that teachers and other caregivers foster these important relationships through a variety of environmental and instructional approaches. |ed|

We need to make sure that programs serving young children preserve the important bonds that children have with their families.

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Challenging behavior

in preschool classrooms

Linking research to practice

A SURVEY INVOLVING NEARLY 400 CHILDREN in preschools and child care centers indicates that 40% of preschoolers exhibit at least one antisocial behavior each day, 24% exhibit three or more per day and 10% exhibit six or more antisocial behaviors each day.

This new information comes at a time when preschool teachers report concerns about increasing rates of challenging behaviors in their classes.

"Some antisocial behavior can be expected in young children," said Donna Bryant, a senior scientist at the Frank Porter Graham Center and an author of the study. "If 40% children exhibit one antisocial behavior a day, we can't consider that 'abnormal;' if 10 to 25% children show high rates of aggressive behavior, we do need to be concerned."

She pointed out, however, that it is also important to keep in mind that the majority of preschoolers were not reported to show any aggressive behaviors on a daily basis. >

Types, frequency of antisocial behavior

Types	Once per month or less	Once per week	3-4 times per week	Once per day	Many times per day
	Frequency (% children rated)				
Hit or kick other kids	59	19	11	4	6
Push, shove, or grab other kids	53	17	11	10	10
Pinch or bite other kids	94	2	2	1	1
Argue or disagree with other kids	36	16	20	11	18
Threaten or "boss around" other kids	64	15	10	6	6
Call names or tease other kids	63	13	8	6	11
Do sneaky things when others are not looking	52	14	14	10	10
Take things when others are not looking	65	8	11	10	6
Play mean tricks	92	4	1	2	2
Tell kids not to play with someone who is not around to hear it	70	11	7	8	4
Tell lies about kids when they are not around	84	7	3	4	2
Say mean things about kids behind their back	82	11	4	3	1

Putting it in context

These data help researchers, policy makers and others understand the extent of the problems resulting from antisocial behavior that many preschool teachers report are on the increase.

The implications of these rates of antisocial behaviors are perhaps better understood in the context of a typical preschool classroom with 15-20 children, said Mike Willoughby, a doctoral student in psychology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and lead author of the study.

Data suggest that in an average-sized preschool classroom between six and eight children (about 40%) will exhibit at least one antisocial act each day. Furthermore, two of these children will likely exhibit six or more antisocial behaviors each day.

"From this perspective, we can better understand the pressures reported by early childhood educators and the need for additional training and resources to help teachers use effective and appropriate strategies to address these behaviors," said Willoughby.

Because these estimates are based on a random sample of children and classrooms, the authors note that specific rates of daily antisocial behavior may be greater in programs that serve more high-risk children, such as intervention child care and Head Start centers, or in classrooms where teachers don't have positive relationships with children or are not well trained in social and emotional development.

Prevalence by behavior

The study found that arguing-disagreeing was the most frequent antisocial behavior, while pinching, biting and playing mean tricks were the least common.

Data suggest that boys exhibit higher rates on four of the twelve items than girls: hitting and kicking, pushing and shoving, calling names and playing mean tricks. Boys and girls did not differ on any of the remaining eight items.

Overt, covert dimensions

Another purpose of the study was to investigate the structure of antisocial behavior in a normative sample of preschoolers. In studies involving older children, both overt (obvious) and covert (hidden) dimensions of antisocial behavior have been typically reported, but FPG investigators wondered whether this was true for preschoolers.

Janis Kupersmidt, professor of psychology at UNC-CH and another author of the study, said more research on subtypes of antisocial behavior is needed. "While some types of challenging behavior may be typical of normal development, others may not. These atypical behaviors may help to identify children who are at risk for negative long-term outcomes." It remains to be seen whether covert behaviors as defined in this study are actually early manifestations of more serious forms of covert behavior that were the focus of previous studies, she said.

Other findings

– Although overt antisocial behaviors were more common than covert behaviors, covert behaviors were not rare. For example, while 15% of children exhibited three or more overt behaviors each day, 10% of children exhibited three or more covert antisocial behaviors each day.

– Overt and covert antisocial behavior were about equivalent for males and females.

The majority of preschoolers were not reported to show any aggressive behaviors on a daily basis.

Implications

The primary implication of this study is the strong need for training and education of early childhood teachers and their supervisors on strategies for helping children learn to get along well together, control their anger and solve problems without resorting to aggression, Bryant said. Many positive strategies are effective in reducing such behaviors and the ultimate goal, of course, is to prevent them, she said.

The study took place in child care and Head Start programs in four counties in the Triangle area of North Carolina. The investigators are now conducting an intervention study as part of the Head Start Mental Health Research Consortium funded by the federal Administration for Children, Youth and Families and the National Institutes of Mental Health. This consortium has been helping Head Start supervisors, teachers and parents learn effective ways of dealing with children's antisocial behaviors. Parents want to learn better ways of helping their children, too, said Kupersmidt, but reaching parents requires different approaches than working with classroom teachers.

Willoughby said that while the finding of both overt and covert subtypes of behavior in preschoolers is new, he cautiously interpreted the results because the study used only teacher reports. "Future studies of covert antisocial behavior in early childhood will likely benefit from using multiple measures that include both adult ratings and observation paradigms," he said.

Implications for screening

The increasingly common finding that antisocial behavior among preschoolers is best viewed as multidimensional in nature has implications for early screening practices.

More research is needed to determine if preschoolers who exhibit developmentally inappropriate covert antisocial behavior are at increased risk for negative outcomes and if these apparently mild covert behaviors are precursors of more serious behaviors that are indicative of conduct disorder. |ed|

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Effects

of quality care and mother's depression

RESEARCH INVOLVING SCIENTISTS AT FPG is adding to the growing body of evidence that shows how early education affects children's behavior, language and cognitive skills. A study sponsored by the National Institute of Child Health and Development found that three aspects of care were most predictive of children's language skills: how much caregivers talked to children, how much they responded to a child's question and whether the caregivers asked children engaging questions.

Interestingly, this study also found two factors that could hinder a child's cognitive development: too much TV and a poorly organized physical setting.

Earlier data from the same study showed that children of depressed mothers performed more poorly on measures of school readiness, verbal comprehension and expressive language skills at 36 months of age than children of mothers who never reported depression.

Children of depressed mothers were also reported to be less cooperative and to have more problem behaviors at 36 months. But these effects only occurred when depression resulted in less sensitive behavior on the part of the mother. Depressed mothers who were also poor were more likely to show low sensitivity to their children than mothers with more financial resources.

Collectively these findings show the value of caregiver sensitivity, the power of simple conversation and interaction, and the benefits of having stimulating materials in children's settings.

"In summary, these data underscore, again, the fact that high-quality child care can have many benefits for children," said Martha Cox, former senior scientist at FPG, now Director of the Center for Developmental Science at UNC-CH and one of the lead researchers nationally on the project. Working with her is Peg Burchinal, who directs FPG's design and statistical unit and serves as methodologist for the entire study, which is the largest long-term investigation of its kind ever undertaken. NICHD is following about 1,100 children from infancy, assessing the effects of child care.

The most recent data show that at age 4, children in better quality child care score higher on tests of thinking and language skills than others who stay home or who receive lower-quality care. Those findings mirror results reported two years ago for the same children at age 3.

"This is an important study because at age 4 children make the transition into school, and there are a number of expectations that we haven't imposed on them in quite the same way before," Cox said. "They go to school and are expected to have or attain skills related to reading and also cooperate in routines that are much more formal than what they were used to."

High-quality care

Both high-quality care, regardless of type, and center care, independent of quality, appeared to boost intellectual growth, memory and language skills. Differences were small but statistically significant. Those in lower quality care, for example, fell into the 42nd percentile, on average, in pre-academic skills, while those in higher quality care averaged the 57th percentile, Burchinal said.

Children with fewer than 10 hours a week of center care averaged the 44th percentile in language skills, while those with 30 or more hours a week fell into the 57th percentile, on average.

"This work documents more strongly than ever before that better educated and trained teachers are providing more language stimulation so that the children they take care of show enhanced intellectual growth regardless of family background," Cox said. "Quality indeed makes a difference."

Unfortunately, one negative finding in the study caught the attention of some media, which lost sight of the many positive findings. The study found that youngsters spending more time in child care in general and center-based care in particular were somewhat more aggressive than other children who spent less time there or who remained at home.

Cox said, "Whether that heightened aggression is a problem that will continue remains to be seen."

Researchers found that children who spent more time in care outside the home were somewhat more aggressive toward other children and disobedient or defiant toward adults at 54 months and later when they were in kindergarten. They also were more likely to bully, fight with or act mean to others.

"We saw that three times as many kids with extensive child care – 30 or more hours per week on average between birth and 54 months – had behavioral problems compared with children with little child care – less than 10 hours per week on average," Burchinal said. "That was 16% of subjects in the former group versus 5% in the latter.

'Behaviors not extreme'

"At the same time, though, we want to emphasize that these were not extreme behaviors, were well within the normal range and might or might not disappear entirely later on," she said. "By the time the children were in kindergarten, differences had narrowed to 17% versus 9%."

Cox pointed out that the 17% figure is comparable to the number of kids in the normal population who would also be active in such ways occasionally. "Instead of citing this figure in an attempt to cast child care in a negative light, we should be using it to ask how to make child care better."

Burchinal noted that while 17% such children exhibited some modest behavioral problems, 83% are doing just fine. Higher quality care corresponded with fewer pro-blem behaviors, the study showed. Center care during infancy was not linked to either positive or negative trends among participating children.

The study found that children who watched more television scored lower on tests of mathematical reasoning and vocabulary and displayed more behavior problems. >

This work documents more strongly than ever before that better educated and trained teachers are providing more language stimulation so that the children they take care of show enhanced intellectual growth regardless of family background.

Women who were despondent most of the time not only were least sensitive but also were the only group to show a decline in sensitivity between the 15-month and 24-month assessments.

Depressed mothers

The earlier data about depressed mothers showed that maternal sensitivity played an important role in the well-being of children. Even when mothers were depressed, if they were also sensitive, their children fared better. Mothers who were respectful of their children, who were supportive of their children's activities and did not interfere unnecessarily, and who responded appropriately to their children's emotions were rated as sensitive.

"Even if mothers continue to be depressed, they can still provide the kind of experience their children need," Burchinal said. Also, women with higher incomes and other advantages were more responsive and played better with their children despite their depression possibly because they were less stressed. "Income made no difference in sensitivity and responsiveness among mothers who were not depressed, but was significant for the depressed mothers," said Cox.

Research has shown that mothers' interactions with their offspring play a crucial role in children's mental development, of which language skills are an important part.

Investigators consider their sample moderately representative of US mothers and their children. Overall, about 55% of the participants were never depressed and 8% were chronically depressed.

Women who were despondent most of the time not only were least sensitive but also were the only group to show a decline in sensitivity between the 15-month and 24-month assessments. As toddlers emerged from the period that some call the "terrible twos" and became less willful, interactions with mothers grew more positive.

In addition, at 36 months, the children were tested for cognitive and language development and observed following requests to clean up toys. Mothers also reported on their children's social behavior.

"Among other things, our findings suggest that women who are depressed shouldn't just

tough it out but instead should seek help from health-care professionals and support from family and friends," said Cox.

"We tend in our society to expect people to deal with their problems by themselves unless those problems are just very extreme," she said. "Our group of mothers were not chosen because they had come to clinics for help but were just a community sample of women having children. Other studies have shown that women with young children are particularly vulnerable to depression, and our new findings indicate strongly that the depression can have important consequences for children."

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

· Both high-quality care, regardless of type, and center care, independent of quality, appeared to boost intellectual growth, memory and language skills

· Higher quality care corresponded with fewer problem behaviors

· Three aspects of care were most predictive of enhancing a child's language skills: how much caregivers talked to children, responded to a child's question and asked children questions to prompt discussion.

· Two factors may hurt a child's cognitive development: too much TV and a poorly organized physical setting.

· Children of depressed mothers performed more poorly on measures of school readiness, verbal comprehension and expressive language skills at 36 months of age than children of mothers who did not report being depressed.

· Children of mothers who had more prolonged depression were seen as less cooperative, and their mothers reported the children had more problem behaviors than children whose mothers were never depressed. These children also scored lower on tests of school readiness, expressive language and verbal comprehension.

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Other findings

· Children of mothers who had more prolonged depression were seen as less cooperative, and their mothers reported the children had more problem behaviors than children whose mothers were never depressed. These children also scored lower on tests of school readiness, expressive language, and verbal comprehension. Children of mothers who were depressed some of the time fell in between these two groups.

· Children whose mothers were more sensitive did better on cognitive and language tests, were more helpful in the clean-up task, and their mothers reported them to be more cooperative and to have fewer problem behaviors, regardless of their mothers' level of depression.

· Lower levels of maternal sensitivity in depressed mothers partly explained their children's poorer school readiness, verbal comprehension, and expressive language and higher rates of problem behavior. This suggests that depression can lead to less sensitive maternal behavior which, in turn, leads to poorer child development.

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Continuity

RESEARCHERS AT FPG are working on a three-pronged, six-year study that may begin to answer questions about the impact of having multiple caregivers during the infant and toddler years.

"Having many caregivers during these years is assumed to be harmful to children because changing primary attachment figures may lead to less advanced developmental progress as well as child distress," said Debby Cryer, lead researcher on the study. Thus, many experts recommend that child care programs keep the same caregiver with children until the children are at least 3.

"However, very little research bears directly on this, and no study has evaluated this in a longitudinal way," she said. "We do not yet know whether the theory matches reality."

Traditionally, young children in center-based child care programs have a series of different caregivers during the first three years of life. Centers often follow the lock-step ele-mentary school practice of moving children to a different class or teacher at the end of the year.

One prong of the FPG study is a longitudinal, randomized comparison in high-quality child care programs in which one group of children has the same caregiver for the first three years of life while another group has a different caregiver each year.

FPG has operated its own child care center for more than 30 years. Cryer said that several years ago, when theory seemed to indicate that continuity of caregiver was important, the FPG center began using this approach. "We found that some children did great with the same caregiver, but some didn't do as well.

For example, a particular caregiver might not get along with a particular child. And there may be caregivers who are good teachers at one level, but do not 'grow' professionally as the child grows. Also, some children seem to find changing caregivers a positive experience," she said. As a result of these unresolved issues, researchers decided to design a formal study.

The study has these components:

- a national mail survey of child care programs to examine current U.S. practices

- the longitudinal study mentioned above

- the perceptions of families and staff about these arrangements

The longitudinal study is well underway. Two groups, each with about 50 kids, have been randomly assigned to either continuity of caregivers or changing caregivers each year. A number of measures are being collected,

# of care

including general developmental status, language development, temperament, attachment, quality of both home and child care settings, social and play behaviors and behavioral indicators of stress. For a sub-group, stress is also being measured physiologically through analyses of cortisol levels in children's saliva. To collect information for the qualitative aspect of the study, families and staff are being interviewed twice a year.

Cryer said, "We don't know what we're going to find. We already know that it's a complex issue, involving multiple interactions among the child, the caregiver and the family." Cryer pointed out that programs generally offer different levels of continuity of care:

· Keeping children and teacher(s) together for a certain number of years.

· Keeping a group of children together over a period of years.

· Keeping a few friends together over a period of years.

"Centers should also be aware that as children grow and develop, the children's environment must be changed to match their abilities and interest," said Cryer. "Also, the adults' treatment of children must move along to represent children's growing abilities."

National survey

The first part of the FPG study–the mail survey of child care centers–was completed by Cryer, Mark Wolery and Sarah Hurwitz, and shows that continuity of caregivers with infants and toddlers is rare.

"Small numbers of infants, and even fewer toddlers, remain with the same caregiver when they move from one class to another," said Cryer.

The survey found that many programs move children more often (from class to class, teacher to teacher) as soon as they reach certain developmental milestones, such as crawling or walking. Some centers even move children on a daily basis to meet ratio or other staffing requirement. "This is often done to make efficient use of program resources by keeping classes full and making space for enrolling infants for whom there is more child care demand," said the authors of the study.

In making decisions about when to move infants and toddlers from one class to the next, most survey respondents said they considered multiple factors. Developmental issues were considered foremost, such as reaching milestones or a certain age. However, decisions were also strongly influenced by more practical concerns, such as whether space is available in the next class or if a young child had been enrolled, requiring an older child to move up to the next group. >

High rates of teacher turnover increase the likelihood that children will change teachers repeatedly during the infant/toddler years.

Reality of child care

These factors that influence decisions represent the reality of child care, in which staff try to balance developmental needs of very young children against efficient operations. In maintaining the balance, staff seem to avoid some practices associated with the poorest quality care. "For example," said Cryer, "when asked how often infants and toddlers were moved temporarily from one class to another to meet state ratio regulatory requirements, about half the respondents reported never doing so, and less than 5% said they did it on a frequent basis."

Respondents said the more frequent transition practices include talking about the move with the child's parents and having the child visit the new class. For the total sample in the survey, talking about the move with the child, getting the child's space in the new classroom ready and getting the child used to the new classroom's routines were also used in 75% or more of the centers. However, other strategies that might substantially increase the child's chance for security, such as moving children together, were used by only a minority of programs. Cryer said, "It is likely that these practices can be helpful for some children and their families, but the extent to which they are used, and the actual quality of the implementation is unknown."

Possible barriers

At first glance, staff and child turnover might be considered two of the barriers to practicing continuity of caregivers. However, researchers found no evidence of this in the national mail sample of 273 centers. Respondents reported that the vast majority of children who were enrolled as infants remain in the center until they are 3.

"There also seems to be sufficient staff longevity to allow continuity of caregiver, at least into a second year with the same caregiver," said Cryer. "However, practicing continuity of caregiver requires far more than low turnover in children and staff."

Agreement with a practice was associated with using that practice among survey respondents. For the total sample, less than 20% strongly agreed with the statement that "in an ideal situation, children should have the same teacher for the first 36 months of life." More than half either disagreed or were neutral in their response.

"To some extent, this explained why continuity of caregiver was not practiced. The lack of strong agreement with the practice may be a barrier to its implementation," said Cryer. |ed|

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Friendship Formation

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.

Her study examined friendship formation in 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.

Buysse 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."

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Other researchers working with Virginia Buysse 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. **>**

Collaboration

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

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More about NCEDL's overall Constituent Advisory Board is online at www.fpg.unc.edu/~ncedl/PAGE/constit.htm

Teacher education programs

WillOwenslUniversity of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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.

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EDITOR'S NOTE Data from this survey was 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.**

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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